

# The Metamorphosis of Towns in the Republic of Moldova during the Communist Period and Beyond

**Raisa ȚĂRUȘ<sup>1</sup>, Vasile SURD<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, Centre for Research of Settlements and Urbanism, Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA

E-mail: [raisa\\_tarus@yahoo.com](mailto:raisa_tarus@yahoo.com), [vsurd@geografie.ubbcluj.ro](mailto:vsurd@geografie.ubbcluj.ro)

**Keywords:** *urban metamorphosis, demography, communist period, administration*

## ABSTRACT

In the first part of this paper, we make a historical retrospective about the communist era in Moldova. The pre-communist era of 1812-1940 and the communist era during 1940-1991 are reflected in society through culture, traditions, customs, laws, dogmas, etc. In the second part, we discuss the theories and methods used to study the communist period in Moldova. These theories and research methods are relevant to our study about the demographic evolution in the Republic of Moldova. In the third part, we analyze the historical stages of the era of communism and how it affected the Republic of Moldova and its citizens. We also specify how towns looked like in the communist period and how their demographic, historical, and political evolution has occurred. We conclude by presenting the administrative units of Moldova during the communist period, the demographic evolution and its current trends.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to remind people of the communism era and of its consequences for towns and for their citizens in the Republic of Moldova. The communist era had great significance for the population and was expressed in their lifestyle, in their thoughts, but also this period played an important role in the evolution of administrative units and towns.

In the communist period, with the advent of the “socialist society”, new characteristics along with those inherited from the past created new towns related to this type of society. The urban civilization of the socialist countries is a synthesis of complex influences. The most relevant example is the former Soviet Union that due to its extension of historical, social, and economic conditions experienced all urban forms, from the Polar to the oasis town, from the old historical towns to the recent industrial communist creations.

The Republic of Moldova is a country that has seen inland communism domination, not only in the

Moldavian territory between the Dniester and the Prut, including the Grecei lands: Codru, Hotărniceni, Orhei, Iași and Soroca, but also in the Turkish “raiale” of Bender, Akkerman, Chilia, Ismail, Reni, and Tătărlacul of Bugeac. This whole territory encompassed an area of 45,630 square kilometres, including 7,400 square kilometres for five fortresses, 17 boroughs and 685 villages, with a total population of 482,630 people (in 1817). It was occupied by the Russian Empire in 1817, and then re-occupied by the Soviet Union in June 1940, as a result of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Due to this last occupation, the communist regime (1940-1991) determined the urban landscape to progressively change and evolve [2].

During the communist period, all the provinces have gone through many administrative changes. The towns in Moldova (figure 1), during the communist era, were: Kishinev – attested in 1436, the town Durlești certified in 1656, Bender attested in 1408, Dubăsari certified in 1523, Râbnîța appeared in 1657, Tiraspol attested in 1792, Anenii Noi (1731),

Basarabeasca (1856), Lipcani (1429), Cahul (1452), Cantemir (1973), Căinari (1525), Călărași (1432), Căușeni (1470), Ciadîr-Lunga (1541), Cimișlia (1620), Comrat (1443), Codru (1945), Criuleni (1607), Dondușeni (1897), Drochia (1895), Edineț (1431), Cupcini (1585), Fălești (1429), Florești (1580), Glodeni (1616), Hâncești (1500), Ialoveni (1502), Leova (1489), Nisporeni (1618), Ocnîța (1897), Otaci (1585), Orhei (1437), Rezina (1470), Râșcani (1602), Sîngerei (1586), Victoria (1965), Soroca (1499), Strășeni (1792), Bucovăț (1882), Șoldănești (1573), Ștefan Vodă (1909), Taraclia (1811), Telenеști (1432), Ungheni (1430), Cornești (1437), Vulcănești (1443), and Vadul lui Vodă (1466) [5].

In this paper, we present the initial configuration of the administrative units in the Moldavian territory, along with the demographic figures as of the first Russian occupation of 1817 (the first official census of the Moldavian territory), then we analyze their evolution up to the establishment of communism and we finally detail the organization, landscape and demographic evolution in the communist period.

Some key figures are analyzed, like the demographic evolution in the administrative units and the whole country, and also within the two main municipalities: Kishinev and Bălți.

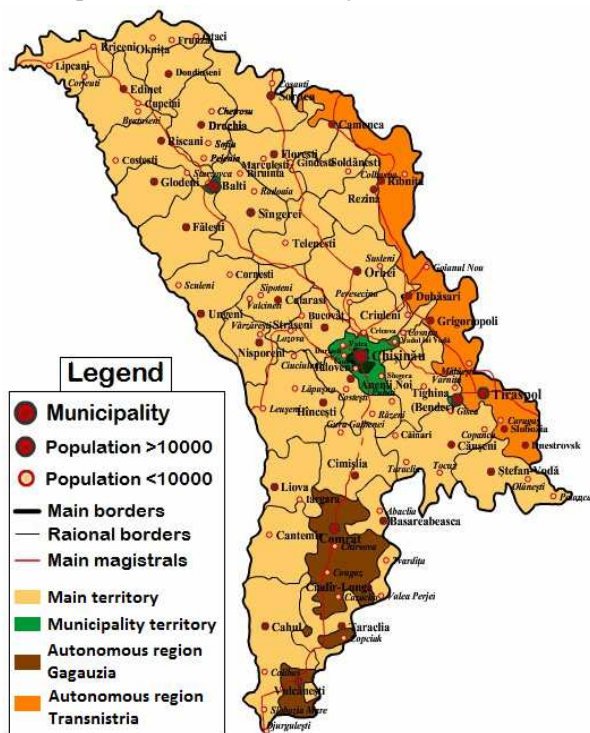


Fig. 1. Towns and their population in the Republic of Moldova [16].

