Istrate, Dan - Ionut; Alupului, Ciprian

Article

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METROPOLISATION AND THE METROPOLITAN SPACE: THE PRACTICE OF HORIZONTAL PARTNERSHIPS AT LOCAL LEVEL*

Dan - Ionuţ **Istrate**
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi, România
istrate.dan.ionut@gmail.com
Ciprian **Alupului**
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi, România
ciprian.al@gmail.com

Abstract: *At present, the development of large cities raises problems to specialists, who must find solutions to the most diverse processes of concentration, to the numerous problems of the communities tightly connected with the metropolitan areas / growth poles. The formation of the metropolitan areas regards not only the most common issues related to the increase of the standard of living, but also the concrete ways of solving the crises and reducing the forms related to the current metropolitan issues. The objective of this article is to present the main favourable aspects of the metropolisation processes, pointing out the advantages of implementing such areas in Romania.*

Keywords: metropolisation, development, territory, metropolitan areas, governance
JEL Classification: R10, R11

INTRODUCTION

Metropolisation enrols in a process that, from the viewpoint of functional organisation, reconfigures space itself. In fact, the whole process of metropolitan development takes into account a factor of spatial integration, allowing the development of settlements and not a change to their boundaries; it is a redefinition of the areas of cooperation, a rapid integration into the European development networks organised in metropolitan regions and areas. In spatial terms, there is a tendency to regroup the population within and around the big cities or metropolises, while from a functional point of view there is a trend to concentrate the activities inside the major cities or metropolises.

For a certain period of time the term *metropolitan* has referred to the major cities, the state capitals; subsequently, metropolises referred to the political and economic capitals of a region, of a

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large provincial urban centre designed to contribute to counterbalance the influence of the country's capital and also to a better socio-economic counteraction.

Metropolitan development unfolds, chronologically and spatially, along urban development, this being a new stage in the development of the urban system by its extension beyond the initial borders; due to the increasing population in the surrounding areas of the cities, the emigration from the cities, but also by attracting people from other localities, the geographic and administrative boundaries of the cities have become inadequate to define urban agglomerations. This extension is equally generated by a comprehensive endogenous process of local economic development and the association of several local communities around an urban centre that exerts its role as *growth pole* (Dincă, 2007).

1. METROPOLISM AND METROPOLISATION

Metropolitan development represents an administrative and economic challenge in terms of the management and coordination of a significant number of resources; it is well-known in developed countries, being a feature of a new phase of urban development and representing the next stage of concentration of the population in the city and the suburbs, such socio-economic areas being defined by specialists as *metropolitan areas* (Dincă, 2007).

Therefore, the result of the process of metropolitan development is the emergence of metropolitan areas, a process also called *metropolisation*, which stands for a process of formation, construction and development of a metropolis. The basic characteristics of this process are *metropolism* and *metropolisation*. *Metropolism* means the result of a "bottom-up" process of awareness by some communities of the regional imbalances, their economic underdevelopment, the ethno cultural features and "the centralism of their lifestyle"; on the other hand, *metropolisation* means a "top-down" process in which states acknowledge the regional imbalances and all the phenomena accompanying them, such as economic underdevelopment or excessive centralism; as a result, they decentralise the political and legal system through metropolitan institutionalisation.

The formation of metropolitan areas meets a need or a set of opportunities determined by the organic evolution of cities. This process of urbanisation on the European territory has led to the interdependent development of metropolises with the localities within their area of influence, thus forming *metropolitan realities*; though not referred to as *metropolitan areas*, they function as unitary areas, relatively independent. Thus, there appear the first characteristics of *metropolitan*

areas; they represent distinct forms of human settlement and consist of a large number of people living within or around a centre of great density (Keating, 2008).

The development of metropolitan areas facilitates an integrated arrangement of the territory at the regional level; thus, it reduces the imbalances between the centre and the limitrophe area brought about by the dispersion or marginalisation triggered by the isolation of some settlements lacking opportunities; the elimination or reduction of such imbalances would lead to the improvement of the quality of life of the population. Thus, the identification of a set of common trends of development and cooperation of settlements within the area, the creation of new forms of institutional organisation and management and the representation of interests at the external level will strengthen their ability to cope with competition and will ensure the increasing economic development of localities in the metropolitan area in comparison with the surrounding regions. The completion of the so-called *development policy* is usually carried out by means of a good cooperation between municipalities in the areas of planning, housing, infrastructure, economic development, environmental protection, use of human resources, transportation, water supply, waste processing and, last but not least, the implementation of investment projects.

