

## RURAL TOWNS IN ROMANIA: A REALITY ASKING FOR SPECIFIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

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**Abstract:** Urban settlements represent an essential factor in meeting sustainable development goals. However, at the local level, the role of a town as the concentration point of local services and the driver of local development is not as obvious as it might derive from its status. Due to their vulnerable structure, the potential of small towns to show adequate performance for the sake of sustainability can be severely weakened. Although, rural areas in Europe perform better from the viewpoint of sustainability, rural Romania has witnessed, in fact, a degradation of living standards, jeopardizing all three pillars of sustainability. In our paper, we identify, using multi-criteria statistical analysis and hierarchical agglomerative clustering, three types of rural towns, to which the fourth type, suburbs, is added. We, then discuss the development possibilities of those towns, supplying four measures likely to give good results in promoting their sustainable development. We, also, recommend tailoring rural, regional and sustainable development policies to each identified type of rural towns, in order for policy makers and executive officials to make them perform better.

**Keywords:** Urban settlements, multi-criteria analysis, sustainable development, Romania

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Urban settlements have become an essential form of living for mankind: more than half of the World's population lives in towns and cities (Merrifield, 2013). Despite of the great variety of the urban forms, their common feature consists in less dependence on local (agricultural) resources.

In order to make order among the numerous urban forms and, most importantly, to distinguish between the urban and the rural, one must take into account three characteristics (dimensions) of urban environment. The *physical (ecological) dimension* considers settlements from the viewpoint of their physical characteristics (densities etc.). The *contextual dimension* puts the settlement in the broader regional context and highlights its coordinating role in the relationship with other settlements. The *functional dimension* emphasizes the role of land as the main source of income. Sometimes, a fourth dimension is added: the *social character of an area*, which, basically, refers to differences in people's behavior,

way of life, values etc. (Frey & Zimmer, 2001). And we must add here the *administrative* approach to new town declaration, when public authorities can override any obvious criterion irrespective of the score on the other four dimensions (Ianoș, 2004; ÖIR, 2006).

The ability to discriminate between rural and urban is very important, because these two living environments face different challenges in attempting to specify and achieve the sustainability goals. This difference can emphasize either quality, or quantity, or both. Thus, the countryside's dominant concern is related to the prevalence of poverty in the rural sector, while cities' challenges are related to managing environmental issues and resources (Elliott, 2006).

Once urbanization of the World increases, urban settlements become central to meeting sustainable development goals (Elliott, 2006). Urbanization influences the degradation of primary eco-energies, which, eventually, jeopardize meeting the sustainable development goals (Ianoș et al., 2011). Therefore, urban sustainability requires reviewing of the forms, structure, land-use patterns and socio-economic

conditions of existing urban areas (Frey, 2007). Small towns have at least as much importance as large cities in this process. Although their coordination ability within the urban system is low, they contain at least half of the EU population (Servillo et al., 2014). Small towns, in pursue for sustainability, are advantaged because they can solve easier bureaucratic problems related to the elaboration of specific strategies and efficiently use civic capacities (Knox & Mayer, 2013).

Among the various types of small towns, specific to the European urban system, two types are especially important for the development of sustainability potential: (a) towns located in the proximity of large cities, which are subject to the "borrowing-size" effect (Alonso, 1973; Meijers & Burger, 2010) and, as such, should be considered separately; and (b) towns embedded in specialized agricultural area, whose relationship with the surrounding rural settlements is bidirectional. The latter are called rural towns in Europe (ÖIR, 2006; Servillo et al., 2014), or, sometimes, market towns in England (van Leeuwen, 2010). Agriculture and agricultural processing industry remains an important sector for these towns in the Netherlands (van Leeuwen, 2010) and Poland (Stanny, 2010); service provider for the surrounding area is another role played by such towns in Spain (Santamaria, 2000); a combination of both roles is characteristic for England (Courtney et al., 2007) and Austria (ÖIR, 2006).

