CENTRALISATION OR PERIPHERLISATION? A 'NEW DEAL" IN URBAN-RURAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT. – Centralisation or Peripheralization? A 'New Deal' in Urban-Rural Relations. Beginning with the new century a new concept of regional planning has established itself in Europe, being strongly related to long-term development, especially in post-industrial countries. Although the conceptual debate about such regions started relatively late, it has gained an important role in spatial planning and research. The need for a development towards a complex political multi-level system (supranational, nation states and local-regional) has become indispensable in a globalized world. An international undertaken in Germany, France, The Netherlands and Switzerland has shown that metropolitan regions are an important strategic tool for economic and regional development in all countries. The present paper aims to deal with the metropolization processes in Europe, comparing the main attitudes and approaches towards this concept, examining the way in which metropolitan regions have been understood in the academic literature. The paper aims also to gather and improve knowledge on the recent theoretical background which has promoted or has acted as the starting points in developing and elaborating metropolitan regions policies.

Keywords: metropolitan region, centralization, peripheralization, uneven development

1. INTRODUCTION

The political and economic changes that have incurred at the beginning of the 1990s, the importance and impact of globalisation, Europeanization and metropolization have brought about considerable changes in the territorial structures of the member states, along with a severe economic decline and deepening development differences between the East and the West, reconfiguring their social and spatial forms of organization. In this sense the key role of cities has been re-evaluated not only due to the fact that they represent the main location for economic, political and social changes, but also because they are the most important territorial actors behind all these changes. Furthermore, due to migration and new means of communication, centralization and peripheralization processes started to overlap each-other; growth, stagnation, shrinkage appearing simultaneously on different levels, affecting both the urban as well as the rural areas. In order to deal with these processes new concepts and tools for territorial

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development have been elaborated and as a result, the elaboration of new spatial planning strategies and establishment of new institutional support structures (metropolitan governance) has become indispensable.

During these territorial and structural changes the scientific, but also the public debate have paid great attention to the newly positioned cities and their hinterland, resulting in the increase in numbers of metropolitan regions all over the Europe while polycentric development concepts have become more widespread strategic and planning tools than ever before. A great amount of literature related to metropolitan areas, their location as well as the spatial distribution of city functions tries to give an impressive description of these areas but a very few of them concentrate on issues like where the metropolitan regions come from, what is the main theoretical and political background and approach, what do they represent in the context of centralization and peripheralization, what does this concept/policy mean to those who can't benefit from it. Also, little attention is paid to regions outside the metropolitan catchment areas (called as in-between-spaces) which could either show a dynamic growth, or a deep shrinkage. Are there any strategies for subsidizing these areas?

The paper aims to deal with the metropolization processes in Europe, comparing the main attitudes and approaches towards this concept, examining the way in which metropolitan regions have been understood in the academic literature. The paper aims also to gather and improve knowledge on the recent theoretical background which has promoted or has acted as the starting points in developing and elaborating metropolitan regions policies.

2. METROPOLIZATION-PERIPHERALIZATION, CORE-PERIPHERY RELATIONS AND THE IN-BETWEEN-SPACES

Problems of uneven development, peripheralization are being discussed not only in geographical literature but they represent the main area of intervention among politicians, spatial planners, economists as well as historians. In this rural-urban duality, the city has always been associated with the idea of centrality, accumulation of resources and connectedness while the rural environment has long evoked the idea of periphery, closure and emptiness (Sohn, 2012), justifying the ideological scheme of dominance and dependence on the centre. Peripherality has remained as a syndrome of distance, difference and dependence, emphasizing the relations to weaknesses in social, political, cultural or economic terms. Hechter (1975) even used the concept of "internal colonialism" referring to the powerful core region exploiting those on the fringes (Hechter, 1975, page 8). According to Blowers and Leroy (1994), periphery regions can be characterized as "geographically remote, economically marginal, politically powerless and socially homogenous" as peripheral communities encompass each of these characteristics in lesser or greater degree (Blowers and Leroy, 1994, page 203). The same authors point out that the process of dominance and dependence which characterizes peripheralization at sub-national levels can also be perceived at an international level.

