

Evolution and Impact of Migration Flows in Rural-Urban Fringe Areas. The Case of Romania

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Abstract: - Human migration is one of the main phenomena that profoundly influenced the Romanian society and especially the rural areas, causing different advantages and disadvantages. This paper is the result of an analysis concerning the characteristics and evolutionary trends of the migratory movements, trying to reveal their causes. The research work was carried out at the local level (commune) and also at regional and national levels, aiming to discover the migration behaviour changes that took place in the last 20 years and their geographical distribution. All this information is a good scientific basis for future studies concerning the causes and the impact of the migrations on the rural Romanian communities.

Key-words: - migration, rural space, out-migrants, in-migrants, rural-urban fringe, Romania.

I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

MIGRATION is a “total” social phenomenon that offers important information concerning the opportunities and the problems the Romanian society had along the entire history, and will have in future too. In present, in the context of the globalization process, and the existence of the rapid, easy communication and traveling systems, free circulation conditions and the propensity to migration, this complex phenomenon affects almost the entire planet [1]. We have information about migrations since very old times, but the most intense and largest movements took place in the XX-th century, developing continuously until present. This situation has important and diverse economic, demographic, social and cultural implications. Therefore, many specialists in social sciences consider it an important “engine” for the changes happening in the society, having impact on the social structure and evolution both in the areas loosing and gaining population [2].

In Romania, in the past two decades, the population movement has been a most active process, having a strong impact on the society and the economy. However, in order to understand the mechanisms triggered by this, we need to reflect back upon the previous period, namely the second half of the XXth century. The migration was then generated by major political, social and economic events that Romania had faced, such as the Second World War, the famine that

followed it, the deportations by the communist regime, the farmers forced to organize into agricultural cooperatives and the rapid industrialization of the cities in the decades seven and eight etc. All these shaped specific migratory behaviours. In this respect, Romania matches perfectly the European post-war model, most exactly the East-Continental one.

One of the outstanding works in the Romanian scientific literature, *Geography of Romania*, highlights the importance of the communist politics, for having contributed to the raise of the population mobility. “The magnitude and orientation of migrations were determined by the industrialization and urbanization pace, by the differences in intensity of social and economic developments and the prevailing economic profile” [3, p. 69]. The main feature of the then movements was given by the final relocation of the rural population (mainly young people at working age – 20-29) to the urban areas, mostly from Eastern and South-Eastern areas to Western ones, more exactly from regions like Moldova, Muntenia and Oltenia to Banat, Crișana and other economically developed territories such as the large urban centres or the mining regions. In addition, the gross migration rate showed a generally declining trend, from over 20‰ in 1955 to only 10‰ in 1989, as a result of the access being restricted to large cities [2].

After 1989, given the significant political, legal and economic changes, the features of migration in Romania suffered rather important changes. Over these past 20 years, with the transition from a centralized to the market economy, the entire socio-economic system was transformed by the implementation of structural reforms. Alongside the privatization and restructuring of industrial companies, we need to mention the reform in agriculture meaning the restitution of farming land to former owners [4]. These actions triggered important social changes, in both urban and rural space. In the latter, as a result of the deep fragmentation of farming land and less jobs provided by the industry, most households were engaged in a subsistence economy, determining a sharp decline of the living standard. However, it is worth mentioning that the declining economy was a feature mainly of the first decade in the interval under review, as the year 2000 saw a revival of the economy, followed by a strong growth as of 2004 (fig. 1).

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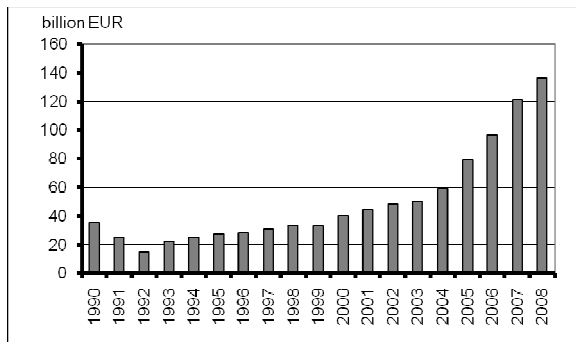


Fig. 1. Romania – economic growth (GDP)

The difficult economic situation of the rural environment compared to the urban one is not new for Romania. The entire post-war period has been economically difficult, despite attempts by communist regime to improve it, somehow, through erratic industrial investments. This impacted on all types of demographic behaviour. The consequence was the reduced natural balance and the intensified exodus towards the cities, which led to a constant decline of the inhabitant number and increasing ageing population, features which persisted and even grew more important, in some instances, after 1989 (table I).

