

REGIONS IN ROMANIA: PURPOSE AND TERRITORIAL REALITIES

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ABSTRACT - Regionalisation as a process and regions as territorial entities reappeared in the political, economic, administrative, and scientific discourse. In Romania, even since the Middle Ages, there have been regional type entities called “*țări*”/ “countries.” They covered areas of approximately 400 km². These regions have remained as such until nowadays and therefore, they are irrefutable territorial proofs of the continuity of the Romanian people in the area. The territorial and administrative divisions that appeared later were the result of the effort to keep pace with the necessity to modernize the society and with the consequences of different historical events.

The present eight development regions in Romania try to emulate the territorial realities that had occurred earlier in Western Europe. The Romanian regions emerged from the need to fit the statistical requirements of the rank 2 NUTS regions, but they are not functional.

The same thing is true about Euroregions, which, in fact, have a rather cartographic functionality, the normal territorial relationships being obstructed by the frontier effect. This effect has increased lately because visas have again become compulsory for some of the would-be partners in the co-operation on which the construction of these regions relies.

Key words: region, land, NUTS

THE PROBLEM OF REGIONS IN ROMANIA: PURPOSE AND TERRITORIAL REALITIES

Regionalisation as a process and regions as territorial entities reappeared in the political, economic, administrative and scientific discourse as means of finding methods and frames to stimulate the territorial development and diminish or even annul the over-centralising tendency of the state, its institutions, and regulations. All over the world the inhabited space organised itself in natural entities according to the principle of the relative homogeneity of its components. Romania is no exception to the rule, as it has three major natural units according to its main **relief** units (a mountainous region, a hilly region, and a plain region).

Looking back at the historical process of the formation of the Romanian nation, the first regional bodies worth mentioning were the “countries,” “*țări*” in Romanian. O. Pecican (2004) mentions that the term “country” refers to an administrative and political organisational structure during the Middle Ages. If we look at the evolution of the Maramureşului Country which evolved from “*silva*”/“*codru*” (in English “forest”), we can say that “countries may have been born from other types of territorial-tribal formations, on condition that their **relief** allowed that specific transformation.”

“*Țara*” became a territory cultivated by man and a bringer of civilisation where the relationships among the community members evolved (“evolution from the egalitarianism among the members of the free tribes, to hierarchical relationships in accordance with a process of social-economic differentiation”-idem 2004).

The “countries”/“*țări*” are placed, in most cases, in small to middle-sized depressions (around 400 km²) that have a centre of command which had been functioning as the central place for 1000 years. Taking into consideration this type of territorial logic, we can say that “*țara*” has two meanings (idem, 2004):

- 1) building a political- territorial entity;
- 2) a community that represented the region in the decision-making bodies.

Besides historical constraints, “țările”/“countries” also had a remarkable physical conditioning. They were organised according to the principles of the systematic occupation of space and the efficient exploitation of space in the context of “historical turmoil,” as a response to the incapacity of efficiently covering spaces and distances. “Countries” succeeded in organising the territory according to the new centres of command. These centres became the seats of power of a densely populated agricultural space that they served in terms of defence, economic exchange and politics, all of them complex functions for those times.

Through their general lexicon, “țările”/“countries” are irrefutable arguments for the continuity of Romanian language and inhabitation in the area. They came into being after the genesis of the Romanian language and people. “Țările”/“countries” developed a basis of geographical information, a remarkable genetic geographic code which turned into enduring mental spaces (P. Cocean, N. Cieanga, 1999-2000) that still offer people a sense of territorial identity and continuity (Țara Maramureșului – *maramureșan*, Țara Bozoviciului – *bozovicean*, Țara Moților – *moș*, Țara Făgărașului – *făgărașan*, Țara Vrancei – *vrâncean*, etc.). They maintain that territorial bond and regional consciousness on which their formation and endurance in time from the Middle Ages till nowadays relied. They are the territorial prototype on which new regional structures can be built and rebuilt.

In time, forms of macro-territorial regions began to take shape and identify with the historical provinces: Transylvania, Moldavia, Wallachia (Țara Românească), and Dobruđja. Each of these areas underwent a transformation and clarification process because of historical and geographical conditioning which led to the appearance of smaller territorial divisions (Ardeal, Banat, Oltenia, Muntenia, Bucovina). The inhabitants of these regions identify themselves with pride with such denominations as *oltean*, *ardelean*, *bucovinean*, etc., which resulted from their remarkable perception of the differences emerging from their relationship with the territory and the longer lasting influences of the outside populations. The consciousness of belonging to a territory and certain traditions has led to the cultural diversity of today’s folklore. Therefore, the consciousness of belonging continues even today and it supports public attachment to the territory.

