

European integration and regionalisation in transition Romania

Europäische Integration und Regionalisierung in Rumänien während der Umbruchphase

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present and to examine the new paradigm of regionalization in Romania, constructed under the conditions of the transition process from a socialist, planned economy and one-party system to a democratic and market economy system which started in 1989. The emergence of regions, the regionalization of space and society and the reworking of territorial and social structures are without doubt strongly connected to the development of society. A huge and growing concern together with the active development of space and society in other forms of regionalization has been seen since 1989. This may be viewed as part of the establishment of the economic, political and social transformation which has led to the construction of a new regionalization in Romania after 1989. The political construction of regions was determined by external factors linked to the process for EU integration for Romania, which requires the establishment of a regional policy and development system. Therefore, in 1998 a regional level was created by the grouping of counties into eight development regions (regiuni de dezvoltare), correspondent to the EU NUTS 2 level. Whether the state will enforce the regional level or not is a question for the future. This problem becomes a dilemma if we consider that the Romanian state has never experienced a decentralized political system and that the political action was charged with stereotypes related to the so called "Transilvanian problem", where more regional power is feared to lead to separatism and active regionalism, juxtaposed with the claims of the most active regionalist group constituted by Hungarians. Therefore, the basic question remains how the Romanian society will assume its regional shape; which regionalisations will be implemented on the knife-edge of internal and external constraints. The changing contents of the regional shape will probably follow the economic, social, political and cultural struggles of the transition process. The characteristics of this process are assumed to provide the essential differences in shaping the regional facets of the Romanian society. In the case of political regionalization, the emergence of development regions at all stages (territorial, conceptual and institutional shaping and establishment as distinct social category) is connected to the idea of European integration and the compatibility of the Romanian social structures to those of the EU. Development regions are spatial manifestations of the transition process.

Zusammenfassung

Ziel dieses Vortrages ist die Darstellung und Untersuchung des neuen Beispiels für Regionalisierung in Rumänien unter den Bedingungen des Übergangsprozesses von einem sozialistischen Land mit Planwirtschaft und Ein-Parteien-System zu einem demokratischen

Land mit freier Marktwirtschaft, der 1989 begann. Die Entstehung von Regionen, die Regionalisierung von Raum und Gesellschaft und der Umbau territorialer und sozialer Strukturen sind zweifelsohne stark mit der Entwicklung der Gesellschaft verknüpft. Wir können ein breites und wachsendes Interesse und aktives Engagement nach 1989 für andere Formen der Regionalisierung von Raum und Gesellschaft erkennen. Dies kann als Teil der Instrumentalisierung der ökonomischen, politischen und gesellschaftlichen Umwandlung gesehen werden und hat zur Schaffung einer neuen Regionalisierung in Rumänien nach 1989 geführt. Äußere Faktoren im Zusammenhang mit dem Integrationsprozess Rumäniens in die EU, der die Schaffung eines regionalen Politik- und Entwicklungssystems fordert, bestimmten den politischen Aufbau von Regionen. Deshalb erfolgte 1998 die Schaffung einer regionalen Ebene durch Gliederung der Gebiete in acht Entwicklungsregionen (*regiuni de dezvoltare*) gemäß der EU-NUTS-2-Ebene. In Zukunft muss die Frage beantwortet werden, ob der Staat die regionale Ebene durchsetzen will oder nicht. Dieses Problem wird zum Dilemma, wenn wir in Betracht ziehen, dass der rumänische Staat nie ein dezentralisiertes politisches System kannte und die politische Maßnahme von klischeehaften Vorstellungen im Zusammenhang mit dem sogenannten „transsylvanischen Problem“ belastet war – es wird befürchtet, dass mehr regionale Gewalt zu Separatismus und aktivem Regionalismus führt, was durch die Ansprüche der aktivsten regionalistischen Gruppe, den Ungarn, noch bestärkt wird. Deshalb bleibt die Grundfrage, wie die rumänische Gesellschaft ihre regionale Form gestalten will und welche Regionalisierungen in einem Balanceakt zwischen inneren und äußeren Zwängen instrumentalisiert werden. Die wirtschaftlichen, sozialen, politischen und kulturellen Auseinandersetzungen des Übergangsprozesses haben wahrscheinlich eine Veränderung des Inhaltes der regionalen Form zur Folge. Die Merkmale dieses Prozesses führen offensichtlich zu wesentlichen Unterschieden in der Gestaltung der regionalen Facetten der rumänischen Gesellschaft. Im Fall der politischen Regionalisierung ist die Entstehung von Entwicklungsregionen auf allen Ebenen (territoriale, konzeptionelle und institutionelle Gestaltung und Einrichtung als eindeutige soziale Kategorie) mit der Idee der europäischen Integration und der Kompatibilisierung der rumänischen Gesellschaftsstrukturen mit denen der EU verbunden. Entwicklungsregionen sind räumlicher Ausdruck des Übergangsprozesses.