Table I. Demographic characteristics of the rural population

| Years | 1966 | 1977 | 1992 | 2002 | 2007 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Population (thousand persons) | 11,797 | 12,164 | 10,418 | 10,245 | 9,670 |
| Population dynamics (1977=100 %) | | 100.0 | 85.6 | 84.2 | 79.4 |
| Rural population as % of national population | 61.8 | 56.4 | 45.7 | 47.3 | 44.8 |
| Elderly rural population aged 60 and over (%) | 12.2 | 16.4 | 22.1 | 24.3 | 23.8 |

Source: National Institute of Statistics, *Census of Population*, 1966, 1977, 1992, 2002 and *Statistical Yearbooks* 1981-2008.

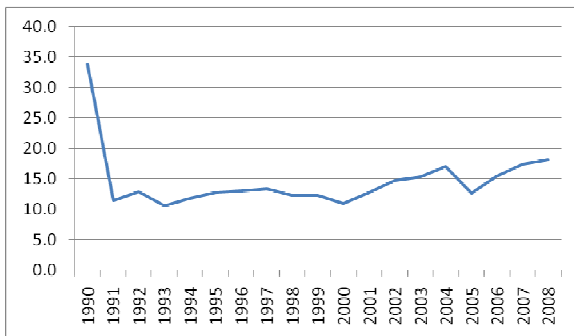


Fig. 2. Gross migration rate (%)

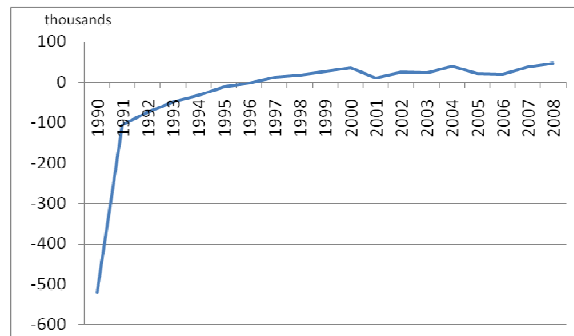


Fig. 3. Migration balance (inhabitants)

Under the circumstances, the migration „boomed” in 1990, with part of the rural population relocating to urban areas, first of all because the restrictions imposed by the previous era were removed (fig. 2 and 3). However, the intensity of this phenomenon went down in the following years, when a shift in the prevailing direction was observed, reflected in the positive migration balance of the rural areas after 1997 (fig. 3). Hence, “the urban-rural component becomes, maybe for the first time in the modern-day history of Romania, the main direction for migration” [2, p. 16].

The causes for this change are many, with the literature in the field focused on how the economic restructuring impacted on the urban population. “Lost jobs or uncertain jobs, the increasing cost of living in a city, the difficulties faced by young married couples in finding a house (the famous “blocks of flats” – cheap and low-comfort apartments – one thing of many that the communist regime was so proud about, stopped

being built after 1989, and were replaced by individual housing, a privilege of those advantaged by the new economic order), as well as the lack of professional prospects for the young people, all these have led to a re-orientation towards the rural environment” [2, p. 16]. All the more since the land law was passed in 1991, many became owners of farming plots that, together with houses owned or inherited from parents, formed an economic basis for the respective families. Another reason why some urban inhabitants came living in the rural areas was the desire to improve the quality of life, with people being attracted by both tangible benefits (beautiful landscape) and intangible advantages (secure and friendly environment) [5], [6]. Therefore, we can conclude that there is an increasing attractiveness in the rural way of living, in parallel with mutations in the rural capital accumulations, in other words a shift from the farming-oriented use of devalued land to a tertiary use which revalues rural resources [7].

II. SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIGRATION MOVEMENTS IN THE ROMANIAN RURAL SPACE

In order to understand the characteristics of migration in the Romanian rural areas and, most of all, the spatial dimension of this phenomenon over the past 20 years, we resorted to the analysis of some specific demographic indicators. These are the gross and net migration rates and the migration growth rate. The three indicators show how this phenomenon has evolved over time and its main features during the interval under review.