From an administrative point of view, metropolitan structures depend on political, social, economic, historical and geographical factors. At the same time, the management of metropolitan areas may raise a series of problems, implying a set of "changes in the development pattern of some territories with low density through a voluntary cooperation between local administrations, the intervention of the State in the provision of urban services, a fair public-private coordination and the existence of some administrative structures in addition to the regional agencies, thus providing public facilities aimed at stimulating regional institutionalisation" (Dincă, 2007).

The structure of metropolitan areas consists of three major components: "the cultural identity, a social and economic basis vital to support the development of the area and a form of power in decision making"; these are only some of the elements required for the establishment of public and private "development coalitions" (Vasile, 2001), along with territory, leadership, external links and development strategies.

The metropolisation process can also be defined from the perspective of economic and administrative components; thus, it represents "all the actions taken by the public sector via its public administration bodies, as well as by the private sector, by means of the contribution of the economic agents; this process has led to the emergence and development of an economic zone, functional and competitive in the area of influence of the metropolis."

Metropolisation implies a process that, from the viewpoint of functional organisation, reconfigures space. In fact, the whole process of metropolitan development takes into account a factor of spatial integration, allowing the development of settlements and not a change to their boundaries; it is a redefinition of the areas of cooperation, a rapid integration into the European development networks classified into metropolitan regions and areas. From a spatial point of view, there is a tendency to regroup the population within and around the big cities or metropolises, while from a functional point of view there is a tendency to concentrate the activities inside the major cities or metropolises.

Metropolitan areas (Dincă, 2007) are the growth engines of national territories, spatial mutations implying a series of social and economic interdependencies that redefine the metropolitan space, thus being re-established the links between the strategies of enterprises, the socio-economic changes, the reconfiguration of the relations of power and the transformation of the organisation of metropolitan areas. The metropolitan area forms around a metropolis (over 1 million inhabitants), taking pride in its ability to support the metropolis so as to develop it at national, regional and international levels. In terms of quantity, the metropolitan area provides 80% of the input/output flows, this representing a hierarchical area where medium-sized and small cities or rural localities with no central functions have areas of diffuse influence; the metropolitan area represents a network of main and secondary poles identified according to a number of relevant indicators so as to determine the correct degree of attractiveness of the sites, being characterised by a wide range of economic specialisations which, together with the specialisations of the metropolis, support its development at regional and national levels.

