



## The urban system in Romania

### *Sistemul urban din România*

*Reader Cristina ALPOPI, Ph.D.*  
The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania  
e-mail: cristina.alpopi@man.ase.ro

#### **Abstract**

*A characteristic of the Romanian urban system has been the alternation of the periods of order and turbulence. Order is dominant in the short term but over the longer term is no absolute stability in the dynamics of the city. Instability, at the urban system level, is determined by the dynamic relationship between cities which upset the local, regional and national hierarchies, producing a disorder similar to the turbulence and even chaos. Thus the evolution of the urban system in Romania in the last decades has seen the alternation of periods of stability and instability, even if on the whole there is a relatively constant hierarchy and configuration at different levels. Thus the new national urban system is the result of a chain of fluctuation affecting the inner evolutions of each city, and the categories of cities as a whole.*

**Keywords:** *urban system, urbanization, evolution, stability, instability*

#### **Rezumat**

*O caracteristică a sistemului urban românesc a fost alternanța perioadelor de ordine și turbulență. Ordinea este dominantă pe termen scurt, însă pe termen lung nu se poate vorbi de o stabilitate absolută în ceea ce privește dinamica orașului. Instabilitatea, la nivelul sistemului urban, este determinată de relațiile instabile dezvoltate la nivel local, regional și național care produc turbulențe și chiar haos. Astfel, evoluția sistemului urban din România, în ultimele decenii, se caracterizează printr-o succesiune de perioade de stabilitate și de instabilitate, chiar dacă pe ansamblu putem vorbi de evoluție constantă a diferitelor niveluri. Astfel, noul sistem național urban este rezultatul unui lanț de fluctuații, care au afectat evoluția internă a fiecărui oraș, dar și categoriile de orașe privite în ansamblu.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *sistem urban, urbanizare, evoluție, stabilitate, instabilitate*

**JEL Classification:** O18

## Introduction

The basic features of the urbanisation in Romania are determined by the type of society. All stages of modern town development were accompanied by the attempt to increase artificially the proportion of urban population by defining various legal space categories (suburban communities, communities included in towns, urban type settlements etc.).

In general, the global urbanization processes are complex because of the different development levels of the nations of the world. At the same time, the interaction between different urban systems leads to the appearance of contradictory processes reflected some quite acute distortions.

The change of the political system in 1989 has established a new environment for the urban system in Romania, marked by the EU and NATO integration process, by the further globalisation of the Romanian economy, privatisation and liberalisation of the urban land and housing market, decentralisation and growth of the weight and importance of local level (Ianos, 2004).

The city, through its complexity, has its own functioning system and generates flows and structures that are maintained within the urban limits in an individualistic way. Certainly, the city is an open system, but non totally so because there are enough resources and mechanism to allow a temporary period of functioning with fewer input flows.

Generally, the city is the user of some diversified input flows, some of them permanent, others temporary or occasional, having a structure dominated by weight and energy. Usually, input flows surpass output flows in absolute quantities, the biggest part of this difference being expressed in the expansion of the built-up areas (residential, industrial and transport) with social facilities that satisfy the biological needs of a large workforce and population. The contemporary development of cities reveals – within the conditions of space contraction – a much reduced dependence by cities on this areas of influence compared with the new types of relationships induced by functional specialization and global interdependence. This means that the relations between the city and the environment extend to unbelievable limits and this became sensitive to what happens at continental and global level (Alpopi, 2008).

## The dynamics of the varied functions

### *Urban*

The demographic evolution of Romanian cities and the territorial differences reflect highly centralized territorial and sectorial development policies in the second half of the last century. In the evolution of urban economic activities there are three main steps: the industrial revolution, impacting on regional centers and newly-created specialized industrial cities (the period: 1950-1970); the industrialization of county centers and some other towns of medium size (the period: 1970-1980); the industrialization of small cities and rural places designated as future agro-industrial centers (the period: 1980-1989).

#### *Industrial*

In the analysis of industrial functions it can distinguish two steps: one that exaggerates this function, especially in the last years of the totalitarian regime, and another that reduces the industrial function in passing from the centralized economy to the market economy. In the evolution of the post-decembrist industrial activities in the city it can distinguish a first period – around 1990 – through general turbulence; a second period showing a dramatic fall in industrial production and the rise of unemployment in post-socialist Romania. In the period 1995-1997 there was some revival of the industrial production, followed by profound economic changes, during 1997-2000, through restructuring and privatization. After 2000 industry experienced further restructuring in parallel with a revitalization process linked with the privatization of the country's industrial giants.

#### *Political-administrative*

This is one of the most important problems in the development and evolution of cities, giving an impulse to all economic activities, particularly after the main administrative-territorial reforms of the 20-th century. The loss of political-administrative functions by some towns had negative effects on urban dynamics when former county centres lost their functions through the reform of administrative areas in 1950. Under the circumstances of the transition to the market economy some changes in the political-administrative hierarchies may occur, through functions arising from the implementation of regional development policies seeking to diminish the territorial differences.

#### *Cultural and educational*

Despite its diffuse character, this function is one of the most striking elements generating relationships between town and country. In the structure of urban centers the country centers are distinctive, usually with more than 6,5% of the occupied active population in the education and culture – and over 7,5% in the big university centers (Cluj Napoca, Timisoara, Brasov, Iasi) and some small centers with a traditionally strong cultural life, especially in Transilvania. After 1990 advanced educational institutions of higher education (public or private) were formed in most county centers the universities in Târgoviște, Alba Iulia, Târgu-Jiu, Arad.