The first indicator, *the gross migration rate*, provides important information about all migration movements, with a highlight on the areas where the population has been, and still is, very mobile (fig. 4). The result is a chart that, if analyzed,

would reveal regions in Romania where migration is stronger, compared to other territories with a more “static” population. The causes of such disparities are many and various. It can be a combination of drivers, formed of both rejection and attraction factors. Still, one fact is clear, and that is the persistence nowadays of some old migration patterns. Thus, in Eastern Romania, regions such as Moldova and Dobrogea remain spaces with a very mobile population, numerous rural localities showing a very high gross migration rate (over 700‰). The same values are common to many communities in counties like Timișoara, Brașov, Cluj, Dolj and counties of Eastern Muntenia, too. At the opposite, we find the ones in the mountains, as well as many rural localities in the South, Centre and North-West.

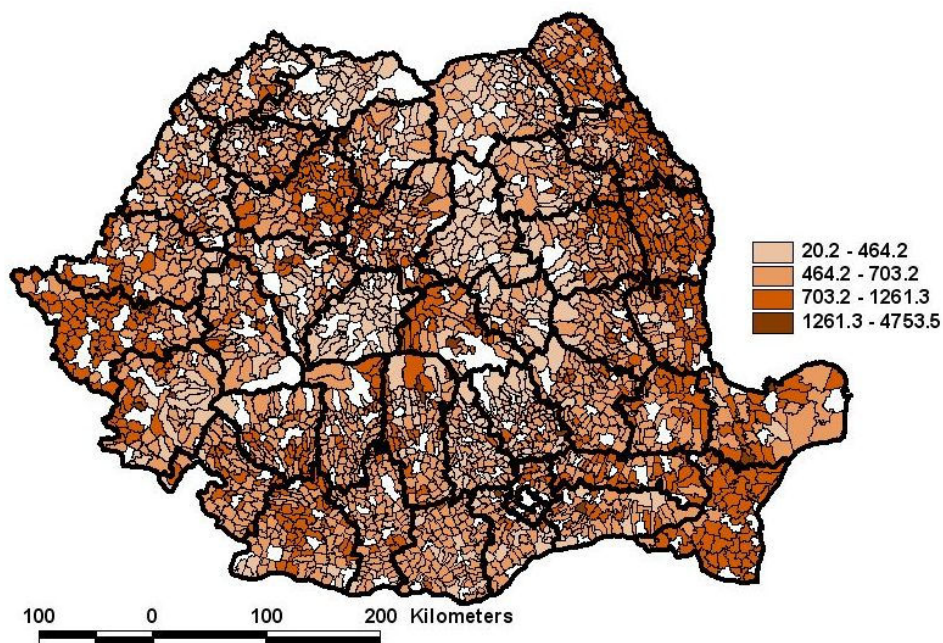


Fig. 4. Gross migration rate (‰)
(1990-2008)

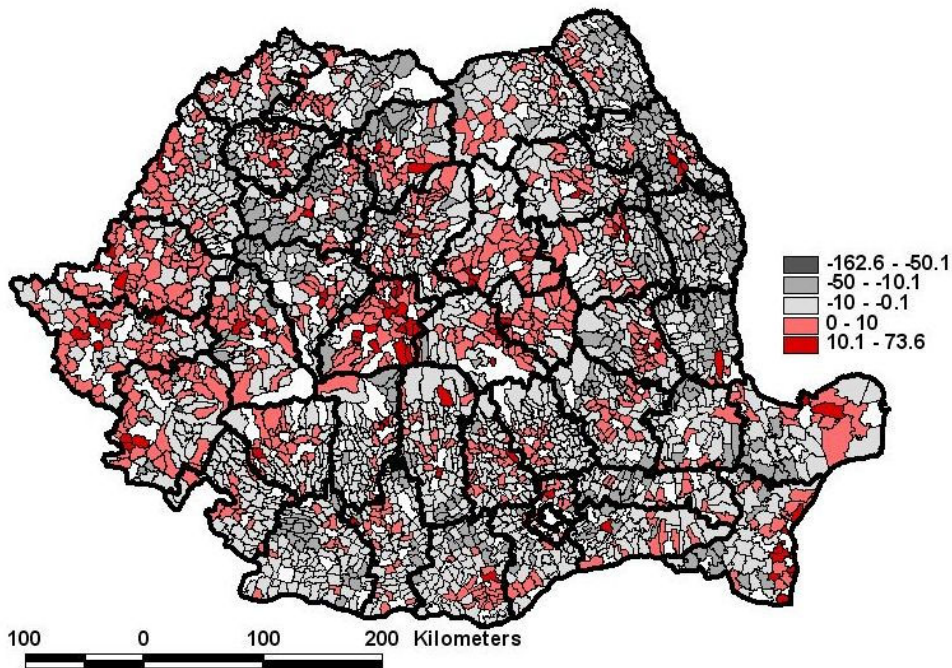


Fig. 5. Net migration rate (%) (1990-2008)