## 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper, various theoretical approaches and methods of collecting statistical data were used to observe the population's evolution in the Republic of Moldova in the communist era. First of all, we mention the bibliographical method by consulting history books

of the communist era, censuses from 1959 until 2004, books about towns and villages in Moldova, and mainly related to its administrative units. This method helped to develop a methodology to study the communist and pre-communist era in the Republic of Moldova and the evolution of the towns in this period.

A descriptive method is a method of mapping, showing the distribution of the administrative units of the Republic of Moldova on a map in a suggestive way, indicating the geographical position of each town in Moldova. Mapping is defined as all the scientific, artistic and technical studies and operations, based on the results of direct observation or using the documentation for the development and preparation of maps, plans, and other representation ways.

In our study, we used the statistical method through collecting data from the 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989, 2004 censuses, along with other data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics in the Republic of Moldova. This method has allowed gathering a number of significant figures that showed the population's evolution, its increase and decrease along the communist and pre-communist periods. In our study, we analyze a series of demographic indicators such as the number of inhabitants, the total population and its dynamics in the communist and in the pre-communist periods by referring to the censuses mentioned above.

The demographic indicators show increases and decreases of population in the analyzed periods, which are defined by different factors.

The factors which lie at the basis of population's decrease are, among others, the low birth rates, different social phenomena and migration to places which grant the possibility of a decent living standard and development.

More indicators which illustrate the demographic state of each town, aspects such as age structure, ethnic structure, and the living standard have also been considered.

We included the analysis and classification of the information gathered, along with an interpretation of the geographical phenomena which resulted in the completion of graphs and diagrams.

The statistical method is a significant method which marks the evolution of demographic statistics. Each has statistical significance for the interpretation and implementation of similarities and differences that reveal the existence of these numbers.

Beside the statistical method, the bibliographical method, and mapping, we mention also the graphic method, using diagram techniques, chart techniques, plot techniques, and other forms of visualization. In this case, two or more variables can be illustrated by the graphic method in order to understand their evolution, trends, and limits. The graphic method came from the need to view the data of a problem and the relations between them through a drawing, illustration, pattern, helping to understand and solve problems. The

statistical data collected were relevant to our study and emphasized the demographic situation during the communist period. These types of methods taken together have helped our study on the demographic evolution of towns in Moldova during the communist era.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As of today, Moldova has two main regions: the Western one, known as the Basarabia region, between the Prut and the Dniester rivers, and there is Transnistria, a thin strip of land across the Dniester river which functioned effectively as an independent state after the conflict in 1991 and 1992. Also, the arid steppe of southern Basarabia is known as Bugeac. Unfortunately, Moldova remains the least known of the states that emerged after the Soviet federation split, after 1991, having an area of 33,700 square kilometres, almost the third of Indiana State or Portugal.

First, a brief stop on the duality of naming Moldova/Basarabia, which persists even today when talking about the territory between the Prut and the Dniester rivers. Before 1812, Basarabia was a part of the Middle Age Moldavian Princedom. Moldova or the Country of Moldova was the short name of the Princedom. Throughout the ages, most people used the name of Moldova, even under the Soviet rule.

Moldova is divided into thirty-two districts ("raioane", singular "raion"), three municipalities and two autonomous regions (Găgăuzia and Transnistria). The final status of Transnistria is disputed, as the central government does not control this territory. The towns of Comrat and Tiraspol, the administrative seats of the two autonomous territories also have a municipality status. Moldova has 65 towns, including the five with municipality status, and 917 communes. Some other 699 villages are too small to have a separate administration, and are administratively part of either towns (40 of them) or communes (659). This makes for a total of 1,681 localities of Moldova, all but two being inhabited.

Towns in Moldova are grouped in the twelve provinces named: Hotin, Soroca, Orhei, Lăpuşna, Hotărniceni, Bender, Cetatea Alba, Chilia, Ismail, Greceeni, and Codru. These provinces or counties were subdivided into districts. Districts consisted of a number of villages. This division was the oldest in Moldova, dating back to the time of the Moldavian Princedom, established in 1359.

In the next sections, we will explore the territorial evolution, the metamorphosis of towns and the demographic changes of the population in Moldova throughout the pre-communist period (1812-1940) and during the communist one (1940-1991).