Regardless the small towns' central role in population distribution, development and sustainability, relatively little is known about their importance for fostering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe (Servillo et al., 2014). In this paper we investigate what specific features are characteristic to small rural towns in Romania and discuss their development opportunities in order to provide adequate responses to sustainability challenges.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Urbanization in Romania**

Evaluation of the level of urbanization in Romania has long been a subject of strong debate discussing both theoretical aspects of its definition and its quantitative level. Thus, urbanization is commonly seen as the physical extending of cities, declared on a legal basis, and the population growth of such cities (Erdeli et al., 1999). The cited authors suggest three ways to increase the level of urbanization: extending of existing cities; promoting rural settlements to urban status; and penetration of urban characteristics to other types of settlements. Despite qualitative differences,

the common feature of the Romanian approach to urbanization consists in strengthening the administrative aspects of this objective process.

Socialist policy, in its attempt to assure a uniform spread of urbanization all across the country, had made this phenomenon the most intensive in Romanian history (Ianoş, 1994). Between 1948 and 1989 the proportion of urban population increased from 23.4% to 53% (Benedek, 2006). As with any country engaged in the modernization race, which tries to catch-up with the most developed countries, Romania wanted to report more than it was (has ever been) in reality. Thus, as a common feature of the socialist urbanization policy (and not only in Romania), various statistical solutions have been involved to increase the level of urbanization: urban-type settlements (an intermediate category, in addition to towns, in 1956, increased the degree of urbanization by 13.3%); communes included in towns (in 1966), villages belonging to towns (in 1968), suburban communes (which increased the level of urbanization in Romania by 6%) (Ianoş & Tălângă, 1994; Benedek, 2006).

The category of component settlements, which describes the settlements, other than towns, that are in the direct administration of the town, have survived until today. These are typical villages, smaller than their parental town, and totally dependent on it; in some cases they are physically neighboring it, and in other cases they are located 10-15 km away. There is a single case of Feteşti town, which has a component village larger than the town itself. According to the 2011 census data, provided by the National Institute for Statistics (NIS), the 943 component settlements increase the level of urbanization in Romania by 6.2%. More than 83% of these settlements (783 out of 943) are under the direct administration of the small towns. Almost one fourth of the small towns' inhabitants live in these component settlements, representing a rural population, in fact, forcibly attributed to the urban category.

Two particular features are important in Romania's post-socialist urban development, both being in strong contradiction with the administrative approach to new town declaration. Firstly, since 2000, 57 out of 320 towns and municipalities (which are a superior category of urban settlements) that exist today have obtained their urban status, thanks to governmental decisions. In such a way, some of the villages have obtained the urban status without even having the basic urban infrastructure (Bănică et al., 2013).

Secondly, suburbanization, as a widespread phenomenon in Eastern Europe (Servillo et al., 2014), has touched large metropolises in Romania as well.

Urban-to-rural migration has been dominating in Romania's population movement since 1997 (Benedek, 2006). This means, in fact, that there are suburbs, fulfilling all the criteria to become urban settlements, which are not (willing to be) granted this status. As a result, the suburbs of big cities (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Constanța, Iași and Ploiești) are "wrongly defined as rural areas" (Ionescu-Heroiu et al., 2013). People living in these suburbs, commuting daily to the urban centers and enjoying urban infrastructure at their homes, are considered rural dwellers. Out of 300 000 inhabitants, which the suburbs have gained since 1990, 55% represent such dwellers, as considered by the official statistics.

## 2.2. Ruralization in Romania

While for Romanian scholars the term "ruralization" is a synonym of degradation, ruralization as a global process does not necessarily mean a bad thing. Thus, in the Netherlands the quality of life in rural areas is higher than in cities (Boelhouwer, 2006). We should not be surprised, because richer people choose healthier environments, being able, at the same time, to support additional travel costs caused by longer commuting distances.

When discussing "ruralization" in post-socialist Romania, scholars, usually refer to changes in two "urban" dimensions. They emphasize increasing dependency on land as a direct source of income of urban dwellers and absence of infrastructure adequate to the settlements' status (functional dimension). They also point out the change of people's everyday life, which becomes apparently more agriculture-dependent (social dimension) (Ianoș, 2000a; Bănică et al., 2013).