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present and to examine one mode of recent region formation in Romania, constructed under the conditions of the transition processes from a socialist, planned economy and one-party system to a democratic and market economy system beginning after 1989. The emergence of regions, the regionalisation of space and society, the reworking of territorial and social structures are without doubt strongly connected to the development of society. Social theories explaining social transformation are vital in this context, but it is quite difficult to theorise about the new spatiality in transition countries like Romania and therefore we have to note a major problem which affects the analysis of socio-

spatial phenomena¹. However, a huge and growing concern together with the active involvement of geographers has been observable since 1989 in different forms of socio-spatial regionalisations such as the political normative regionalisation. These may be viewed as part of the establishment of economic, political and social transformation and have resulted in the construction of a new regionalisation in Romania after 1989.

2 The new regionalisation: the development regions

One new regional formation of the transition period is a political construction with large geographical support (political-normative regionalisation). It illustrates the way in which the social or political actions of powerful players create spaces. The political construction of regions was determined by external factors linked to the EU integration process of Romania, which demands the establishment of a regional policy and development system. It is the guiding principle of the political class in Romania, that a substitution of the communist political system by a democratic, multiparty system and the change of the economic system will automatically lead to better living standards and economic wellbeing. Therefore, in 1998 Law no. 151 on regional development in Romania (replaced recently by Law no. 315 of 18th June 2004) established the institutional framework, objectives, administrative power and instruments of regional development in Romania. Territorially it has created a regional level by the multi-criterial grouping of counties² in eight *development regions* (*regiuni de dezvoltare*), correspondent to the EU NUTS 2 level. These regions do not have a jurisdictional function, i.e. they are not administrative-territorial units. They have a framework function for the establishment, implementation and evaluation of regional development policies, as well as a technical function as basic territorial units for the collection of specific statistical data in order to conform to the EUROSTAT regulations. The territorial shape created is a fixed one, as described in the regional development laws from 1998 and 2004, which represent the normative foundations of the new regions. The boundaries of the new regions follow the boundaries of the counties and of the Municipality of Bucharest. Law no. 315/2004 allows counties located in different development regions to build associations for the solving of common problems. The symbolic shape of development regions is partially incorporated in the historical and social consciousness of the regions. There was little effort by the state to establish new territorial symbols or to strengthen already existing ones. For example, most development regions were given very technical names reflecting their geographical position (North-East, South-East, West, North-West, Center). Only three of them got names reflecting the historical-cultural background, too: South-West Oltenia, South-Muntenia and Bucharest-Ilfov. The new development regions were established by creating a new institutional network for the administration of these spatial units (*Fig. 1*, at the end of the article). This network includes

¹ Some authors have sought to theorise transition in Romania: HÄKLI (1994), SANDU (1996, 1999), PASTI et al. (1997), HELLER (1998), PICKELS & SMITH (1998), but it still remains an under-researched issue.

² Counties (*judete*) are administrative-territorial units of Romania, situated between the state level and the level of localities (local administrations). Romania is subdivided into 41 counties plus the Municipality of Bucharest.

- National structures for regional development, represented by the *National Council for Regional Development* will be, according to Law 315/2004, a partnership-based institution for elaboration and implementation of the objectives of the regional development policy. The state has a strong position in this institution, because its chairman is the Minister for European Integration, the Secretariat is run from the Ministry for European Integration and different representatives of the Government are members of the Council in an equal number with the representatives (the presidents and vice-presidents) of the eight Regional Development Councils. Among the most important tasks of the National Council for Regional Development are the following: approval of the national strategy for the regional development and of the National Development Plan; approval of the criteria and priorities for using the National Fund for Regional Development; proposal of the utilisation of the preaccession funds for regional development allocated to Romania from the European Union; approval of projects proposed by the Agencies for Regional Development etc.
- the National Agency for Regional Development which was set up initially in 1999 as a national structure, but has been abandoned after the new Law of regional development from 2004;
- Territorial structures for regional development, represented by eight *Regional Development Councils*, constituted already in 1999. Each council is a body at the level of every development region without jurisdictional function. The councils have the following main tasks: to analyse and decide on the regional development strategy and programmes; to approve the regional development projects which were selected at the regional level in accordance with the priorities and methodology set up by the national institution which guides regional development issues (currently the Ministry for European Integration); to approve the criteria, priorities, allocation and destination of the resources constituted in the Fund for Regional Development etc.
- the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) which are territorial structures for regional development constituted within the framework of each development region. They are non-government, non-profit making organisations of public utility, with a jurisdictional function and with the following tasks: to elaborate and apply to the Regional Development Council for approval of the regional development strategy, the regional development programmes and plans, and the funds management plans; to implement the regional development plans and the funds management plans; to manage the Regional Development Fund for the purpose of achieving the objectives provided in regional development programmes etc.
- Two problems correlated to this political regionalisation are discussed here:
- the criteria underlying the formation of the regions were heavily disputed and consequently not applied. Four main criteria were regarded as basic: population, surface area, culture and economic interrelations. But the constructed regions are too large in population and size (above the EU average), one region is culturally heterogeneous³, and in many cases representatives of the counties would have preferred different