After 1998, the system of mass learning became a reality and universities were able to receive all students who could pay the fees for their studies. In the period 2004-2005 the universities offered a large number of places that could be filled by high-school graduates of 2003-2004 (Nicolae, 2002).

#### *Commercial*

This function is the main one in cities with tourist activities and curative therapies and also in large cities. The highest percentage (more than 12%) of the occupied active population in commerce is specific to small cities from the mountains and Sub Carpathians with a high tourist and curative potential (Vatra Dornei, Borsec, Covasna, Sinaia, Bușteni, Călimănești, Băile Herculane) and also places from the southern Black Sea coast (Constanta, Eforie, Mangalia, Techirghiol).

The positive evolution of commercial functions is clear in big cities which have attracted modern commercial units; some specialized, generating a large area of influence extending beyond the city as a whole or of some parts of the supermarket chains of Metro,

Billa, Carrefour, Brico Store, Cora, Auchan. Since these supermarkets appeared it has been assisting to an expansion from the initial areas of periphery to even those inside the city, conforming to later decisions of the municipalities (Ianos, 2000).

### **Intra-urban dynamics**

The internal structure of the city, which reflects the specific historic evolution characterized by a succession of adjusting phases, points to a particular way of organizing urban space. Intra-urban dynamics take into account the territorial effects of the mobility within this space and there are identified three types of evolution:

- the Californian evolution, that is characterized by the fact that the city is marginalized by the expansion and development of the suburban and rural-urban zones;
- the Rennin evolution, that is characterized by the fact that the urban system comprise a dense network of smaller urban centres;
- the Parisian evolution, that is characterized by the fact that the urban concentrations are very important and mobility is extremely limited due to the urban congestion (Bonnet, 2000).

However, the evolution of the Romanian society during the last half-century produced several distortion in the inner structure of cities, arising from the centralizing policy of the totalitarian regime. The state's interventions of the urban structures were often radical and incoherent.

In general, the main structure of a city has four subsystems: a support subsystem, essential for other two extremely dynamic subsystem (population and economic activities) and a subsystem facilitating the mass, energy and information flows inside of city. At the first sight, the city is an antientropic territorial system.

The city is an entity constantly being structuring according to the processes urbanization, sub urbanization, peri-urbanization and gentrification. Exchanges between the city and its environment minimize the process of entropic development, leading the city to resist the tendency whereby the inner structures disorganize into primary elements. Becoming more and more complex, there are permanent spontaneous changes in certain segments of the existence of the city.

The recent evolution of the city proves that the answer to its environment is extremely complex and it usually has a spatial materialization. Otherwise, in the recent dynamics of the sustaining city-space interaction it may distinguish a succession of phenomena, having a direct impact on the process of internal structuring and also on the structuring relations with the environment in which it develops: urbanization, sub urbanization, periurbanisation and gentrification.

The development of human society shows that cities cannot exist isolated from their environs: rather there are permanent interconnections. The methodology of analysis regarding the system of habitats have developed through the reinterpretation of theories that appeared during the period of development of geographical thought focused on the spatial economy, producing remarkable ideas about central place, rank-size relations and the urban economic base.

The global urbanization processes are complex because of the different development levels of the nations of the world. At the same time, the interaction between

different urban systems leads to the appearance of contradictory processes reflected some quite acute distortions.

In Romania, the alternation of the periods of order and turbulence has been a characteristic of our urban system. Order is dominant in the short term but over the longer term is no absolute stability in the dynamics of the city. Instability, at the urban system level, is determined by the dynamic relationship between cities which upset the local, regional and national hierarchies, producing a disorder similar to the turbulence and even chaos. In the dynamics of the Romanian urban system after 1945 there were several periods of stability, transition to instability and of instability (Nimigeanu, 2001). In addition to influences arising through unequal economic development, great turbulences arose from political-administrative decisions involving the creation of new cities.

After 1989, the socio-political distortions were reversed and gave rise to industrial restructuring, agricultural reform and tertiary growth in the urban economy, creating an excess of work force in the urban areas.

Thus the evolution of the urban system in Romania in the last decades has seen the alternation of periods of stability and instability, even if on the whole there is a relatively constant hierarchy and configuration at different levels. Thus the new national urban system is the result of a chain of fluctuation affecting the inner evolutions of each city, and the perturbations from the environment in which it develops, and the categories of cities as a whole.

### Bibliography

- Alpopi, C. (2008). “The effects of urban concentration on environment”. *Economia. Management*, Vol. 11, issue 2, pp.12-20
- Bonnet, J. (2000), *Marile metropole mondiale*, Institutul European, Iași
- Ianos, I. (2000), *Sisteme teritoriale*, Editura Tehnică, București
- Ianos, I. (2004), *Dinamica urbană*, Editura Tehnică, București
- Iordan, I. (1973), *Zona periurbană a Bucureștilor*, Editura Academiei, București
- Nicolae, I. (2002), *Suburbanismul ca fenomen geografic în România*, Editura Meronia, București
- Nimigeanu, V. (2001), *România. Populație. Așezări. Economie*, Editura Universitară «Al.I. Cuza» Iași