However, it would be wrong to say that Romanian ruralization refers to achieving the current standards of rural life. Eight villages enter the top twenty of the most developed Romanian settlements, while the poorest Romanian town is outranked by 90% of the rural communes (Ionescu-Heroiu et al., 2013). The term "ruralization" should be understood in the Romanian context as returning to the pre-1950 rural life standards (Zamfir et al., 2009). One must bear in mind that pre-socialist rural life was superior neither to the urban standards of those time, nor to the current rural ones.

## 2.3. Rural features of small towns

Romanian small towns have been designed to serve as an intermediary chain between large cities and the countryside (Ianoș, 2000b). Their development was in a strong relationship with the industrialization policy of socialist Romania. Manufacturing industry was

considered as the only driver of development in socialist Romania (Ianoș, 2000a). Thus, the socialist industrialization policy had two goals: efficient use of resources and diminishing inequalities between urban and rural standards of living (Turnock, 1986). By the end of the socialist period, industrialization had brought modernity, especially to villages, which significantly increased their living standards. Post-socialist transformations, however, have nullified the socialist policy targets. Places where industrialization was driven solely by the modernization purpose, without a local resource base, have rapidly lost their industrial character due to low quality and expensive products that could not compete on a suddenly opened market. Places where industrialization occurred on the resource efficiency base have had a long struggle for finding their place in the new capitalist world. This hasn't been a surprise, because resource-based mono-industrial towns are set to fail as soon as conditions, under which they experienced economic boom, change (Hayter, 2000).

Thus, considering the urban functions of Romania's small towns, there can be identified three phases of its evolution (Zamfir et al., 2009): (a) strong rural features characteristic to the great majority of towns before 1950; (b) rapid industrialization, accompanied by the modernization of public infrastructure in the socialist period (1950-1989); small towns came into focus of this policy in the 1980s, when the idea of coordinating strong "rural towns" was dominant (Benedek, 2006); (c) re-gaining pre-1950 rural features, since the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989 such as returning to individual heating based on firewood and coal instead of central heating; disappearance of local public transportation etc.

The collapse of the socialist regime in Romania after the 1989 Revolution brought about a postponed industrial restructuring. What happened in Western Europe and North America in the 1970s due to petrol shocks, the dismantling of trade barriers and flee of industry to more market-oriented economies, came to Romania in the 1990s, but in a much more compressed time span. Restructuring of manufacturing activities has cut down jobs and caused many production units to shut down (Birtel & Turnock, 2007).

## 2.4. Problems of small rural towns

Since the beginning of the post-socialist transformations, small towns have been struggling for survival and for finding their new identity (Zamfir et al., 2009). Several issues are of particular importance to this process:

- economic base constituted of micro-scale agricultural and forestry activities (Bănică et al., 2013),

which has never been based on manufacturing industry or which has become predominantly agricultural after the shut-down of industrial enterprises (Ianoş, 2000a);

- high unemployment rates caused by industrial restructuring (Birtel & Turnock, 2007);
- urban poverty: 44% of the poorest households in Romania are located in the small towns (Voicu, 2005), while the towns with less than 20 000 inhabitants comprise about 10% of Romania's population;
- lack of utilities and urban infrastructure: some of them have never had such infrastructure, in other towns it was destroyed due to lack of investment (Bănică et al., 2013);
- out-migration, which is a common feature for all poor regions, to traditional rural areas (Ianoş, 2000a) or abroad (Sandu, 2005).

Thus, towns undergoing a ruralization process in Romania combine the disadvantages of both types of settings. High unemployment rates in times of crisis and inefficient resource use represent the heritage of their industrial and urban past. Out-migration, lack of basic utilities and accentuated poverty are the process characteristic to the most depressed rural areas.

Regional development policies put into practice so far at the level of the entire European Union, but especially the Romanian ones, lack coherency, while their implementation has accentuated the existing territorial inequalities (Ianoş, 2000a; Bănică et al., 2013).

### 3. DATA AND METHODS

When talking about large, or even medium-sized cities, their "urban" features are evident in any obvious sense, and one don't need to make too much effort to provide the arguments about their urban identity. The situation changes when small towns are considered: their "*smallness*" and their "*cityness*" frequently generate strong epistemological, ontological and methodological debates (Bell & Jayne, 2009). In terms of their size, the upper threshold of a small town is considered to be 10 000 inhabitants (Bibby, 2009), or, more frequently, 20 000 inhabitants (Adam, 2006) while the lower one oscillates around 1 000 – 2 000 inhabitants (Carrière, 2008).