#### 3.1. The Pre-communist Period (1812-1940)

The pre-communist period beginning in the 1812 signified the first annexation under a Russian

administration (the Tsarist Empire) of the territory between the Prut, the Dniester, the Danube, and the Black Sea. This brought the establishment of Moldova as a distinct region, independently of the Moldavian Princedom to which this territory historically belongs. This annexation had a crucial influence on its later evolution and the separation of Moldova from the rest of the Romanian territories during the communist period.

Starting with 1812, because the territory of Moldova was considered independent from the Moldavian Princedom, exact censuses were conducted by the Russian authorities, illustrating the demographic evolution in this region. The Romanian territory between the Prut, the Dniester, the Danube and the Black Sea annexed by the Tsarist Empire in 1812 had an area of 44,422 square kilometres. In the years following annexation, significant population movements were caused by the fear of bondage of the Moldavian peasants. Basarabia's centre region, covered by forests, had as first human settlements large groups of villages, called "răzăşeşti" (of free peasants).

One of the first demographic figures in the Moldavian territory dates back to 1812, when Admiral Ciceagov mentioned that the population of Basarabia was represented by 41.160 families or 240,000 souls, and, in 1813, this number increased, amounting to 55,560 families or 340,000 souls, so there is a growth difference of 100,000 souls [2].

Kishinev was chosen capital of Basarabia which remained until the eighteenth century. Only at the half of the eighteenth century the village was transformed into a district, with hundreds of houses and churches. In 1817, they founded the town hall, and after a decade and a half municipal planning works began in the young capital, so it was represented as a town with wide streets, huge markets, new neighbourhoods with elegant houses, and public buildings with a modern architecture. The population of Kishinev has evolved from 12,000 inhabitants to 50,000 inhabitants in 1821.

Under the leadership of A. Sciuşev, they drafted a systematic network of streets with total destruction of the old town and just keeping an old house and the main monuments such as the Old Sobor, St. Ilie Church, the Museum Church, etc.

The peculiarity consists in isolating housing towns, like in villages and in between they arranged green areas. Except for the settlements of merchants and craftsmen streets, houses were arranged in groups which vary between 500 and 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> area, land on which dwelling was located southwards and always had a courtyard. In this large fenced area they used to plant flowers, vegetable gardens and orchards. Also, in villages, housing was developed independently of the household's facilities.

Ştefan Ciobanu's words from 1925 remain memorable: "Kishinev or better saying the New Town

represented the creation period of the Tsar's squares straight lines and military, Emperor Nicholas I, and hence exterior shape very much resembles the southern Russian towns" [10].

The first official census of the Moldavian territory was decided by the Russian authorities in 1816-1817, along with the administrative division of the annexed territory, keeping Moldavian traditions. In this regard, we remind that Basarabia was divided into eight regions (counties), and each of them in districts. This division operated until 1856. Orhei and Hotin lands had most districts (12 and 8) and Codrului and Greceni lands the fewest (each with 2 districts). Of the 1103 settlement statistics reported in 1817, the largest number was recorded in Orhei land (316) and in Soroaca (189). The Bugeac Area north to the mouth of the Danube, territory created by the Ottoman Empire, registered the lowest population [3].

Tsarist Authorities census conducted between 1816 and 1817 gives us important information also about the ethnic structure of the population. Basarabian population was about 500,000 people. About 420,000 people were reported as 86% Romanian, followed by: Ruthenian (6.5%), Jewish (4.2%), Lippovans (1.5%), Greeks (0.7%), Armenian (0.6%), Bulgarians (0.2%), and Gagauz. We can say that the region between the Dniester and the Prut is a Romanian territory, whose population is formed by an overwhelming majority of Romanians [11].

In Basarabia were brought in 1824 and 1828 the Lausanne Swiss settlers. Earlier however, French families were placed in Bugeac. By the middle of the last century, the number of Polish settled in the province between the Dniester and the Prut will increase to hundreds. They live mainly in northern and central areas. Bulgarians began to settle in Moldova since the eighteenth century, under the Russian-Ottoman wars settling in southern areas the villages abandoned by the Turks and by the Tatars. In terms of administrative Bulgarian colonies, the occupied territory was divided into four districts (Ismail, Prut, Bugeac, and Cahul). In these districts there were 57 villages with over 5,000 families. Two years later population almost doubled, approximately 8,900 families with over 46,000 inhabitants, but out of these 2,500 families were Romanians and Greeks. In 1835, over 56,000 inhabitants were living in the Bulgarian districts [2].

Instead, in lands like Bender, Ismail and in Cetatea Alba, and in some colonies, there were the Gagauz. Among the ethnic minorities in Basarabia were also the Jews. Their number increased during the war period 1806-1812, so that when the annexation of Basarabia took place, there were approximately 5,000 Jewish families.

For 1814, we mention the existence of a group of about 1,500 families of Germans settlers who came from the Warsaw region, founding seven colonies in the Buceag.

In 1828, the population movement shown by the statistical office is reflected as follows: in 1828 - 409,110 inhabitants, in 1829 412,429 inhabitants, in 1930 469,783 inhabitants [15].

The Basarabian population grew at a rate much higher when compared to other areas of the Tsarist Empire, reaching in 1856 over 990,000 inhabitants. Following the surrender of the three counties in the southern province of Moldova, the population under Russian administration in 1856 was 862,000 inhabitants. Following colonization and natural population growth, population will increase in 1875 to over 1,150,000 people.