³ The South-East region, with counties from three different cultural regions: Moldavia, Muntenia and Dobrogea.

regionalisations on the basis of forging stronger economic links with other regions; links which have been established and enforced in the last 20 years. This is the case with Braşov county (now in Central Region) which has strong economic relations with the development axis Prahova Valley-Bucharest, and with the counties of Prahova and Dâmboviţa belonging to Southern Region, but which has a very low level of cohesion to the southern part of this region. An open question, which needs more future empirical evidence, is about the cultural regions and about the underlying regional consciousness, which was strongly influenced by different social systems of the past⁴.

- On the other hand the regions have very low decision-making power and are financially weak. They are practically subordinated to the governmental level which distributes the financial resources to these regions, a similar situation to those of the French regions of the seventies and eighties. The new political-normative regionalisation was top-bottom oriented, it is the result of consulting a very limited number of players.

It is questionable whether, in the future, the state will enforce the regional level or not, and the problem becomes a dilemma if we realize that the Romanian state has never had a decentralised political system and that the political action of decentralisation was heavily weighed with stereotypes related to the so-called “Transilvanian problem”, where more regional power is feared to lead to separatism and active regionalism⁵. The fact that Hungarians constitute the most active regionalist group added to this dilemma. Therefore, the basic question remains: how will the Romanian society assume its regional shape and which regionalisations will be established on the knife-edge of internal and external constraints? It is certain that the political regionalisation of national space has substantiated the regional differences by shaping and aligning their boundaries to those of cultural-historical regions. The only exception is the South-East region already mentioned above whose internal differences are much greater than those between Transilvania (Centre Region) and Moldavia (North-East Region) for instance. Given this broad correspondence to the cultural-historical regions, the new regions already form a partial basis for social classifications. The regions not only have a distinctive cultural feature but they also correspond to inter-regional economic disparities, which were already in existence in 1920. Having decreased during the long period of state economy, these inter-regional economic disparities were finally reinforced after 1989 by the opening and integration of the Romanian economy into global networks of production and consumption (BENEDEK 2004). The Romanian regions have reacted differently to this new political and economical framework according to their economic capabilities, competitiveness and institutional networks. The winners of the transition are the urban agglomerations with a developed service sector, and the coastal region and the regions situated along the western border of Romania. In contrast, the big losers are the remote mountain regions, the rural regions and the industrial districts. But the regional distribution of development indicators (*Tab. 1*) illustrates

⁴ MUNGIU-PIPPIDI (1999) notes that regional consciousness is expressed clearly by Transylvanians and people from the western part of Romania (Banat, Crişana and Maramureş), while the other regions became very homogeneous regarding this aspect. She also notes that there is no Transylvanian consciousness which transcends ethnic identity and argues for the parallel existence of Transylvanian Romanian consciousness which is more active than the Transylvanian Hungarian consciousness.

⁵ See also JORDAN (1998).

the fact that cultural background is still an important factor of regional development in Romania. The least developed region is still Moldova (development region North-East). Dobrogea, Muntenia and Oltenia (development regions South-East, South and South-West) are situated on an intermediary level, while Transilvania, Banat and Crişana (development regions Centre, West and North-West) together with Bucharest constitute the most developed areas (BENEDEK 2004). It is a characteristic of the Romanian society that the adepts of the political decentralisation are not the winning regions of the transition. The most active regionalism is located in the central region of Romania (Harghita and Covasna counties), dominated by the Hungarian population, with a lower economic development level. Here, political autonomy has been seen as the best way of economic recovery and development. Other regionalist groups had little influence. We can cite an initiative in Moldova, the poorest region of the country, where a few years ago a political party of Moldavians was founded⁶, and the isolated efforts made by the intellectual groups around the journals "Alterra" (edited in Târgu Mureş by the NGO Liga PRO EUROPA) and "Provincia" (edited in Cluj between 2000 and 2002). The main feature of these efforts is that they can hardly be viewed as regional movements, because they are missing the mass character specific to regionalism. Therefore the regionalism in Romania is captured by a small elite group without larger active population support.