The category of rural towns is even more vague and unclear than that of small towns. Different authors in different countries use this term to describe different situations. In order to understand these differences the classification criteria are very important. In many developed countries rural towns are understood as 'development' or service poles in rural areas (ÖIR, 2006), thus, representing the combination of contextual and functional classification dimensions. Translated in

terms of sizes, rural towns can be up to 40 000 inhabitants in England (Frost & Shepherd, 2004) or even up to 100 000 inhabitants in Japan (Ishii et al., 2014).

In Romania, when talking about "rural" towns, researchers usually do not establish a particular upper size, but they bear in mind the functional dimension (agricultural activities, public utilities and infrastructure: water and sewage pipes, gas supply etc.) and the town's social character (Ianoş, 2000a; Benedek, 2006; Bănică et al., 2013).

Taking in consideration the above-mentioned approaches we focus on four variables, which put forward the physical, contextual and functional dimensions of the urban classification criteria, without having a specific upper threshold for the towns' size:

- share of villages' population under the towns' direct administration (component settlements) in the total population of the town in 2011 (%) (*contextual*);
- share of persons employed in agricultural and forestry sectors in the total number of employees in 2002 (the latest available data) (%) (*functional*);
- share of non-modernized roads in the total road length in 2013 (%) (*physical*);
- population change 1992-2011 (%) (*contextual*).

All variables have a positive relationship with the phenomenon of ruralization understood in Romanian terms (see the discussion above), i.e. the bigger the variable, the deeper the ruralization. This might be obvious in the case of the first three variables, however, the fourth one, population change, has a similar relationship too, when we recall the above-mentioned fact that urban-to-rural migration has been dominating in Romania since 1997 and cities have been losing more population than the countryside.

Hierarchical agglomerative clustering was chosen for the multi-criteria analysis. Before clustering, all variables were normalized. The Euclidean distance was used as a distance metrics, while Ward's method was applied for the determination of linkages between clusters.

We applied our method on the entire pool of settlements having the urban status: municipalities and towns (320 units). Ten groups resulted from our analysis. Three of them were identified as bearing clear "rural" characteristics. The fourth one, strongly linked to the other three groups, represents the suburbs of Bucharest municipality: they manage to combine highly urbanized peripheries with old rural cores.

### 4. RESULTS

Our analysis clearly highlights three groups of rural towns, which were labeled, according to their

characteristics: non-modernized rural towns, modernized rural towns, and agricultural towns (Fig. 1). The Bucharest's suburbs constitute a separate cluster, although in strong relationship with agricultural towns. Their core is formed by old villages, while the periphery has expanded as a result of suburbanization processes, up to their administrative limits (Ion, 2014). In such a way, these towns present a highly polarized combination of rural and urban features. The other three clusters constitute a quite numerous group of towns, embracing almost 30% of all Romanian towns (Table 1).

Table 1. Rural types of towns\*

Type of towns	Number of towns	Share of new towns** (%)	Average population (pers.)
Non-modernized rural towns	15	66.7	8 441
Modernized rural towns	47	46.8	8 522
Agricultural towns	32	28.1	8 455
TOTAL	94	43.6	
<i>Suburbs</i>	5	100.0	23 925

\*in order to produce the typology, data for the following years were used: 1992, 2002, 2011, and 2013.

\*\*obtained the urban status after 2000.

Source: own calculations based on NIS data

*Agricultural towns* represent a classical type of a rural town, as defined by its contextual dimension. They are located in the middle of agricultural areas, with long tradition in crop production, and relatively far from larger cities. They are concentrated in flat areas and lowlands, especially in southern and south-eastern parts of the country, which are well-known for their wheat and maize crops. All the variables in this group of towns are higher than the national average (see legend in Fig. 1), but none of them goes to the extreme. These towns have had quite a long urban tradition, at least since the socialist industrialization period; less than 1/3 of them obtained this status after 2000.