The precise explanation for the causes of this phenomenon cannot be given but by analyzing how the second indicator – *the net migration rate* – behaves spatially (fig. 5). We could say that there may be an “overlapping” of the two images, but we need to observe that, in the second case, the evolution of the migration balance is visible. This new perspective highlights the areas with significant population losses over the period, as well as the attractive regions. One will notice that the Eastern region of the country, Moldova, but the South too, Muntenia and Oltenia, remain – like in the second half of the XXth century – spaces which “provide” population. These are, obviously, the rural communities less developed. The economic difficulties sharpened during the transition period and were not solved even in the years when the Romanian economy appeared to recover (2004-2008), a fact that is confirmed, in our case, by the significant rural population losses in some of the counties which are highly developed (Cluj, Prahova, Argeş).

Attractive rural areas are, as expected, the “traditional” ones (Banat and South Transylvania) but also the metropolitan areas of large urban centres (Bucureşti, Constanţa, Braşov, Cluj, Iaşi, etc.). The economic development is still the main driver, and it is given by the proximity of industrial centres or the geographical positioning within regions with mainly industrial and services functionalities.

The analysis of the migration growth rate (fig. 6) is a sum or combination of all pieces of information obtained from the first two indicators. However, the result is discouraging in the fact that communities with a negative growth outnumber the others, all the more since the attached values are more significant.

III. MIGRATION PATTERNS IN THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE – THE METROPOLITAN AREAS IN ROMANIA

The new features of the migratory movement in Romania, in other words the shift in the traditional migration direction is mostly seen in metropolitan areas (MA). Unlike the international geographical literature, the Romanian one defines these spaces as being under the influence of a number of urban centers with macro-regional functions, having over one billion inhabitants; the highest demographic level of

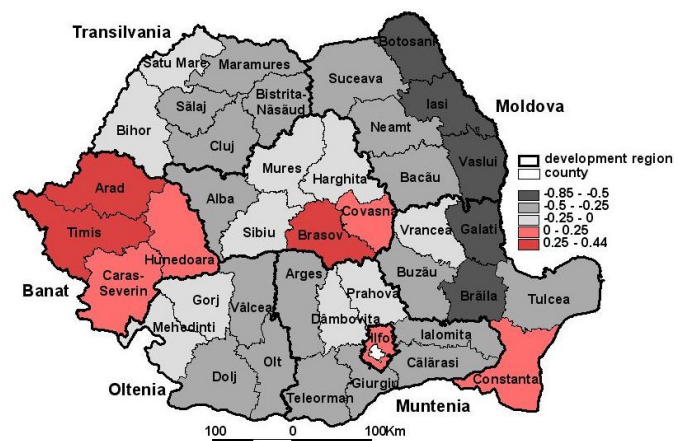


Fig. 6. Migration growth rate (%)

these metropolitan areas is ranging between 5 and 30 million inhabitants [8]. From this perspective, we should not find this type of areas in Romania, since the regional metropolitan cities, except for the capital city, are under 400,000 inhabitants, polarizing areas with less than one million. This is why the domestic legislation changed somehow the content of the concept, considering that the main feature of the MA is the associative character of the basic administrative-territorial structures, the communes and towns neighboring the large urban centers. Thus, according to Law 351/2001 (Law on approval of the Arrangement Plan for the national territory –

Section IV – Locality Network) the metropolitan area is „an area built by association, based on a voluntary partnership, between the large urban centers and the neighboring urban and rural localities, within a distance of 30 km, which developed cooperation relations on multiple levels”. The same law includes the capital city in the large urban centers category, along with 11 first rank municipalities: Bacău, Braşov, Brăila and Galaţi (the only *urban system* in Romania), Cluj Napoca, Constanţa, Craiova, Iaşi, Oradea, Ploieşti and Timişoara [9].