2. EUROPEAN METROPOLITAN AREAS – THE NETWORK OF REGIONS AND METROPOLITAN AREAS IN EUROPE (METREX)

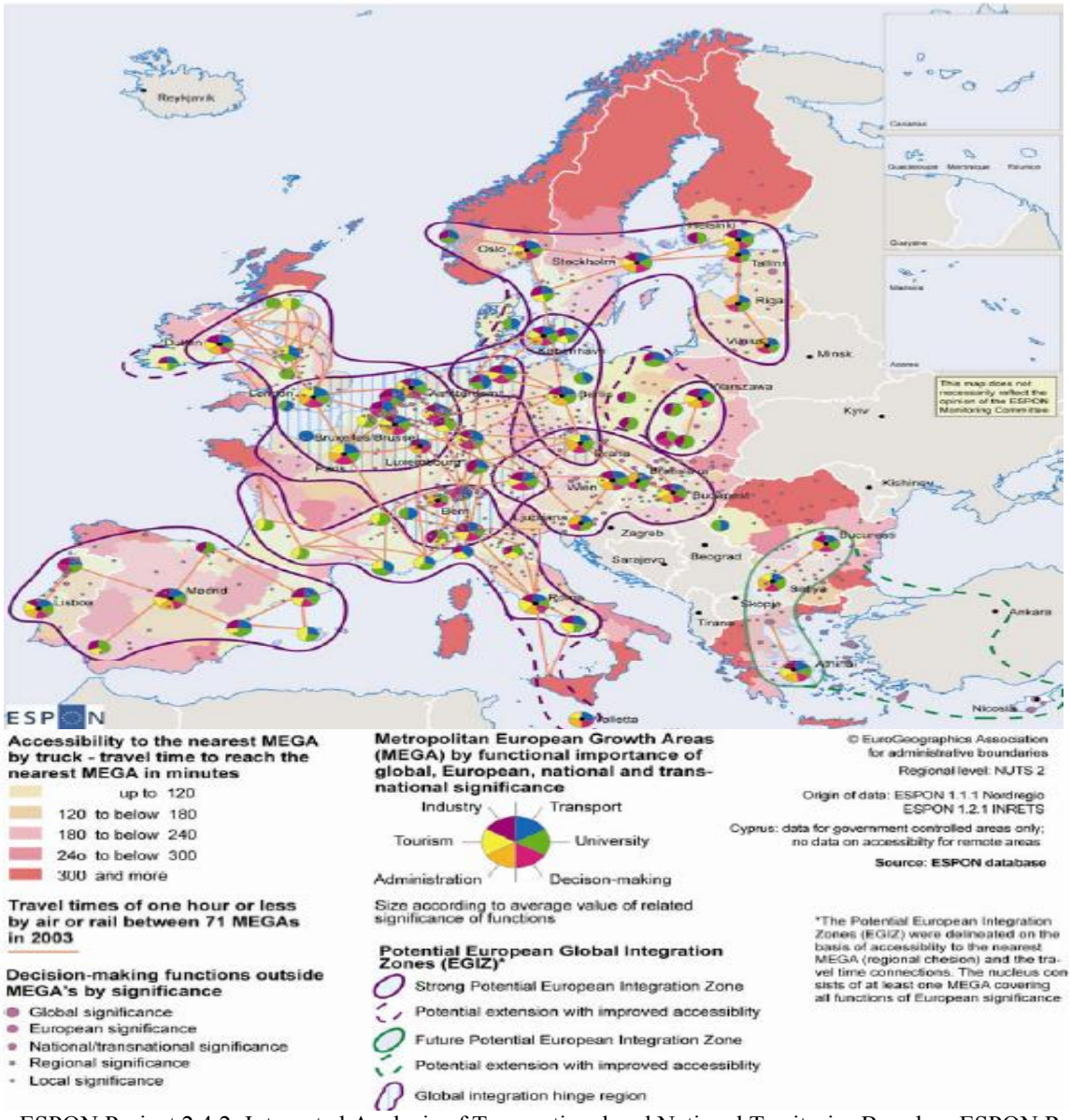
European experiences relate to theoretical approaches on the integrated planning of polarising cities and their areas of influence; these approaches are reflected in a series of legislative measures on the harmonisation of the development of cities and the afferent territory. Practical and systematic interventions have taken place since the 1990s when the enlarged Europe was facing the integration into global economy and the rigors of competition; therefore there appears the need of the existence of other perspectives on the development of cities and localities - *regional development*.

In 1996, at the Conference of Metropolitan Regions in Glasgow, with the support of the European Commission, there appeared the Network of Regions and Metropolitan Areas in Europe

(METREX), meant to ensure the means to promote metropolitan governance and answer the problems of enlarged Europe.

In 1999, METREX in collaboration with the European Parliament, the Committee of Regions and the Council of Europe, convened the assembly of the main European institutions and the national and local governments in the metropolitan areas of Europe to sign the "Metropolitan *Magna Carta* – the Porto Declaration" regarding the strategy in the planning and development of regions and metropolitan areas in Europe. The event resulted in a document with 40 signatory entities. Currently, the process of structuring the metropolitan regions and areas in Europe is expanding: there are 120 metropolitan regions or areas, of which 33 are METREX members.

Figure 1 - Metropolitan Areas in Europe



Source: ESPON Project 2.4.2: Integrated Analysis of Transnational and National Territories Based on ESPON Results

The prospect of the European Union enlargement is a decisive factor in accelerating the process of development of metropolitan areas in Europe; as an important actor on the global market, it must meet the requirements of the competitive development and prepare the localities to respond to these challenges.

There is no hierarchy of metropolises; the population size has become a less relevant factor in the case of a city aiming at becoming a metropolis. According to a study carried out in 1995 (DATAR), the minimum threshold at which a city can aspire to the status of metropolis is 200,000 inhabitants, consistent with its structural, functional and accessibility characteristics.

3. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF METROPOLITAN AREAS IN ROMANIA

In Romania, metropolitan development involves two distinct actions: the definition and subsequently the delimitation of these areas. One of the first definitions of the *metropolitan area* dates back to the 1980s, during the U.S.A. Census: "Statistical Metropolitan Area" including a city and the surrounding localities, characterised by relationships of interdependence and summing 50,000 inhabitants, this number reaching 254 in 1990.