*Non-modernized rural towns*, that is, towns whose infrastructure remained outdated and degraded, are mainly concentrated in two parts of the country: south and north-east. They have the highest average proportion of rural population among all Romanian cities as well as the highest share of non-modernized roads. Ten out of 15 towns obtained the urban status after 2000, suffering from the rush and unpreparedness so characteristic to this last "urbanization" wave. It wouldn't be a surprise that the poorest Romanian town, Flămânzi (Ionescu-Heroiu et al., 2013), is also part of this group.

*Modernized rural towns* constitute half of the rural towns. They have a large share of rural population; other variables, instead, show quite moderate deviations from the national mean. The share of non-modernized roads is even lower than the average. Less than half of the towns obtained the urban status after 2000. The main concentration core is in the hilly area in the southern part of the country, to the south of the Carpathian Mountains. Secondary concentrations can be found in north-east, north-west and the central parts of the country.

*Suburbs* represent a distinct category, which can be assimilated to rural towns with a certain degree of conditionality. They are exclusively concentrated around Bucharest municipality. We can expect to find similar characteristics among the settlements having a rural status, which surround several large municipalities in other parts of the country as well (Ionescu-Heroiu et al., 2013).

But, as not being "towns", they exceed the scope of our analysis. Having a strong relationship with other rural towns, suburbs stand out for their highly positive demographic trend and one of the lowest shares of the component settlements' population. At the same time, infrastructural modernization is not their strong point (Ion & Pîrvu, 2015), despite the proximity to the largest Romanian (and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest EU!) city.

In terms of geographic concentration, we can clearly identify five main areas where the rural towns are relatively more frequent: south, center, north-east, north-west, and west. Rural towns in the western part of the country are more ruralized, because a high number of people here work in agriculture. The majority of these towns received the urban status in the last 12 years; the same situation is observed in the north-eastern part, where all the newly declared towns are ruralized (with strong agriculture and forestry).

The concentrations of ruralized towns in the southern and central parts of the country have two different origins: some are recently promoted to the category of towns, with dominant agricultural activities, while the remainder eventually ended up in this group because of their deindustrialization.

The north-western concentration is less evident due to the foreign investments coming from Western Europe. This explains the above average level of development of the small towns in the area.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The industrialization period between 1950 and 1989 was perceived by the population and scholars as a forced action. It sounds natural, taking in consideration the fact that before 1989 territorial planning in Romania was being managed directly from the national



level through state representatives, who were taking decisions regarding all aspects of development, no matter the level of administrative hierarchy concerned (Hamilton, 1970). As a consequence, once the forces that imposed those processes disappeared, a reaction process has begun by pushing the system (the town) back to its original, pre-socialist, status. The lack of alternative jobs made the small town inhabitants to return to a rural life style in a decaying urban environment (Ianoş, 2000a). This was possible because their mentality never changed, their income disappeared, as the only factory in town was closed, and, as a consequence, they couldn't afford to pay for public utilities anymore; utilities that had made their life style to be urban. The reverse was not possible because of lack of investments, either from the government, or from the international business actors.

In turn, Birtel & Turnock (2007) mention that the workers that lost their jobs due to the industry shut down had few alternatives, turning to agriculture the first and the most at hand. Returning to their old, pre-industrial, specialization was encouraged by land restitution, which has caused huge fragmentation of land properties. Instead of creating the framework for development of large-scale feasible and competitive farming, the restitution law has caused explosion of land-use conflicts between small land owners (Ianoş et al., 2012). Considering these facts one can conclude that the land restitution process was responsible for the agrarization of society (Benedek, 2000), but it is unlikely that if those workers had other alternatives, they would have still turned towards this labor-intensive and poorly lucrative activity. A sociological study supports our idea that rural settlements with a high rate of migration abroad are mainly located in the proximity of small towns from poor counties, into central areas (Sandu, 2005). It can be thus argued that the small towns' incapacity to foster development opportunities contributes to a significant out-migration flow. This "agrarization" process has had a significant impact mainly upon the number of inhabitants of small rural towns, without turning these settlements into villages; in such a way, this "agrarization" process seems to be false.