Table. II. Characteristics of the metropolitan areas

| Metropolitan areas | Setting-up date | No. of towns | No. of communes | Total population (2008) |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Iaşi | 2004 | 1 | 13 | 400,347 |
| Oradea | 2005 | 1 | 8 | 245,568 |
| Constanţa | 2007 | 6 | 8 | 446,595 |
| Braşov | 2007 | 6 | 8 | 402,041 |
| Cluj | 2008 | 1 | 17 | 379,705 |
| Craiova | 2009 | 1 | 5 | 333,834 |
| Bacău | 2005 | 1 | 17 | 248,214 |
| Târgu Mureş | 2005 | 2 | 12 | 211,463 |

There are currently 8 metropolitan areas officially established in Romania: Cluj and Oradea in the North-West, Iaşi and Bacău in the North-East, Constanţa in the South-East, Craiova in the South-West, Braşov and Târgu Mureş in the center of the country (fig. 7). However, considering their main features, we must say that there is a high diversity. Both the number of settlements in each area and the number of inhabitants vary considerably (table II). Hence, the Cluj metropolitan area is formed of 17 settlements, whereas Craiova only includes five¹. In addition, although all of them include urban localities, the rural ones are in a higher number, with two exceptions: Constanţa MA and Braşov MA. The total numbers of inhabitants vary a lot, from 211,000 in the Târgu Mureş MA metropolitan area, to 450,000 in Constanţa.

In fact, there is one more metropolitan area, a very important one, developed around Bucharest.

The capital city of Romania is unique because of its distinct position within the national and regional urban system, which creates the most extended urban polarization perimeter in this country. It consists of all settlements in Ilfov county and some from other neighboring counties (Călăraşi, Dâmboviţa, Giurgiu, Ialomiţa and Prahova). Its main feature is the strong rural nature, except for the neighboring “ring” which, because of the lower land price compared to the capital city’s, took over a number of urban functionalities such as a small industry, commercial and storing premises, amusement areas. As a consequence, the Bucharest metropolitan area shows all the features of a *strongly polarized rural environment*, which

led to the emergence of a number of secondary polarization cores.

There are many suggestions to organize this metropolitan areas. The first counts 94 administrative units at the local level (communes and towns) and 5 counties: Ilfov, Călăraşi, Giurgiu, Dâmboviţa and Ialomiţa [10]. The year 2003 brought along the second major benchmark in the development of the Bucharest metropolitan area, when the concept was launched in the media and simultaneously the draft legislation was initiated related to building the Bucharest metropolitan area; the draft has been initiated and supported by the mayor of Bucharest Sector 1, Vasile Gherasim. According to them, Bucharest metropolitan area would represent a distinct administrative and territorial unit having the status of a county including Bucharest and 62 other localities, to be organized in two parts: the metropolitan core of Bucharest (MCB), formed of the urban polarizing centre, and the pre-metropolitan Bucharest area (PBA), formed of the rural ring around this core. The draft law came with a study on the need for organizing the Bucharest MA, defining the indicators for the spatial arrangement, the methodology and the formula based on which the area would be defined [11]. One other suggestion for a territorial separation of an administrative structure polarized by the capital city would be centered on a Bucharest “district” that would include the city and 9 outskirt areas, 8 urban localities and 30 communes (out of which 3 are proposals for new administrative structures) [12].

¹ The town around which this was built is included in the total number of settlements.

