

PROJECT FOR A FUNCTIONAL REGIONALIZATION OF ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT - The decision of the Romanian Government to connect Romania closer to the realities of the European Union, including administration, imposes the introduction of a new taxon, the regional one, equivalent to NUTS 2 level, which did not exist before in the panoply of the national spatial entities. This has generated a special effervescence of concerns in the field, reflected in the elaboration of numerous regionalization scenarios, based on various criteria, from the geographical ones to the economic, social, political, or heteroclitite ones. This is the context in which the model of territorial division presented below was elaborated. The model was submitted to the attention of the Romanian Geographical Society during its annual Conference held in Timișoara on 25-27 May 2013, being unanimously voted by the specialists in Geography attending the meeting.

Keywords: region, administrative regionalization, functional regionalization, Romania

INTRODUCTION

The history of territorial divisions in the area of the current territory of Romania is old and expresses both the political-administrative needs of the times when they were initiated and the models used in various epochs, under the imperative of different conditionings.

Thus, if the Dacian state centralized by Burebista in the 1st century B.C. had as internal divisions territories inhabited by certain tribes, delineated in a symbolic, conventional manner, the Roman rule instituted after the second Dacian-Roman War of 105-106 A.D. preserved the unity of Dacia for only a few years. In 118 A.D., Emperor Hadrian divided Dacia in three provinces: Dacia Inferior, Dacia Superior and Dacia Porolissensis. Therefore, province (*provincia*) is the first spatial taxon recognized and attested as such by historical sources. Towns (called *colonia* or *municipium*) and rural communes, known as *vici* or *pagi*, appeared in the same period (Istoria Românilor, II, p. 48).

The Roman withdrawal from Dacia in 275 was followed by the turmoil induced by the migration of peoples, when the only form of territorial identification was represented by village communities (*obști sătești* or *romanii populare*). They were “forms of territorial-administrative organization of the native population, aimed at defending the land, organizing and practicing activities” (Jordan I., 2003).

In the 8th-11th centuries (Istoria Românilor, III, p. 108), the territorial organization recorded the emergence of voivodeships (*voievodate*), knezdoms (*cnezate*), of autonomous groups of people interconnected through kinship or economic links (*jupanate*) or lands (*țări*) (equivalent to dukedoms in Western Europe). Another taxon specific to Romania is *ținut* (district), thoroughly described by Dimitrie Cantemir in *Descriptio Moldaviae*, the first European book of genuine regional geography, elaborated in 1717 and published in Amsterdam a half a century later.

In the Middle Ages, the territorial units specific to the three Romanian states were counties (*județe*, in Wallachia), districts (*ținuturi*, in Moldavia), lands (*țări*) and shires (*comitate*) (adopted in Transylvania under the influence of the political factors that exercised their prerogatives over its territory). The counties appeared for the first time in Wallachia at the end of the 14th century (Jaleș, 1385; Vâlcea, 1392) and districts in Moldavia (Tutova, 1432; Chilia, Bacău or Tecuci, 1436; Hotin, 1441; Trotuș, 1446). In Transylvania, the first administrative entities mentioned were the “lands”, assimilated to districts. The Land of Făgăraș appeared as *Terra Blachorum* (the Land of the Romanians) in 1222 and the Land of Hațeg as *Terra Harsoch* in 1247.

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The example of Maramureș, known successively as *terra* (1299), *district* (1326) and *comitat* (1368) (Istoria Românilor, IV, 2001, pp. 198-199), is relevant to the significance of various territorial entities in the medieval Transylvania. Also in Transylvania, in the early 14th century, specific forms of administrative organization appeared in the regions colonized by Saxons and Szeklers, called seats (*scaune*) (Sibiu, Sebeș, Rupea, Sighișoara, Orăștie or Odorhei, Mureș, Ciuc, Arieș, etc.). They cohabit with the Saxon districts (Brașov, Bistrița) or with the Romanian districts in Hunedoara and Banat (Istoria Românilor, IV, 2001, pp. 200-202).

In the 18th century, the 19 districts (*ținuturi*) of Moldavia were divided into small rural districts: *ocoale*, subsequently substituted with *plăși*, while the 17 counties (*județe*) of Wallachia had as lower taxa the so-called *plăși* in the plain regions and *plaiuri* in the mountain regions (Istoria Românilor, VI, 2002, pp. 318-319). In Transylvania, the shires (*comitate*) were maintained throughout this period.