At the same time, most of the newly appointed towns didn't meet the conditions defined by law. The agricultural sector employed the majority of labor force and generated most of their income; those towns missed basic infrastructure and provided a slim probability to diversify their local economic base (Benedek, 2006). That is why, the increase of urban population originating in the last urbanization wave (which peaked in 2004) is rather considered to be pseudo-urbanization (Bănică et al., 2013). However, this is not just a Romanian problem; many other

countries, such as Azerbaijan (Afandiyev et al., 2014) or the Republic of Moldova (Sîrodoev, 2009), with an administrative approach to the appointment of new towns, face similar cases.

As many farmers have abandoned their farms in the last decade, Rusu & Schreiber (2013) consider it evident that small towns haven't fulfilled their role as an intermediary chain between the countryside and large cities. As these small towns didn't offer development opportunities or specialized services, the inhabitants of the surrounding rural areas by-passed them on their way towards cities in search of the necessary services and functions (Portnov, 2004). The gap between the small towns and large cities steadily increased over time, having led to the marginalization of the former. Indeed, an industry restructuring process can be easily absorbed by a large city, in which the proportion of brownfields is almost insignificant (as in Cluj-Napoca, 0.42%); while in small towns this figure can be enormous (as in Călan, 87%) (Filip & Cocean, 2012). It also looks quite clear that Romanian small towns have a long way to go to reach the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth desired by the EU as defined by the Europe 2020 Strategy (Servillo et al., 2014).

Small rural towns have their strengths and weaknesses. Among weaknesses one should mention their isolation and peripheral position within the national urban system (Bănică et al., 2013). Isolated and peripheral small towns show lower performance, attract fewer investments in infrastructure and also do not benefit from the relocation of industry. The infrastructure in continuous degradation worsens even more the chances of these towns to attract new investments, and the vicious cycle keeps going on, unbreakable.

As Massey (1995) highlighted, historically, one of the strengths of the small towns consists in some degree of competitive advantage in industrial employment. However, due to increasing global competition, this relative advantage becomes problematic. Our findings confirm the trends observed in other EU countries (Servillo et al., 2014) that smaller settlements experience less spatial inertia when they are forced to respond to the phenomena originating at national or international scales, that is, they are more exposed to external challenges, and, frequently, are not capable of providing adequate responses, entering into deep decline.

Contrary to the expectation that towns placed centrally in rural areas would have a better chance of developing their own identity (Zamfir et al., 2009), evidence in Romania, as well as in other countries, shows that the towns that form a more or less dense network (Bănică et al., 2013), or are agglomerated and

networked towns (Servillo et al., 2014) or form clusters of towns (Portnov, 2004) perform better and can significantly enhance their growth potential. This may be due to the fact that an isolated town in the countryside relies heavily on the surrounding countryside in searching for development opportunities. Once the countryside becomes poorer (the case of Romania, and many other transition countries), the development opportunities of those towns weaken.

Any solution to enhance the development opportunities of small rural towns should be based on an approach that favors several paths at the same time, without condemning, however, the depressed towns to chronic underdevelopment (Ianoş et al., 2010). Spatial planning has a key role for providing an analysis framework for the sustainable development of a spatial entity (Vancutsem, 2014). The research having been carried out so far pointed out both the difference among the Romanian regions in terms of sustainability performance (Burja & Burja, 2013) and the divergence in performance of regions characterized by smaller settlements in remote areas and of areas with strong urban influences formed around large regional metropolises (Săgeată, 2013; Servillo et al., 2014). This divergence is particularly strong when the overall economic situation improves (Portnov, 2004).

The spatial variation in the sustainability performance of Romanian regions requires adequately tailored development policies. First of all, there must be considered the creation of clusters of towns, in the urbanized and peri-urban areas. Interconnections of these clustered towns, along with the “borrowing-size” effect will relax the pressure over land and infrastructure, characteristic for large cities. It will as well create additional opportunities for low- and medium-skilled jobs, or for highly paid jobs, which are sensitive to the quality of the environment. Good road infrastructure, in concert with well-established mass transit systems must represent those drivers that would attract new investments in the area (Portnov, 2004) and eventually contribute to its sustainable territorial development (Sánchez-Zamora et al., 2014).