The territorial-administrative divisions between the two World Wars kept pace with the economic modernization of the country and overcame the difficulties of joining different territorial units after the Union of 1st December 1918.

During the period after WW II (after 1950), an administration framework imitating the Russian one was adopted, namely relying on such units as districts (*raioane*) and regions. With the necessary adjustments, this lasted until 1968, when a new territorial-administration framework was introduced. The purpose for this transformation was a fairer distribution of the work force on the territory, in other words a national levelling of the differences in development.

For almost half a century, the level of income remained unchanged for comparable social and professional categories although investments were mostly directed towards the counties in the east and the north of the country. In spite of all this effort for economic emancipation by creating industries and infrastructure and by accelerated urban development, the south and the east of the country continued to remain less developed in comparison with the centre and west of the country.

The engine of territorial development relying on the population-capital-technology triad did not function well. That is why the European Union Treaty signed at Maastricht in 1992 gave priority to the regional development policies in the new political and strategic continental configuration. According to this treaty, the aims and the means of regional politics are (quotation from Maria Vincze, 2000):

- diminishing the differences between regions and the differences caused by underdevelopment;
- the creation of correlated national and community structural instruments and economic policies in order to do away with important differences in regional development.

The territories to be included in the development regions must have a statistical unit for records and analysis – NUTS (Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques), which must be in concordance with the regional EU policies. The NUTS exist at several levels: from the national level –NUTS1- down to the local levels – NUTS5. The development regions belong to NUTS2 and they are defined without interfering with the existent administrative – territorial structures.

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The eight Romanian development regions resulted from simply putting together some counties according to the contiguity principle. They are, unfortunately, the result of imposed association and territorial identity, the essential element, is missing. Subsequently, a question arises: which is the identity of the inhabitants in the new regions? Will they call themselves “centriști” (“centerers”), “nord-vestici” (“north-westeners”), “nord-estici” (“north-easteners”), etc.? Therefore, we introduced a possible territorial mechanism that we are not so sure about and with which, for sure, we do not identify. That is why the constituent areas of the regions, the counties, continue to function as administrative units and the regional development priorities have not been formulated.

Besides the “central” county interests, underdevelopment remains and it also increases because we cannot identify some regional development centres on which the out-of-the-county interests, namely the regional concerns can focus. From the territorial point of view, not only do things get more complicated, but quite often there isn’t even the minimum coalescent factor of economic and social unity.

Regional bureaucracy would be preferable if it were the consequence of diminishing central bureaucracy and competences. That is why we believe that development regions are a whim and they only mimic EU policies to create sub-state territorial divisions. We believe that the creation of development regions by overlapping the territory of Romania’s historical provinces would be a much more appropriate alternative.

Even worse is the problem of creating Euroregions. In Western Europe they were created as a result of the will of the populations that inhabit them. Also, they relied on a much higher level of economic development. In that context the barrier effect of the border had become a huge obstruction for new territorial collaboration required by technological development.

As far as our country is concerned, Euroregions will only unite poverty. They are more likely virtual regions, “wishful thinking” regions. The historical legacy obstructs their creation. The territories proposed for these regions reject rather than attract one another in order to make a whole. Reality contradicts the theory that the regional connecting element is the national minorities that live in the cross border regions. In all this territories there are small chances for regional collaboration. In addition, in many such areas the visa policy was re-introduced.

From the point of view of normal human relations, the Romanian Euroregions are perceived as medieval realities of the contemporary world. They look good only statistically and cartographically. They take shape only on maps. However, there is relentless scientific demonstration for them. But these regions remain just statistical information, maps, photos and cartodiagrams. Regionalists produce the only territorial activity. Regionalists, as main actors of this show, aren’t disturbed by anything in their sleep of regional rationale. In conclusion, we are made to believe that regions exist, of course...but, in fact, they lack completely.

The consolidation of present regions of development by endowing them an economic identity is a chance for regionalization of the Romanian territory. This requires putting in practice the objectives concerning economy and infrastructure, objectives that are able to ensure an up-going development for Romania. The present cooperation among the counties forming the regions – cooperation that aims to achieve common objectives – doesn’t offer a very optimistic perspective on the future of the regions. An unsolved issue remains the identification of the main objectives that are a priority for all regional actors and also finding a substantial European financial support to realize these objectives.

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