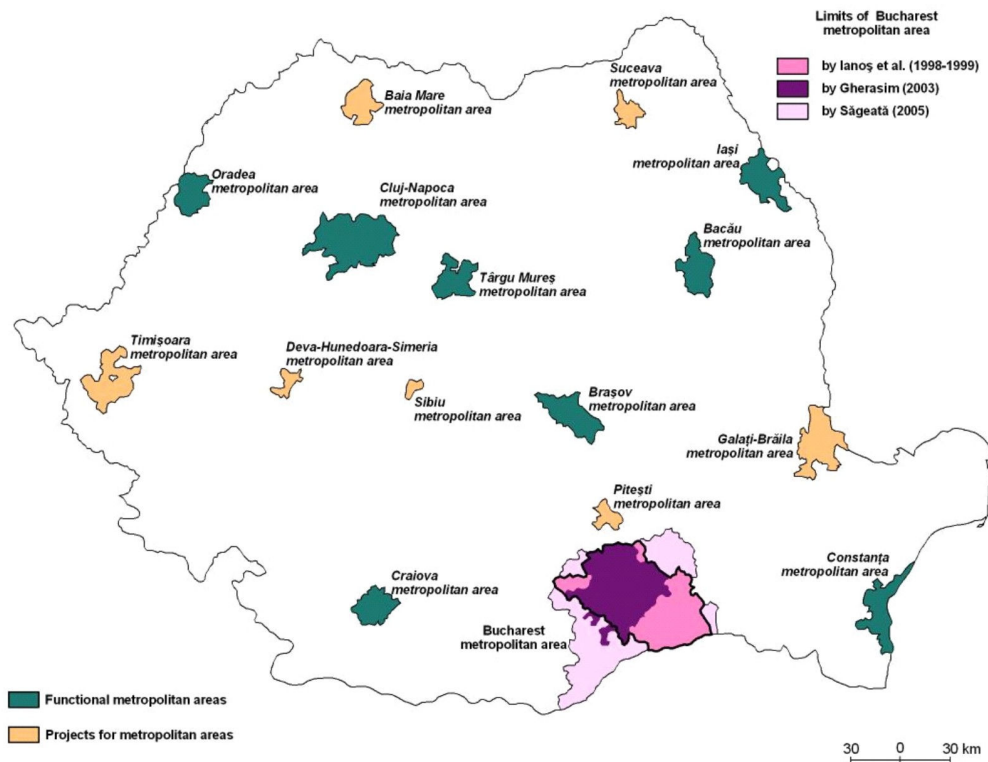


Fig. 7. Zonele metropolitane din România [12]

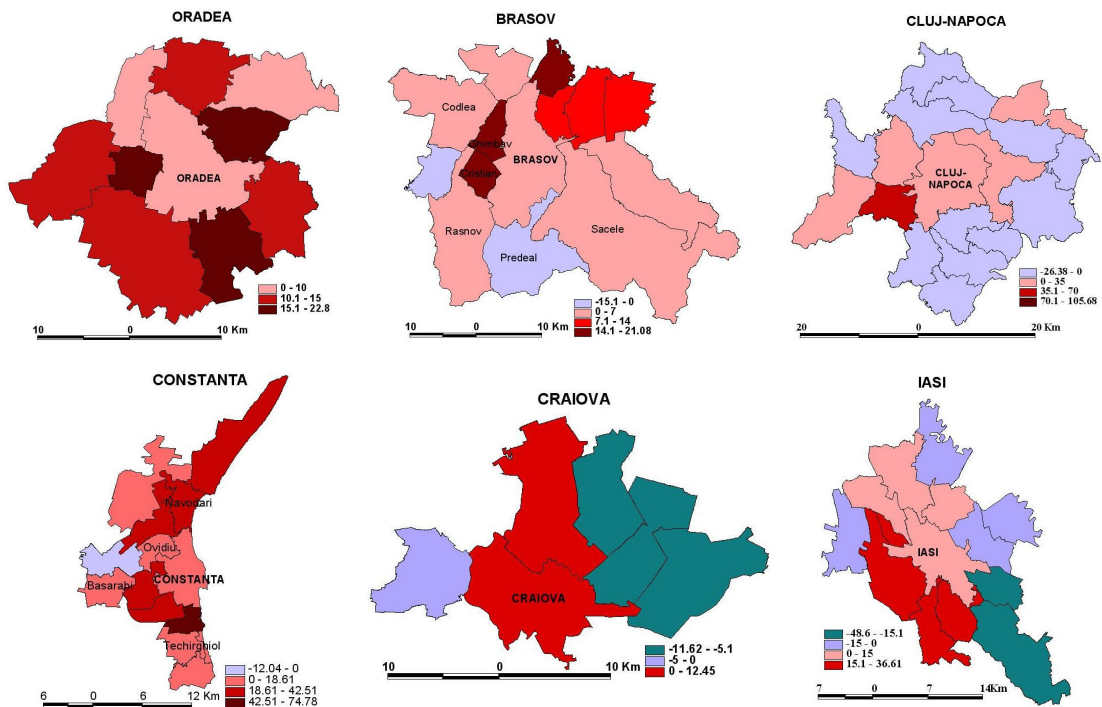


Fig. 8. Migration growth rate (%) in the metropolitan areas

One other alternative takes into account a total reconsideration of the current territorial arrangement, based on the relationship existing among the human settlements, in other words the area influenced by the Capital City. It proposes a much larger metropolitan area compared to the ones considered before [11].