According to population density the most densely inhabited are the lands of Hotin and of Kishinev, followed by Orhei and by Soroaca. This increase was due mainly to natural increase and especially due to the massive colonization by Russian administration. For the period 1835-1857, official statistics demonstrate an annually average of about 21,000 foreign settlers which were brought into this territory between the Dniester and the Prut.

If government statistics recorded a total of 738,000 Moldavians (i.e. 74% of the total population) for 1856, the census performed by the authorities and published in 1871 recorded a significant decrease in the percentage of Romanians, down to 67.4% (692,000 Moldavians). The other ethnic groups recorded an increase. Between 1856 and 1871, the Russian-Ukrainian population increased from 12% to 15.8% and the number of the Hebrew from 8% to 9.1%. As the ratio of urban and rural population is 4/5, the population who lived in towns is close to 184,000 [4].

Kishinev district recorded the highest percentage of urban population (46%), while Orhei only 4%. Provincial capital, Kishinev had a population of 87,500 inhabitants, 50% Romanian, 20% Jews, 10% Russians, etc., according to the census of 1860. Statistics from 1 January 1913 show that in Basarabia there were 2,521,277 souls (1,285,664 men and 1,235,613 women) [11].

With the Great Unification in 1918, Basarabia returns to the Romanian administration and is integrated de facto as historical region into the Kingdom of Romania from 1918 to 1940. This period was one of the most prosperous for all regions of the Kingdom of Romania, so the population in Basarabia continued its growth and the standard of living was also increasing. This is reflected in the Romanian statistics in 1925 and the general census in 1930-1931.

In 1925, population consisted of Moldavians/Romanians - 50.5%, Ukrainians - 34.3%, Russians - 5.5%, Jews - 4.8%, and other - 4.7%.

The 1930-1931 census registered 2,864,402 souls and the population was dynamically growing.

Summarizing, the population varied from 482,630 inhabitants at the census of 1817, conducted by the Russian authorities up to 1,935,412 in 1897 (under

the same authorities) and up to 3.2 millions at the time of its occupation by the USSR in June of 1940.

In 123 years, the population increased seven times and registered a corresponding increase in average density, from 10.8 up to about 70 inhabitants per square kilometre. These numbers give us some perspective on the changes that have occurred in this area over the years. The total population in the pre-communist period, from 1812 to 1940, is reflected in the diagram in Figure 2, which shows that since 1812 the Moldavian population begins to grow until 1819, when it starts to fall below 500,000 inhabitants. After 1826, the Moldavian population is increasing from year to year, so that in 1875 the average trend growth has over 100,000 inhabitants. From 1812 until 1875, we notice a trend of average evolution of population, and, after 1875, the demographic trend stands above the average of 2,500,000 inhabitants [15].

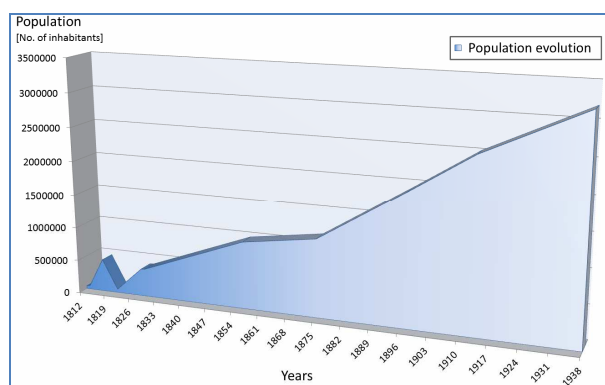


Fig. 2. Total population evolution in the pre-communist period: 1812-1938.

### 3.2. The Communist Period (1940-1991)

On August 2, 1940, six counties in the territory of Basarabia – Bălți, Bender, Moldova, Cahul, Orhei and Soroca and six of the 14 districts of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic – Tiraspol, Grigoriopol, Dubăsari, Camenca, Rîbnița, and Slobozia united in the newly proclaimed Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR).

During 1940-1950, population declined due to immense loss in the Second World War, Stalin's famine, deportations, and repressions.

According to reports from the Minister Kruglov to Stalin, unearthed by the historian Nikolai Bougai, and according to the census data, from 1940 to 1950 Moldova has lost a third of its population, from 3.2 million people according to the Romanian census of 1938 down to 2,229,000 according to the Soviet census of 1950 [15].

According to the American historian Charles King's research [11], the difference between the population censuses of 1938 annexed territory (Romanian) and of 1950 (Soviet), taking into account the intense Soviet colonization after August 1944, shows

that the demographic deficit was partially compensated by settlement. So 971,000 people disappeared in 10 years:

- 140,000 Basarabian Germans were deported to Germany under the Nazi-Soviet Pact;
- 300,000 Moldavians were deported between 28 June 1940 and 22 June 1941 (only in the night of 13 June 1941: 13,470 families, including 22,648 people, out of which approximately two thirds of women and children);
- 120,000 Jews fled to the USSR and never returned; they established there or they have been caught by Wehrmacht and killed by Einsatzgruppen;
- 250,000 Moldavians were deported between 1944 and 1948;
- 150,000 people died between 1946 and 1947 as a result of the famine caused by the Soviet requisitions when there was in a period of bad harvests (policy already applied in neighbouring Ukraine in 1920-1930 - Holodomor);
- 11,324 families were displaced, using force, from Moldova, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1949 (approximately 40,850 people).