A metropolitan area refers to an area which contains a number of autonomous administrative units, with emphasis on both the metropolitan independence and the coordination of metropolitan affairs. A new defining element for the metropolitan area, in addition to the territory and the administrative organisation, is the population. In accordance with the French law, namely "an agglomeration of communities representing a public entity which regroups several municipalities forming a geographical area inhabited by at least 50 000 inhabitants. At least one of these localities must be inhabited by at least 15,000 inhabitants, the mission of the entity being to formulate a joint program for urban development and planning the use of land", all of them in accordance with the *Chevènement Law* of 1999, France.

The first metropolitan areas were defined by the *Law on the Landscaping of the National Territory no. 351/2001* as "areas ensued from the association, on the basis of voluntary partnership, between urban and rural areas, between which there have developed collaborative relationships on multiple plans." The metropolitan territory, on the basis of the *Law on Urban Planning no. 350/2001*, is defined as "the area lying around the municipalities of first rank, including localities at distances up to 30 km, where there are reciprocal relationships of influence in the field of communication, economic, social, cultural and urban infrastructure". The formation of a metropolitan area was the aim of the *Ordinance 53/2002 on the Status of the administrative-*

territorial unit, which stipulated its operation under the conditions of preserving political and administrative autonomy to each of the municipalities in the metropolitan area.

The establishment of the partnership for metropolitan development does not require an area identical with the administrative areas of the units involved. In delineating a metropolitan area there are important aspects to consider, such as the axes and corridors of development, the areas of mutual influence, the common problems and interests, their spatial extent, the complementary, articulated and integrated resources etc., but also a series of social and economic analyses. Romanian legislation states that "metropolitan areas function as independent entities without legal personality, although there is the possibility that these areas function on a perimeter independent of the boundaries of administrative-territorial units, jointly established by the local public administration authorities". The development program of the area can be put into practice only *with the consent of local councils and in consultation with the public in accordance with the law*.

Metropolitan areas and urban agglomerations are formed with the express agreement of the local councils of the administrative-territorial units and aim at the infrastructure development and the development goals of common interest. The deliberative and executive authorities at the level of each administrative-territorial unit keep their local autonomy. The modifications of the *Law no. 215/2001 on Local Public Administration* introduced a series of new clarifications. Thus, the metropolitan area is defined as "the association of intercommunity development on the basis of partnership between the Romanian capital or first-rank cities and the territorial administrative units located in the immediate area."