The analysis based on the migration growth rate indicator highlights the diversity of the migratory behavior of the population in the environments under review (fig. 8). The values are very different among the localities of the metropolitan areas, some of them with a high potential of attracting the population, while the others showing mainly rejection factors. If we compare the 6 metropolitan areas presented in the picture, we can classify them as follows: Constanța and Oradea shows very attractive, with values over 10% (22.4% and 10.99%, respectively), whereas these values in Cluj and Craiova are mostly negative (-6.63% and -2.47%). The other two areas, despite of positive migration growth rates, do not go over 10% (Brașov – 6.53% and Iași – 5.13%).

The analysis of the same indicator in the rural settlements of the metropolitan areas produced very interesting results as well. The strong attraction force of the two MAs – Constanța and Oradea – is a feature of the rural settlements too, with even higher values (27.87% and 12.8%, respectively). The same difference, to the benefit of the rural environment, can be seen in the Brașov MA as well (7.14%). In Iași, although somehow lower, the value is positive (4.8%). At the opposite we find the other two areas where the rural settlements show rejection forces stronger than at a general level (Cluj -7.63% and Craiova -5.45%). Hence, we can see that in most cases the rural environment of the metropolitan areas is more attractive than the urban. Constanța, Oradea, Brașov and Iași, in spite of being important Romanian cities, have recently proved less attractive than some of the surrounding communes. This is not true for Cluj and Craiova, that continue to be strong attraction poles in their areas of influence.

IV. MIGRATION PATTERNS IN BUCHAREST RURAL-URBAN FRINGE

The Metropolitan Area of Bucharest Municipality (MAB) is very different from other metropolitan areas. Despite the fact that it is only the object of a legislative proposal, this area seems to cover a very large territory. Under the influence of the big city, the size of this area would become even bigger. According to the draft law submitted to the Parliament, MAB would include 62 localities, of which 10 towns, stretching on over 2,000 km². The size is not only determined by the importance and the social and economic power of the Capital City, but it reflects as well the geographic positioning in a highly accessible space: the Vlăsiei Plain, a sub-unit of the Romanian Plain located in South-Eastern Romania. In addition to being very accessible, this flat surface with low heights allows settlements to extend unlimitedly. Other landscapes such as the hydrographical network, lacustral surfaces and forests are, in

their turn, favourable factors to the development of these built-up areas, by being highly attractive.

However, the first driver of this type of metropolitan area is Bucharest city. This city ranks first in all social and economic hierarchies in Romania. It is the first large city in Romania, both in terms of surface (over 200 square kilometres) and population (over 2 million inhabitants in 2009). Bucharest is, at the same time, the largest economic centre with a significant number of industrial activities and services, accounting for 19% of the gross domestic product. The city is the main railway and road junction in Southern Romania, with a high number of transport routes connecting the city to the entire Romania and to the neighbouring countries as well.

Under these circumstances, Bucharest has always been a strong attraction pole for the population. In communist “industrialization” times, the city grew considerably, with the number of its inhabitants going double in less than forty years. As a consequence of this, and against the background of other Romanian cities going bigger, the then authorities ruled in the ‘80s the interdiction to migrate to the respective urban settlements. In those times people used to talk about “the