In 1950, more than 220,000 "unwanted" or "harmful" had already been deported from the country, out of which 49,000 were still alive at the scene of deportation [13, 14].

Stalin's death does not end deportations: between 1954 and 1964 a number of 300,000 families were moved to Russia and Kazakhstan.

During the 1950-1990, the number of residents increased by 1.9 times due to natural population increase and massive population migration to the Soviet territory. In the post-war period, the Soviet government arranged the migration of workforce (mostly Russians, Belarusian, and Ukrainians) into the new Soviet republic, especially into urbanized areas, partly to compensate for the demographic loss caused by the war and the emigration of 1940 and 1944.

The first transformations which took place once the communist power was established started with the forced metamorphosis of Romanian pre-war institutions into Soviet institutions. This process was parallel with the appearance of new establishments, mainly for coercive purposes (militia, NKVD branches, town Soviets, town Committees, new courthouses), as the communist regime was installed by force.

This already brought some changes in the structure of towns, involving the confiscation of some individual or public properties for communist establishments. For example, in Kishinev, as soon as the 1940 Soviet occupation, the Italian Consulate and other western embassies/consulates, were confiscated and transformed into NKVD offices. In 1944, with the return of the Soviet regime, a large number of individual properties were confiscated and marked "occupied by NKVD" (e.g. part of "Armenească" and "Cuznecinaia" streets in Kishinev, individual properties

on Ostrovski, Alexandrovscăia and on Gogol streets in Kishinev, etc.) [13].

Another direction which influenced urban transformation was represented by rural collectivization, which caused the disappearance of the individual agricultural property and impoverished rural population, some of which will migrate to towns. This is convergent with the main characteristic which shaped the organization of communist towns: the emergence of industrial towns and industrial parts of the old towns focused on a single branch or on few industrial branches. The industry of the newly proclaimed Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was totally dependent on the industrial centres of the USSR, which, in exchange for agricultural products, food industry and light industry products, were delivering oil and coal, iron and steel, plastics and metals, tractors, trucks and cars, excavators and agricultural machinery, machine tools for the local industry.

Developing big industrial projects, the communist system naturally needed workforce to support this intensive industrialization effort. To this end, the authorities have encouraged, since the late '40s, the gradual migration of a large part of the workforce – especially younger generations – to newly emerging industrial centres. Holding the levers of management, the pan-union ministries also promoted the massive affluence of the workforce from outside the MSSR territory, for the construction of new industrial enterprises even when a local workforce surplus was present [14]. The direct consequence of this policy was the change of the socio-demographic balance of the country in a relatively short period. Between the rural and urban areas, population migration had only one direction, from villages to towns.

As a direct consequence of population relocation, in the early '50s and '60s, the communist authorities launched an extensive program of housing construction, to meet the urgent requirements of the new town dwellers. For 15-20 years, the apartment buildings were built in the suburbs, on vacant land, along the ring roads or along peripheral boulevards and access roads to towns. So, in this first phase, up to the early '70s, it is fair to say that, in general, historical centres were not affected. But the changes in the structure of existing towns were already major: the important extension of districts for workers – communist buildings with small apartments, studios – where compact living spaces were promoted while the neighbourhoods of houses were not encouraged.

Once the peripheral areas were intensively populated, some major demolition periods affected also historical centres and traditional architectural areas in major towns. After 20 years from the beginning of this process, the structure and the building area of at least 18 towns in Moldova were destroyed at a rate of 85-90%, being replaced by apartment blocks of a totally different character (see Figure 3).

The structure of towns was affected also by the confiscation of traditional houses which were either demolished or seized and transformed into communist administrative institutions or in few cases other social buildings (e.g. orphanages, medical institutions, etc.), the demolition of traditional architecture buildings, and the building of social cantinas and centres for general alimentation.



Fig. 3. Kishinev surrounded by typical apartment blocks built during the communist period.

An important transformation which began in the early '60s consisted in the demolition of churches, monasteries, and other religious monuments. At the suggestion of the Communist Party bodies in Moldova, the USSR decided to fight all religious manifestations and their expression. At least 900 properties of this type (churches, monasteries and religious monuments) were destroyed, ruined or transformed into prisons, hospices or even barns, sheds, and cow houses.

The exacerbation of single industrial production activities at the expense of balanced industrial-agricultural and cultural, artistic, scientific activities gave towns a characteristic aspect. The massive development of industrial zones, which may be integrated within the town itself, along with territorial expansion and the integration of communes and villages from the periphery into the town structure resulted into heterogeneous urban structure.

In the diagram presented in Figure 4, we analyze the total population in Moldova during the communist period (1940-1991). After the pre-communist period in 1938, population increased, registering 3,000,000 inhabitants. During the transition from the pre-communist to the communist era in 1940, Moldova's population began to decline slowly down to a total of 2,000,000 inhabitants in 1950.