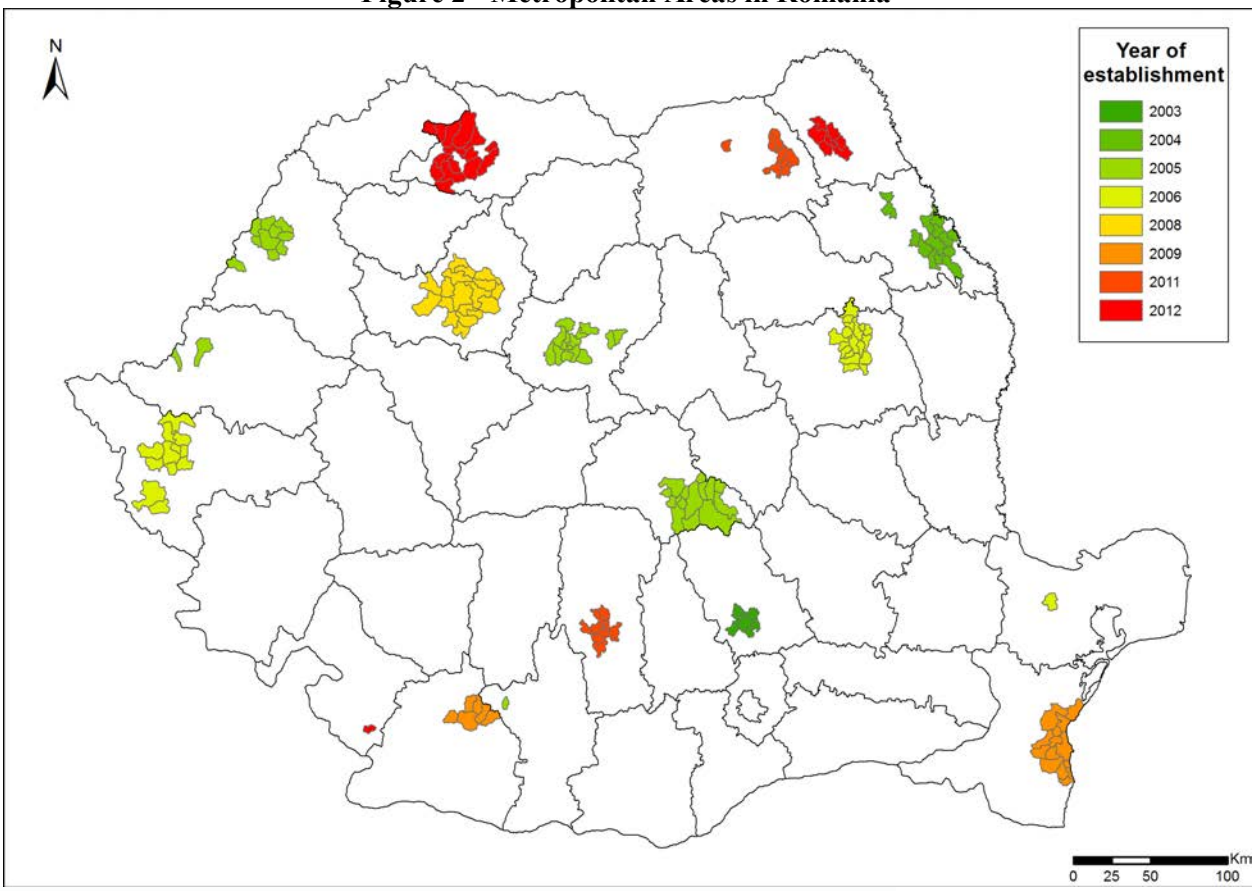
However, this definition can lead to some confusion; on one hand, it is mentioned that metropolitan areas function as entities without legal personality, while on the other hand there is reference to *the association of the metropolitan area*, a syntagm which implies the existence of an associative structure of the metropolitan area[*]. Although there have been attempts to cover a legal vacuum regarding the functioning of metropolitan areas, the apparent equality between metropolitan areas and the associations of intercommunity development does nothing more than to introduce a new contradiction (Pop et al., 2007). As indicated in the paragraphs above, the legislation relating to metropolitan areas stipulates the possibility of functioning in a territorial framework independent of the administrative structure, while intercommunity association relationships can only work within the administrative limits of the component units.

Reality has shown that in numerous counties people have understood that such structures constitute a framework conducive to development by applying integrated strategies at the level of

[*] The associative structure will function according to the Law 246/2005 as regards associations and foundations.

urban-rural relationships. So far there have been set up 14 metropolitan areas and at least half of them have been constituted after the law modifications (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Metropolitan Areas in Romania



Source: Representation based on data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs – UCRAP

Unfortunately, the biggest problem of these structures is their relatively reduced functionality triggered by frequent conflicts between the officials of these units. The worst examples are usually related to the projects of integrated management of waste, because in this case, no official is willing to allow the construction of such facilities on the territory of its locality. However, the utility of such structures cannot be denied. Possible subsequent legislative modifications may introduce more prerogatives for these areas; moreover, raising the awareness that such associations can bring an economic benefit for those involved may lead to a future increase in the level of performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Romanian experience has proven that major reforms are still needed in several areas. The ability of the local government to manage and facilitate local economic development is still limited by national legislation and too restrictive administrative rule. These legal and regulatory obstacles

limit the ability of the local government to use productively its assets (which it controls nominally) and to encourage economic growth through innovative planning measures, based on market relations.

The emergence and development of metropolitan areas around the main cities implies the fact that the applicant entities should assume some functions in order to stimulate economic development and social cohesion and at the same time to contribute to building and reinforcing some specific roles at territorial, national and international level, so as to meet development processes. The result is the development of integrated systems of infrastructure that turn metropolitan areas into genuine logistical knots, namely areas which are equally attractive and accessible, equipped for complex functions and accessible to the measures designed to ensure territorial development. Thus, while focusing on already existing functions and on the potential of the area, there are developed numerous international links meant to contribute to maintaining their already established role in areas of influence, as well as to cope with the rigors of the metropolitan entity existing within the European networks.

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