After the establishment of the Romanian national state in 1859, the county (*județ*) became the basic administrative unit. It was maintained even during the inter-war period, when it imposed itself in the newly attached provinces. In addition, there were a series of initiatives to achieve higher rank taxa, capable of including larger territories and more complex spatial systems. It was the period in which the political class was increasingly concerned with the issue of regionalization based on functional criteria, as proved by the numerous proposals for the delimitation of new administrative units.

The region (*regiune*) appeared on the list of the political-administrative units of Romania in 1950 when the country was divided into 28 regions consisting of districts (*raioane*) and communes (*comune*). In 1952, the number of regions was reduced to 16 by merging, accompanied by a change in their names based on temporary criteria (Săgeată R.D, 2004).

Finally, the above-mentioned Soviet-influenced regionalization was abandoned in 1968 and a return to the traditional taxon, the county (*județ*), took place, still available nowadays.

The term “region” became topical again indirectly with the delineation of the 8 *development regions*, without legal personality, stipulated by Law 151 of 1998 and named uninspiredly after the country’s cardinal points (North-East Region, North-West Region, South-West Region, etc.).

Other distinct territorial entities mentioned over time were the republics (*republici*) described by Dimitrie Cantemir in *Descriptio Moldaviae* (Vrancea and Câmpulung) and a metaphorically-defined upper rank unit (Highland or Lowland), which grouped the northern and the southern districts, respectively, of the medieval state of Moldavia.

Ministerial directorates (*directorate ministeriale*) can be mentioned among the political-administrative entities with an ephemeral existence (1929-1931), established by *Law for the organization of local administration* of 3 August 1929. According to the law, Greater Romania was divided into 7 such units largely overlapping the geographical-historical provinces (however, Dobruja was annexed to Wallachia and Crișana to Banat): Transylvania (Cluj), Bukovina (Cernăuți), Bessarabia (Chișinău), Moldavia (Iași), Wallachia and Dobruja (București), Banat and Crișana (Timișoara), and Oltenia (Craiova).

Districts (*ținuturi*) had also an ephemeral existence (1938-1940), the 10 territorial units (Suceava, Nistru, Prut, Dunărea de Jos, Mării, Bucegi, Olt, Timiș, Someș and Mureș) being subdivided, similar to ministerial directorates, into *județe*, *plăși* and *comune*.

PURPOSE AND CRITERIA FOR THE CURRENT REGIONALIZATION

The radical political, economic and social changes occurred in Romania after 1990, completed by the Romania’s joining to NATO and the European Union, have generated new realities and new desiderata for territorial development. The connection to the European economic macro-system requires an adaptation of the autochthonous spatial structures to the community matrix. Therefore, the introduction of the regional level has become an objective necessity, development regions lacking the necessary means for achieving the above-mentioned desiderata.

As I have already mentioned in a series of recent articles published in the local media (the 4, 8 and 11 April 2013 issues of the *Făclia* newspaper) and in a series of scholarly journals (Cocean P., 2013 a, b), no matter of the place and context, delineation of regions has always been a difficult

PROJECT FOR A FUNCTIONAL REGIONALIZATION OF ROMANIA

operation. Therefore, it must have a clearly defined purpose from the very beginning and must be based on prioritized scientific criteria. The purpose cannot be other than the one defined by the following desiderata: optimizing the functions of the national territory, optimal management of its resources, achievement of territorial cohesion, implementation into practice of the development programmes and policies and, as a corollary of all these, good territorial governance.

From our viewpoint, the operation of planned regionalization must have as final purpose the delineation of some *spatial programme entities with systemic attributes* (Cocean R., Cocean P., 2003; Cocean P., 2004). This desideratum can be achieved by basing the operation on the following attributes of the territory:

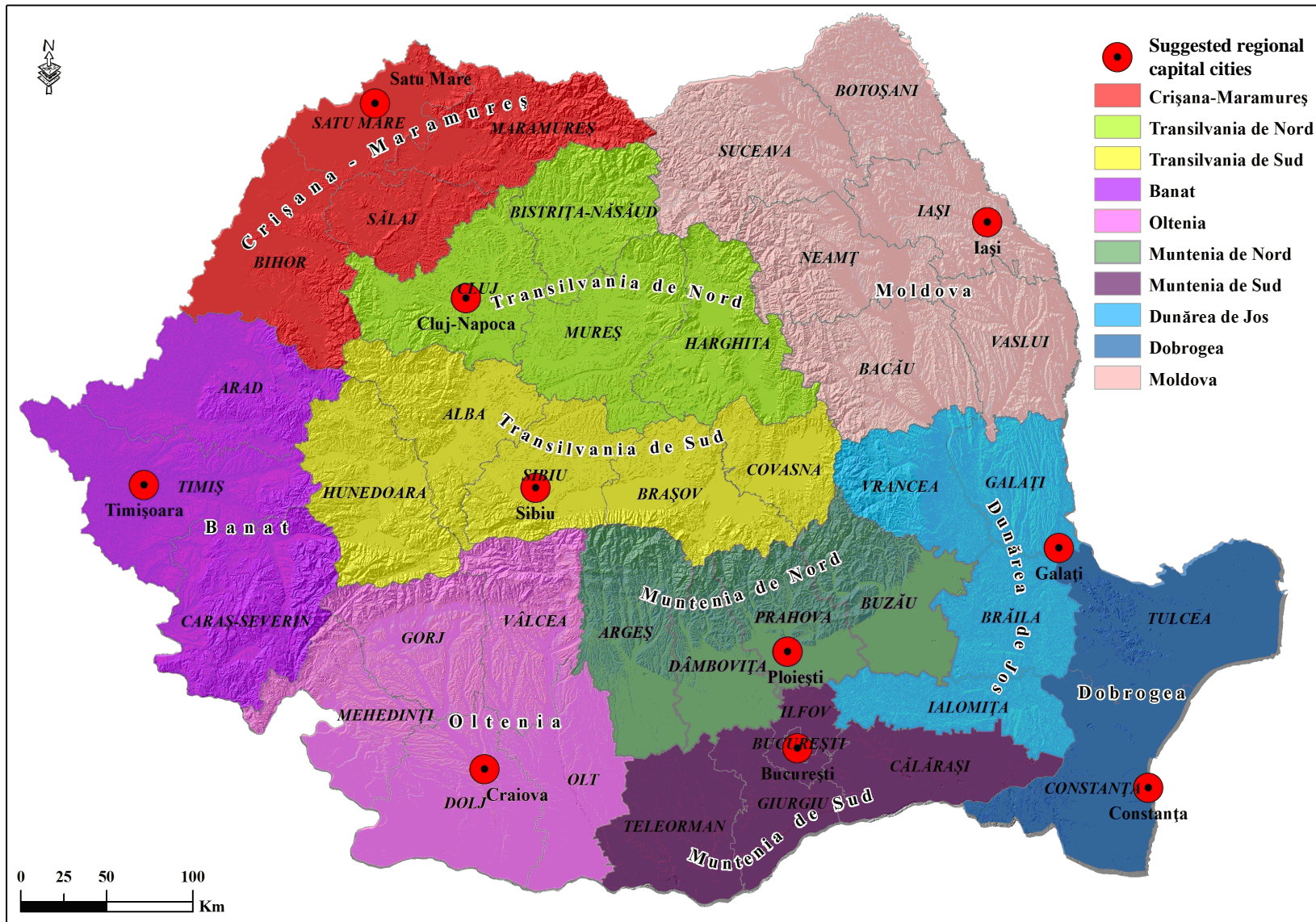
- natural and anthropogenic gravity towards growth poles or development axes;
- the existence of a support base for sustainable development, consisting of rich and diversified soil and underground resources;
- optimal internal fluency of the mass, energy, goods, and interests carrying vectors;
- high capacity for innovation and innovation dissipation;
- favourable linkages with the neighbouring spatial entities (derived from the geographical location, but also from the already established connectivity relations);
- well-consolidated mental space.

In this context, the two criteria that are commonly used by the political factor in the regionalization process - area of the region and the number of inhabitants - are not mandatory because of their rigidity and of the dysfunctions they subsequently generate.

ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONALIZATION OF ROMANIA (VARIANT)

In the light of the above-mentioned criteria, the territory of Romania can be divided into 10 regions, shown in the map presented below (Cocean P., 2013 a, b), equivalent to as many spatial systems with a high degree of functionality, namely:

1. *Moldavia Region (Regiunea Moldova)* entirely overlaps the current North-East Region and includes, in a significant proportion, the two historical-geographical provinces of Romania, Moldavia and Bukovina, having Iași as growth pole, a city representative for its history and culture. It is an entity whose development will be centred on the gravity axis of the Siret, an important sector of the traffic corridor that linked the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea during the Middle Ages and which will become more dynamic in the future.
2. *Crișana-Maramureș Region (Regiunea Crișana-Maramureș)*, located in the north-west of Romania, includes the counties of Bihor, Sălaj, Satu Mare and Maramureș that belong to the two historical provinces. Its polarizing centre of great perspective is Satu Mare, a city with numerous attributes as “central place” compared to the other three county seats, even if some of them (Oradea, Baia Mare) are on a slightly higher position as regards the current development level. However, the higher connectivity and the favourable geographical location support its aspirations to become a regional capital of real perspective.
3. *Northern Transylvania (Transilvania de Nord)* includes the counties of Cluj, Bistrița-Năsăud, Mureș and Harghita, centred on two development axes, that of the Someș rivers and that of the Mureș river. Its gravity pole remains Cluj-Napoca, an urban centre with a highly-recognized historical and cultural aura.
4. *Southern Transylvania (Transilvania de Sud)* spatially overlaps the counties of Covasna, Brașov, Sibiu, Alba and Hunedoara. Its capital city is more difficult to establish because Brașov, Alba Iulia and Sibiu have entered the competition with their own strengths. We opt for Sibiu for such reasons as optimal centrality and increased connectivity.
5. *Banat* is structured on the homonymous historical-geographical province, composed of the counties of Arad, Timiș and Caraș-Severin. Timișoara has emerged as the main growth pole in the competition with Arad or Reșița for the title of regional capital.
6. *Oltenia* preserves the area of the old homonymous province, with the current counties of Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea. The city of Craiova is a real polarizing centre, without contenders.



7. *North Wallachia (Muntenia de Nord)* associates the counties of Dâmbovița, Prahova and Buzău in an integrated whole. Due to its privileged geographical location and its urban rank, the city of Ploiești stands out as a development pole. The Buzău-Ploiești-Târgoviște-Pitești urban axis provides consistency to the spatial system by articulating it functionally.
8. *South Wallachia (Muntenia de Sud)* includes the București-Ilfov Metropolitan Area and the counties of Teleorman, Giurgiu and Călărași. The current situation of “a region within region” is totally unproductive, generating great dysfunctions because the above-mentioned Danube counties would gravitate towards the capital city of Bucharest and not towards Călărași, chosen as the administrative headquarters of the South Muntenia Development Region.
9. *Lower Danube (Dunărea de Jos)* took shape at the interface of the historical provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia, bringing together the counties of Galați, Brăila, Vrancea and Ialomița. The toponym has coverage in the local history and the development pole is the Galați-Brăila binomial, unique in Romania as regards its tendency to create an urban junction.
10. *Dobrujea (Dobrogea)* is the only region of Romania where the natural demarcation is unequivocal, the Danube and the Black Sea coast imposing categorical limits. Constanța has no rival as regards the chosen regional capital.

ARGUMENTS

We consider that the proposed project meets the following goals of the scientific research in the field and of the immediate applicability in the political-administrative practice (Cocean P., 2013 c):

- The proposed regions meet both structurally and functionally the features of the *spatial programme entities with systemic attributes*, considered to be the most suitable in the practice of territorial planning. They fall, without exception, in the range of the European spatial taxon NUTS 2 in terms of the number of inhabitants (between 800,000 and 3,000,000 people);
- *The limits of regions*, drawn based on multiple criteria (functional, structural, mental), follow in overwhelming majority the diffluence line of the vectors carrying the development principles in each geographical unit;
- *The support base for the economic development* of all regions is composed of diverse soil and underground resources; the question that arises is their proper management and exploitation in the interest of inhabitants;
- The proposed regions have, without exception, *growth poles and/or development axes* that will ensure, both strategically and logistically, the conditions required for the economic and social development of the territory they coordinate;
- All proposed regions have *strong academic centres*, with laboratories where the premises for *innovation and its dissipation* in the neighbouring area flourish – a sine qua non condition for competitive development in the current period;
- The proposed variant of territorial division preserves *the spiritual, historical and cultural heritage of the old historical-geographical provinces*, including the designated names, which it adjusts into structures according to the scientifically-decanted principles of regionalization of the century we live in;
- *The “capitals” of the future regions have been chosen*, in the absolute majority of cases, *from the cities with certain functional attributes and historical and cultural resonance*, distanced from those of any rival. The only exceptions, Sibiu and Satu Mare, have been proposed starting from their favourable position in the territory, similar to a “central place” with well-known connectivity facilities in the afferent territory. Brașov and Alba Iulia, Oradea and Baia Mare, respectively, are cities with a superior historical aura, but located at the periphery of their own region; however, they keep their position as regional growth poles unaltered, with beneficial influence on the economic and social rise of the unit as a whole, the concept of *polycentric development* being highly topical in the European space. Etc.

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