After 1950, population increased up to 3,500,000 inhabitants in 1969. The number of inhabitants increased up to 1991 to over 4,500,000 people, so that one may notice that from year to year the number of inhabitants had a trend of transition from social, economic, and political perspective.

Since 1940-1991, we notice that the population in the Republic of Moldova has gone through many political, economic, and social changes. These changes are reflected by increasing and decreasing the number of inhabitants, shaped by the foreigners who came to stay and by those who merely passed through, including Greek colonists, invading Turks and Tatars, officials of the Russian Empire, German and Bulgarian colonists, and communist apparatchiks from the Soviet Union, soldiers from Nazi Germany, Romanian co-nationals, and 20<sup>th</sup>c. Russian and Ukrainian immigrants. Each group has left its own legacy, sometimes cultural and sometimes political, and often unwelcome.

The population dynamics in the Republic of Moldova during the communist period can also be reflected starting from the diagram in Figure 4, where we represented different census (1940-1941) information.

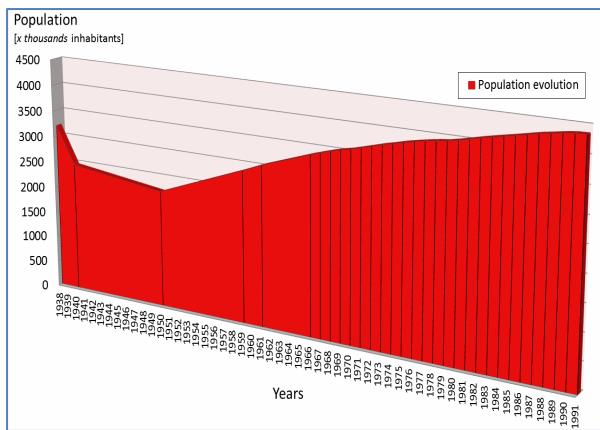


Fig. 4. Total population evolution during the communist period: 1940-1991.

In this context, from 1938 up to 1950, population decreased with a rate of 30.3% because of deportations, famine, and low birth rate.

From 1950 to 1961, the population of Moldova increased with a rate of 36%. Basarabia had the largest rural population of the Romanian provinces, about 87% of the population living outside towns, out of which 93% were Romanian language speakers.

Between 1961 and 1971, the population of Moldova increased year by year, reaching an average increase rate of 19%. From 1961 to 1971, the number of inhabitants reaches a lower increase rate of 11%.

During the period from 1981 to 1991, population increased with 8%, when compared to the beginning of the interval.

The dynamics of population from 1960 to 1991 shows an increasing trend, with the number of inhabitants increasing year by year, as revealed by the censuses in 1940-1991.

Urban planning was very limited or, under the influence of political views, it only accomplished the agglomeration of a large number of people with the

minimum infrastructure. Ecological consequences of this social and economic policy promoted by the communist regime during the post-war decades led to disastrous effects which are even today present in the peripheral areas of towns.

To this aim, in Figure 5, we mentioned two municipalities that developed during the communist period, such as Kishinev and Bălți. We noted that from 1959 to 2004 Kishinev population increased from year to year, from 300,000 up to 700,000 inhabitants. Instead Bălți, from 1959 to 2004, had a slow growth, from less than 100,000 inhabitants to over 100,000 inhabitants.

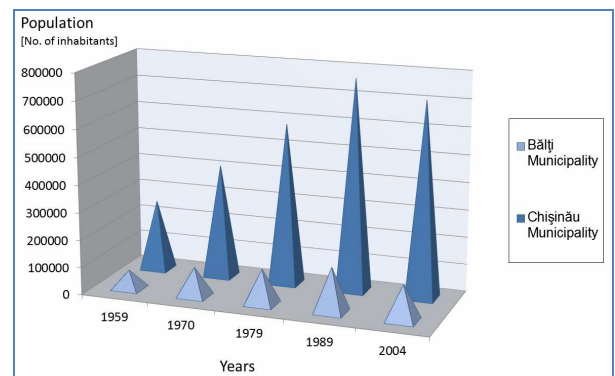


Fig. 5. Demographic evolution in the two main municipalities: 1959-2004.

The towns of Moldova are plotted in Figure 6, where we analyzed the demographic evolution of Moldova between 1959 and 2004. In this figure, we represented 32 towns in the Republic of Moldova. We observed the increase of population in these towns during this period and also a decrease because of natural, economic, and political causes.

An important cause of this difference was represented by the increase and the decrease of population through migration. As a result, migration diminished because of the very restrictive movement policies that the government supported during the communist era. Under the repressive regime, those who wanted to leave the country were forced to cross borders illegally or to be politically exiled.

Migrants came from unstable environments and tried to avoid the negative impact of the transition process by resorting to atypical, risky solutions. Decisions to migrate were generally reached at gradually, after several failed attempts to make a living in the home town, such as job or occupation changes or internal migration.