Table 1: Basic data of the development regions

Source: Institutul Naţională de Statistică (2000, 2002), Carta Verde (1997), ZAMFIR (2002)

Region	Surface (km ²)	Population 2002	Level of urbanization 2002 (%)	Global development index 1994	Cars/1000 persons 1994	Poverty 2001 (%)	Infan. Mort. 1999 (‰)
Nord-Est	36,850	3,685,393	40.6	40	44	42.8	20.9
Sud-Est	35,762	2,852,480	54.6	49	47	35.3	20.1
Sud	34,453	3,380,516	39.7	45	75	35.7	19.6
Sud-Vest	29,212	2,332,194	43.8	49	73	31.4	17.2
Vest	32,034	1,959,985	60.9	62	100	30.0	16.0
Nord-Vest	34,159	2,744,008	51.1	56	88	30.1	19.7
Centru	34,100	2,521,745	58.3	64	110	34.2	16.9
Bucureşti	1,821	2,221,860	87.9	-	137	23.1	12.9
România	238,391	21,698,181	52.7	51	85	34.0	18.6

3 Conclusions

Adopting the perspective of PAASI (1995) which considers the region as a human and social category institutionalised in four evolutionary stages, we observe that the recent region-

⁶ Here we refer to the cultural-historical region of Moldavia, which is a constituent of the Romanian state, situated in the eastern part (with Iaşi as the biggest urban center) and not the political formation called Republica Moldova which came into existence in 1989 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and whose capital city is Chişinău.

alisation of the Romanian society is partially presenting these stages in the same order. At first sight the territorial shape (Stage I by PAASI) of the political-normative regionalisation is a new one; it never existed in this form before. But on further examination we have concluded already that it reproduces the cultural dividing line represented by the Carpathian Mountains between the “Western provinces” of Romania (Transylvania, Banat, Crişana and Maramureş) and the “Heartland provinces” of the modern Romanian state (Moldova, Muntenia, Oltenia and Dobrogea). However we have noted that this cultural demarcation line, sharp at the beginning of 20th century, has become less evident during the last century due to the modernisation policy of the state. At the level of development regions the role of the cultural dividing lines in the regionalisation process is secondary, as mentioned in the third part of this essay.

The formation of institutional shape (stage III by PAASI) was already undertaken with important differences: the result of the political regionalisation (development regions) is based on newly established institutions established by the regional development laws from 1998 and 2004. In the future we have to expect changes in the underlying institutional framework regarding the development regions, in accordance with the problems listed in part II of this study.

The formation of conceptual (symbolic) shape, stage II by PAASI, represents in our scheme the third one. In this order the state had not established clear symbolic marks for the constructed regions. It is a future task to see the effects of the new division of labour under socialist and transition rules on the content of regional consciousness. Lacking in empirical evidence, we can only hypothetically assume that the socio-spatial processes in the past half century - such as massive industrialisation and urbanisation, accompanied by massive inner-regional and rural-urban migration, bringing together populations with different cultural backgrounds in towns, and massive emigration of some ethnic groups like Jews and Germans - have reshaped the regional identity and created new kinds of “feeling together” which may be in contradiction to traditional regional identities.

The establishment of regions as entities and social consciousness of the society (stage IV by PAASI) is also still under construction and is running simultaneously with the third stage of our generalisation. This fact is related to the unclear function or role of the new regional units. The functions are better evidenced by the development regions, according to the existence of the institutions of regional development mentioned above.

The conceptual shape is changing fast and this influences a simultaneous change in the established role of regions. The changing contents of the regional shape will probably follow the economic, social, political and cultural struggles of the transition process. The characteristics of this process are assumed to provide the essential differences in shaping the regional facets of the Romanian society.

In the last years, the other forms of the normative-political regionalisation of Romania, at a different spatial level, have received much assistance. These are the lowest administrative

levels of cities and communes (orașe, comune), which showed a general trend of fragmentation. This can also be regarded as a form of regionalism, in the sense that it is a bottom-up initiative, which has its roots in the latest huge administrative reform of 1968, when many settlements lost their administrative function, and, as a consequence, have since then lacked major public investments and development. In the last four years the number of new administrative units has increased as a result of the establishment of definite criteria for this new political regionalisation in 2001; Law nr. 351. If, at this level, the process of fragmentation goes on, we are pessimistic as far as the reshaping of the regional level is concerned because chapter nr. 21 of the *aquis communautaire* (in the accession negotiations between the EU and Romania) will be closed very soon. Therefore the chances for establishing new development regions or for the redrawing of the existing ones are very low. We therefore have to conclude that the state will remain the main force of territorial rescaling in Romania.

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Fig. 1: The institutions and the financing of regional development in Romania