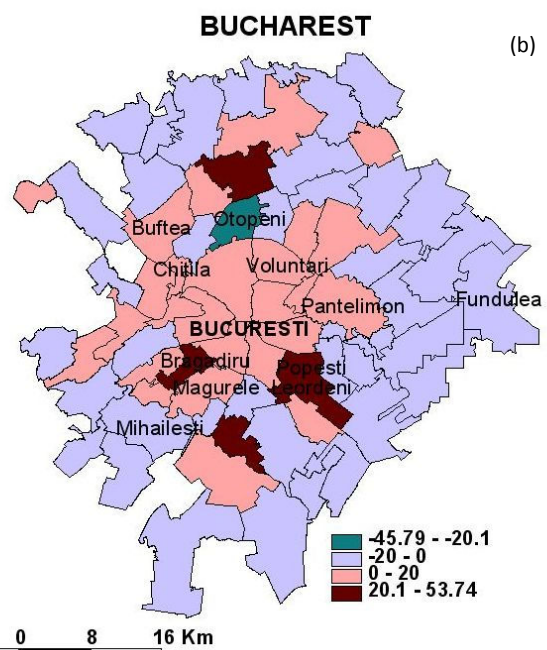
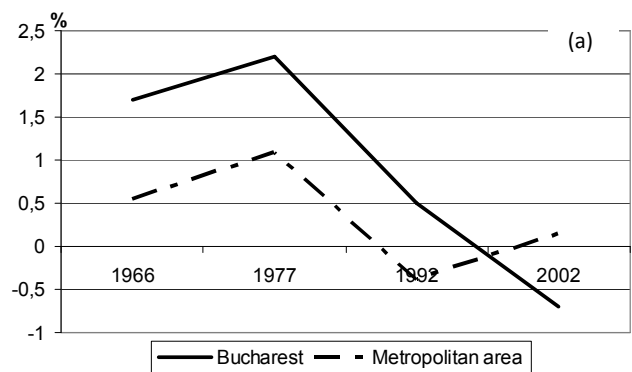


Fig. 9. Migration growth rate (%) in Bucharest metropolitan area ((a) 1966-2002; (b) 1990-2008)

closed cities”, all the more so attractive. Hence, in early '90s, Bucharest had over 2 million inhabitants, with many others at its “gates” who, although administratively belonged to the neighbouring territories, from an economic point of view they were Bucharest inhabitants. A lot of communes around the big city at that time, with numerous inhabitants, exceeding by far the demographic size of a normal rural settlement, such as Voluntari, Pantelimon, Popești-Leordeni, Chitila, with over 10,000 inhabitants. As anyone would expect, some of these settlements were declared towns after 1990, thus changing the administrative configuration of this part of the country.

From a social and economic point of view, the evolution of the metropolitan area is directly linked to the evolution of Bucharest city. Hence, as a result of the rapid industrialization of cities, the metropolitan area sees an important demographic growth by the beginning of the 80s, on a pace similar to the capital city. Subsequently, the population growth rate goes down in both zones as a result of the policy aimed at fighting migration to big cities. The trend after 1990 is interesting, underlining in a suggestive manner the changes of the migration process to the metropolitan area. The migration flow from Bucharest to the fringe area largely increases (fig. 9).

From a spatial perspective, this is an unbalanced process. The migration between the two zones is subject to various factors, the distance from the capital city and the accessibility being the most important. The location within the metropolitan area is also significant, its favourability depending on the more or less developed neighbouring areas. Thus, the settlements located near Bucharest have always had a rapid population growth compared with those placed at larger distance. This situation is distorted by the presence of some important roads and railways that determined a positive demographic evolution even in the more remote villages. Good examples are the communes Mogoșoaia, Tunari, Pantelimon, Bragadiru and many others located in the North of the capital. The settlements from the South and those located far from the city have negative population growth as

their accessibility is poor. Berceni, Vidra, Adunații-Copăceni are only a few examples.

The differences between the Northern and Southern areas of the metropolitan perimeter can be explained by the fact that they are neighbouring regions with different economic development potentials. If the North is the transit way to economically heavy Valea Prahovei having favored an important communications network, the South is a connection with a peripheral area that is less attractive and developed, the Giurgiu county.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Over the past 20 years, the Romanian rural environment had to put up with various economic, legal and social events, which profoundly affected it. The nationwide changes influenced this environment, unfortunately in a negative way. We still cannot talk about any rural revival, but rather of a slow fadeout as a result of losing or giving up resources.

Population is one of these resources which, with the persisting subsistence economy and the lack of prospects of improvement, would rather migrate to either urban or high potential rural areas or, unfortunately, to other European states viewed as economic “paradises”. One hope for Romanian villages is that most people working abroad send their revenues back home, thus contributing to local and regional development otherwise much slower if depending only on domestic resources.

Despite the fact that, for the time period under analysis, we can say that the general feature of the rural environment is an important demographic loss on most of the national territory, there are spaces with attraction potential too, and they may be the reviving centres of the Romanian rural regions. These are the areas where the sub-urbanization, counter-urbanization, and gentrification (less present in rural) take place. This is evidence of the increasing interest and desire of the individuals, mainly urban inhabitants, to rediscover and benefit of all resources and traditions provided by an environment which did not lose its authenticity, in a world where identity is gradually annulled by globalization.

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