We observe that the demographic evolution of the population from 1959 to 2004 depends on the environment of each town and on its citizens. An example of a town where population increased between 1959 and 2004 is shown in Table 1. In Ialoveni, population increased from 60,000 inhabitants in 1959 up to 97,000 inhabitants in 2004 [15].

Table 1. Population of Ialoveni, 1959-2004.

Locality/Years	1959	1970	1979	1989	2004
Ialoveni	64,111	76,952	82,861	90,942	97,704

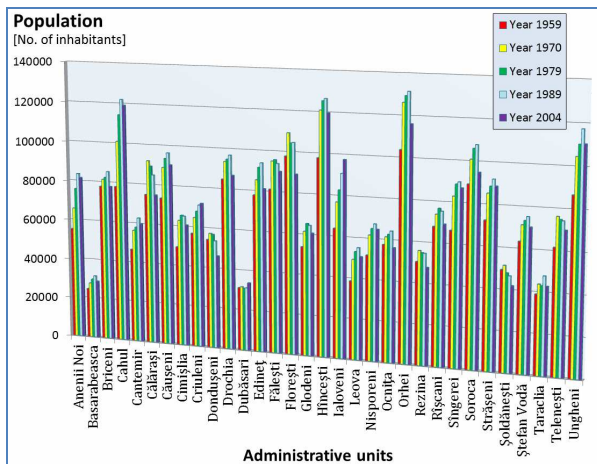


Fig. 6. Demographic evolution in administrative units: 1959-2004.

In Figure 6, we discover towns with minimum and maximum limits of demographic population trends. Basarabeasca town at the census from 1959 recorded a minimum of 24,814 inhabitants, while, on the other hand, Kishinev city recorded a high demographic evolution to 770,948 inhabitants in 1989. From the census in 1959 to the census in 2004, we observe that the city population is increasing moderately, with a mild decrease trend later, in 2004 [15].

The abrupt end of communism in 1989 and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a turbulent transition period.

Over the twenty years that followed 1989, all fundamental societal characteristics of the old communist order, from government-planned economy to equalitarian social relations, were dismantled and restructured all anew, ostensibly along the flagship doctrines of victorious twentieth-century rival of communism: free-market capitalism.

In terms of demography, we should recall that in 1989, during the Soviet census, the population of the country was of 4,335,360 people, but because of migration and decreasing birth rates, the population was estimated at 4,320,000 in 1997, being the least urbanized state of all Soviet states. So, Romanian-speaking majority population amounted to 64.5% of the population, followed by the Ukrainian (13.8%), the Russian (13%), the Gagauz (13.5%), the Bulgarian (2%), and other minorities. About 83% of the population lives in Basarabia and 17% in Transnistria. Moldavians represent the largest ethnic group in both regions, about 60% of Basarabia and 40% of Transnistria. 70% of all Ukrainians and Russians in Moldova live west of the Dnister River, in Basarabia [11].

In the 1990s, the country has experienced a decrease in birth rates and we observe a decline in the overall rate of natural increase.



Fig. 7. Towns in the Republic of Moldova in 2003 [17].

The birth rate increased from 9.7 per 1,000 in 1990 to 11.9 in 1997. Infant mortality increased from 19.0 to 20.0, while the birth rate fell from 17.7 down to 11.9 over the same period. Average life expectancy has dropped and it reached 70.9 years for men and 70.4 years for women in 1996 [4].

In the early '90s, rural and urban population decreased. This phenomenon is caused by demographic factors (natural movement, aging, etc.), social and economic consequences of the transition period. From 1990 until 2010, population decreased with 275 thousands or with 6.3%. In general, population's numerical evolution is determined by two processes: natural movement and migration.

The town network currently consists of 65 urban settlements, including five municipalities and 60 towns. In the four cities (Kishinev, Bălți, Bender, and Tiraspol) lives approximately 50% of the total urban population. There is a remarkable predominance of small towns (under 20,000 inhabitants). This category includes 50 urban settlements with industrial-agrarian specialization.

The largest number of towns is in the northern and central regions. A denser network of urban settlements is in the south, yet with only two towns and urban centres, such as: Cahul (39,000 inhabitants) and Comrat (25,000 inhabitants).



From 1991 to 1998, Moldova remained with the division on the Soviet model districts. The only change was made in 1994, when the Administrative Territorial Unit of Gagauzia appeared.

Structural changes were made in 1998, when the territory reverted to counties. Although there were border counties in the interwar period, this change was however a step towards the separation from the communist background.

After 2003, the communist government brought the same administrative division of Soviet origin, even the same model of sad memory, the districts (with slight modifications). This reverse change is depicted in Figure 7.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Our research covers a broad study on the changes of the Moldavian towns and administrative units during the communist period.

In order to illustrate the urban evolution process during the communist period, we include a pre-communist period analysis, a discussion of its influence and the transition from the pre-communist to the communist period. The demographic evolution during the pre-communist period is analyzed and linked to the communist one. We observed that from the pre-communist to the communist era, the demographic evolution of the population oscillates with 700,000 inhabitants. The result of the growth in urban population is the migratory and natural movement of population for different living standards and for social aspects.