On the other hand, there must be created a separate policy focused on the development of isolated towns in remote rural areas. Towns in rural areas are more likely to serve as an appropriate focus for rural development policies. Among the measures that best performed in other EU countries, one should mention:

- Focus on larger rural towns in areas where employment in agriculture is above the national level (van Leeuwen, 2010): (a) these towns have few chances to perform using their own, limited, sources, and need special attention from regional planners and decision-makers; (b) they have a good spatial context

to attract the surrounding rural areas, which have few alternatives for growth.

- Foster service industry growth: construction and food and drink services must be inexpensive in order to be affordable to a significant part of the population; banking and financial services are important for local employment (van Leeuwen, 2010).

- Promote residential and business development in town location, whilst facilitating targeted business growth in hinterland locations: this measure will concentrate the development opportunities in the central location, leaving the periphery beyond. However, the strong coordinating center will contribute to the spatial diffusion of higher urban standards in the future (Ianoş, 2000b).

- Encourage local microbusinesses (Woods & Muske, 2007). This proposal has a double effect. First, local businessmen know better the opportunities and which local settings might offer them to potential investors. Second, local investors are less likely to move with the accumulated profit out of the region and are more willing to re-invest their profit in their area of origin. And the local patriotism should not be neglected in this case.

With regard to the typology of rural towns resulted from our cluster analysis, the group of *agricultural towns* must be the one to promote the rural development initiatives described above. In the particular context of Romania, many of these towns have the additional advantage of being located in the area eligible for trans-boundary cooperation policies with the neighboring countries (Chişineu-Criş, Nădlac, Corabia, Zimnicea, Băneasa, NegruVodă).

The *modernized rural towns* are appropriate for the networking policy, focused on creating regional clusters. The concentrations of towns in the hilly areas of southern Romania, in the central part of Transylvania as well as in north-east or north-west counties, enjoy a good networking potential. Such clusters can be formed around Suceava, Baia Mare and Ploieşti municipalities, as well as inside the perimeter formed by several large municipalities in the south: Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Târgu Jiu, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Piteşti, Craiova, or along the arc formed by Sibiu, Alba Iulia and Târgu Mureş.

The *non-modernized rural towns* should not be subject of special policies, but must be incorporated in regional or rural development or metropolitan policies as separate chapters. Issues they face must be solved; however, and the appropriate solutions must be examined on a case-by-case basis.

The *suburbs* should enjoy a special approach that must combine two spatial scales of implementation. First of all, there must be a policy at the national level specifically focused on the suburbs,

regardless of their administrative status. Such a policy should be focused on preserving the sustainable urban form, compact and land-saving (Salvati, 2014), while suburban residential districts should enjoy special attention (Kusuluoglu & Aytac, 2014). In such a way, the great part of unconformity between urban life-style and rural status of suburban dwellers, mentioned by Ionescu-Heroiu et al. (2013), would be removed. It is equally important for each metropolitan area to have its own development policy, in which the suburbs should have an appropriate place and role.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In our paper we reviewed the main features of the Romanian urbanization process with focus on socialist industrialization and post-socialist ruralization. Our conclusion confirms some of the previously expressed opinions that ruralization of Romanian towns does not make them return to the current rural standards, but rather to the pre-socialist ones. This particular trend jeopardizes the possibility to meet the sustainable development goals at the local level and, especially, in underdeveloped rural areas. A set of special policy measures needs to handle this particular situation, in which a “one-size-fits-all” policy would definitely fail (and it has already done it!).

Our proposal for tailoring rural, regional, sustainable, and metropolitan development policies is based on a typology of all Romanian towns, out of which we selected several types of rural towns. Each of the four identified types requires special policy measures at all territorial levels: national, regional, and local. Agricultural towns should be the main focus of rural development policies. Modernized rural towns must serve as the basis for networking initiatives and regional development policies focused on urban clustering. Non-modernized rural towns must be treated on a case-by-case basis, being incorporated in any related policy (rural, regional, sustainable development etc.) as a separate chapter. Suburbs, as the most dynamic component of the entire Romanian settlement system, need special attention from both directions: urban-to-rural and rural-to-urban. Development policies related to suburbs must see beyond the urban-rural dichotomy in order to eliminate the contradiction caused by the urban dwellers of rural settlements, which exist due to inconsistency in the administrative approach to urbanization in Romania.

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