In Moldova, beside native population, there were many Russians, Ukrainians, and Jews. The number of Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish inhabitants continued to increase because of the influx of refugees fleeing across the borders to get rid of collectivization, of the Great Holodomor, or of the NKVD persecution.

In a further phase in our research, we referred to the transformation in the towns of Moldova during the communist period, their demographic evolution, the increase and decrease of the number of inhabitants.

All the changes during the communist period were reflected afterwards in the transition period, after 1991. Throughout the region, the period of transition has been characterized by significant demographic shifts and some changes in the patterns of urbanization reflecting the broad socio-economic transformations taking place in transition countries since the early 1990's. The dominant demographic trends for the majority of the nations in the region have been the rapid aging of population coupled with general population decline. The negative population growth has been accompanied by a comparable decrease in urban population, even though the latter has been partially offset by a rising wave of rural-to-urban migration.

With roughly two thirds of their population residing in urban areas, the transition countries are

highly urbanized. This is a legacy of the intense urbanization which took place in the region during communist times. The period of adaptation from command-driven regimes to democratic societies attuned to the forces of the market has triggered significant adjustments in the settlement networks of the transition countries.

Large international and domestic migration flows have resulted in unique pressures on urban areas. Thus, post-communist towns experienced general population decline coupled with rapidly aging population – a combined effect of low fertility rates and emigration of working and reproductive-age residents.

The general decline in the share of urban population because of emigration conceals the extent of another powerful process taking place during the transition period: rural-to-urban migration.

In the last two decades, a great number of migrants have been drawn from rural to urban areas, attracted by the promise of greater employment opportunities. The overwhelming majority of these migrants have settled in large urban agglomerations around national capitals. These migrants have contributed to increase the number of inhabitants in the urban area and have assimilated the traditions from their native town, in this way becoming the witnesses of the pre-communist and communist period.

Demographic evolution was affected by collectivization. The urban transformation of towns is related to the image of a group of buildings with grey-coloured, old architecture surrounded by green spaces.

As a general conclusion, the aim of our research was to understand the demographic evolution of the population in the pre-communist and in the communist periods and the urban transformations of the towns of Moldova.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] **Surd, V.** (2009), *Geography of Settlements*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- [2] **Scurtu, I., Almaş, D., Goşu, A.** (2003), *Istoria Basarabiei de la începuturi până în 2003* [The History of Basarabia from Its Beginning to 2003], Ed. Institutul Cultural Român, Bucureşti.
- [3] **Nistor, I.** (1991), *Istoria Basarabiei* [The History of Basarabia], Ed. Cartea Moldovenească, Chişinău.
- [4] **Purici, Şt.** (2006), *Introducere în istoria Basarabiei* [Introduction to the History of Basarabia], Ed. Universităţii “Ştefan cel Mare”, Suceava.
- [5] **Trofăilă, V.** (2007), *Oraşul Soroca: Istorie şi contemporaneitate* [The Town of Soroca: History and Present], Ed. VAST-M, Chişinău.
- [6] **Trofăilă, V.** (2008), *Oraşul Floreşti* [The Town of Floreşti], Ed. VAST-M, Chişinău.
- [7] **Nemerecvo, V.** (2009), *Administraţia municipiului Chişinău* [Administration of Kishinev Municipality], Ed. Prut Internaţional, Chişinău.

- [8] **Baciu, Gh.** (2011), *Orașul Bălți și oamenii lui* [The City of Bălți and Its Citizens], Ed. Litera, Chișinău.
- [9] **Poștarencu, D.** (1996), *Chișinăul în 1941* [Kishinev in 1941], Ed. Museum, Chișinău.
- [10] **Ciobanu, Șt.** (1925), *Chișinăul*, Ed. Comisiunii monumentelor istorice, Secția din Basarabia, București.
- [11] **King, Ch.** (2003), *The Moldavans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Ed. ARC, Chișinău.
- [12] **Vizer, B., Strugaru, V.** (2005), *Pe calea urbanizării* (orașele Moldovei în anii 40-60 ai sec. XX) [Towards Urbanization (the Towns of Moldova from the 40s to the 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)], Universitatea Pedagogică de Stat "Ion Creangă" din Chișinău, Chișinău.
- [13] **Bugaï, N. F. G.** (1992), *Correspondence Joseph Stalin – Laurent Beria: "We Have to Deport Them"*. Journal "Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii", Tom 5, Moscova.
- [14] **Bugaï, N. F. G.** (1989), *30-50, On the Deportation of the URSS People in the 1930s-1950s*, Istoria URSS, No. 6, Moscova.
- [15]\*\*\* *Biroul National de Statistică al Republicii Moldova* [National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova], *Recensămintele din anul 1959, 1970, 1989, 2004* [Censuses from 1959, 1970, 1989, and 2004] Available at: <http://statistica.md>. Last accessed: February, 4, 2013.
- [16]\*\*\* *Towns and Population Map of the Republic of Moldova*, Available at: <http://itravel.md>. Last accessed: February, 5, 2013.
- [17] \*\*\* *Map of Towns in the Republic of Moldova*, Available at: <http://casa-regala.blogspot.ro>. Last accessed: February, 5, 2013.