Peripheral regions are the areas not sufficiently integrated at the given place and time in dominating structures, processes and systems (Marada *et al.*, 2006). Lagging behind, slow development, passiveness, closeness, unimportant marginal areas often became concepts most frequently associated with high outflow areas (Daugirdas and Burneika, 2006). Thomas (1989) also introduces the concept of "transfer dependency" highlighting the fact that the more transfers are allocated in the periphery, the more peripheries will tend to become dependent on central handouts (Thomas, 1989, page 218).

Like cohesion, peripherality also represents a complex, multifaceted societally, politically and economically defined concept. According to Markusen (1999) it even represents a "fuzzy concept" since it arguably lacks clarity, it difficult to operationalize and possesses multiple meanings (Markusen, 1999, page 2). Churski (2004) argues that peripherality – being a natural phenomenon – cannot always be considered negative, as not all problem regions are peripheral and not all peripheral regions must necessarily be problematic.

Metropolization processes contribute to major changes not only in the cities' internal structure but also in the transformation of the relationship with the surrounding regions. According to several schools the tie between them could be both strong and wide-ranging but also weak, diverting resources from the periphery. Many authors highlighted the hypothesis that the regional hinterland is no longer needed by metropolises as it does not offer the resources necessary for metropolitan development (Sassen, 1991; Castells, 1998; Kunzmann, 1998; Jalowiecki, 2000; Gorzelak and Smętkowski, 2008), emphasizing furthermore on the limitation and weakening links between the metropolis and its regional surroundings, the relative marginalization and the increasing development differences among them. Other discussions are focusing on the obliteration of the dichotomy between urban and rural areas, this latter being the main objective also for a polycentric development of the EU. Discussing about peripheralization, first we have to look at those main processes which have determined the appearance of peripheral regions in most of the European countries:

- Population decline as a consequence of low birth rates and an ageing population, large scale emigration which has lead to shrinking regions.
- Economic decline, industrial restructuring, increasing unemployment rates, slow and long-lasting privatization process, difficulties in the countries' external balance of payments have lead to losing ground in a globalizing world economy, resulting in an economic and one-sided political dependence (Lang, 2012).
- Neoliberal thinking which has appeared in regional policies has further concentrated on the development of large urban areas, neglecting the development of others in need (Weichart, 2008).

As Western Europe is usually associated with being the "central" or "core", very few studies are dealing with problems of decline and shrinking in core regions as well as the appearance of some "hidden champions in hidden regions" (Aring and Reutther, 2006, page 11), referring to new forms of peripheries and cores and to some of the changeovers taking shape together which overlaps at different spatial levels. From a Western European perspective, Eastern countries usually appear as peripheries, as countries sending out a high number of the population, although there is always the

possibility of finding these "hidden champions" with high levels of population inflow. As peripheries arise at different territorial levels, it depends on the social viewpoint, on the selected scale whether some regions are identified and stigmatized as being a periphery, giving this duality certain multi-scalar characteristics. It is crucial to recognize that processes of centralization and peripheralization are socially constructed phenomena and should not be considered as something given, meaning that this can be socially changed or reconstructed. Core-periphery relations and peripherality itself cannot be understood as a static concept, neither can modern social change be considered as uniform, linear and static processes since they all involve continuous transformation: not all cores or peripheries will follow similar developmental patterns and no historical movement can permanently determine the eternity of the status of cores and peripheries. This is what gives peripherality the characteristics of temporality. Angus and Shoesmith (1993) have pointed out that "centres are as much dependent upon their margins as the margins are on the centre" (Angus and Shoesmith, 1993, page 7).

Herrschel (2011) has defined the process of peripheralization in a geographic and social-communicative perspective referring to new patterns and practices in governance as: open, flexible, non-territorially defined, network based informal inter-personal and inter-institutional linkages. According to the author there are some actors along these linear linkages who are much less involved, who stand beside these networks, their interests and views being regarded as less important or even going unheard. The outcome of this process is peripheralization through "in-between-ness", representing exclusion but not in a distance-based spatial point of view. The case with in-between spaces is the same: they are not situated on the fringe, they are not peripheries in the right sense of the word, they simply just do not benefit from the relevant governance policies. As a result such "in between spaces" are excluded or have a more restricted participation in policy making networks. In-between spaces reflect the notion of being left out, excluded, pushed aside or as Copus (2001) put it: "aspatial peripherality" (Copus, 2001, page 539). This has been the case with the metropolitan areas which form clusters inside a country with a strong formal or informal, policies and policy-maker networks, becoming separated from the other areas and regions which are outside this network. So in a geographical perspective the level of infrastructure development could be shaped not only by accessibility and the communication flows, but rather by the relationship networks between the main policy and institutional actors. Here peripheralization can be regarded as the result of being situated "between" the main communication flows (Herrschel, 2011).

3. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BASIS: DEFINING METROPOLITAN REGIONS

To give a more detailed explanation of the concept, the economic theory of agglomeration, the growth pole-, cluster-, and the post-colonial theories may provide a useful starting point. The ideas of core and periphery have been present either explicitly or implicitly in both classical models (e.g. Alonso, 1964 theory of urban land use; Myrdal 1957 cumulative causation) as well as in structuralist and political-economic perspectives on uneven development (Wallerstein, 1974: world system theory, Krugman,

1991: core-periphery model, Porter, 1990: cluster theory). By analyzing these theories the multi-scalar nature of peripherality becomes evident, in the sense that Alonso's work emphasizes the core-periphery relation at urban level, Myrdal`s focuses on the inter-regional or national scale while Wallerstein`s work identifies cores and peripheries within the global economy. This is further on reflected in the modern territorial structure regardless if we are talking about the EU, CEE countries or about Romania. Theoretical concepts of convergence and divergence reflect catching-up processes on the one hand, while dependence theories and cluster theories (e.g. Krugman and Porter) suggest further growth for highly developed areas. As Porter has put it, in a world of economic integration clusters play a prominent role, albeit clusters also represent a key element in the European Metropolitan Region concept (Litzel and Möller, 2009). Even in the early 1940s when the metropolitan concept was first conceived and the changes on the fringe of cities have come under the increasing attention of spatial disciplines both in the US and in Western Europe, it was seen as an economic unit where a cluster of activities in a core location with different functions sustain the population of a surrounding hinterland which was economically and socially integrated with the core area (Frey and Zimmer, 2001). In order to face the challenges of structural change, to support the regional labour market and to strengthen existing potentials – even in a global way – more and more metropolitan regions have implemented the cluster concepts.

The postcolonial concepts based on difference and otherness, tackling the ways on how peripheries are constructed by the core has long been discussed not only on a supranational level but also in a European context which makes it possible to examine them at regional or national level (Lang, 2012). First, the internal colonialism school brought in the relationship between economic development and regional identities; moreover Lafont (1967) introduced the notion of a colonial relationship between centre and periphery. In his view the relationship is based on exploitation. Hechter (1975) argues that the relationship between core and periphery within a state works exactly the same way, in the sense that peripheries are usually dominated by the metropolitan economy, introducing the concept of "internal others" as the differences appear not between but within nation states.

The discourse about metropolitan regions has had several forerunners identifying big cities as nodes of globalisation, such as Friedmann's World-City Hypothesis (Friedmann, 1986) or Sassen's work on the Global City (Sassen, 1991). They have identified cities as the emerging spatial scale, replacing countries as central nodes in a globalising economy. Both emphasise cities and global city networks as a major driving force behind the new spatial organisation and the international division of labour. This position has been further adopted by the Globalisation and World Cities Research Network monitoring the relation between cities (Beaverstock, Smith, Taylor 1999). And in 2002, Friedmann concludes that "almost the whole world will coexist in a single global urban network, driven by worldwide competition" Friedmann, 2002, page XV). Most authors in the context of the global cities debate mainly reflect on their ability to concentrate control functions (as main location for transnational corporations) or on the development of services needed to execute these functions (Derudder, 2006). In scientific as well as in political discourse, there has been a clear link between globalisation and urban politics ever since (Newman and Thornley, 2005).

A widespread empirical definition was elaborated in the framework of the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON). The project titled "The role, specific situation and potentials of urban areas as nodes in a polycentric development" defined under the headline "Enabling cities to act on the European and global scenes" 76 metropolitan growth areas based on population and GDP, competitiveness, connectivity and knowledge basis (ESPON, 2006, page 115). Since then, the so-called MEGAs have become a standard element in European wide monitoring of spatial development (e.g. in the progress reports on economic, social and territorial cohesion).

After countries such as France and the Netherlands have been early promoters of the metropolitan regions concept, the European debate was heavily influenced by the German approach to support the emergence of European Metropolitan Regions with specific metropolitan functions in Germany (Ritter, 1997; Blotevogel, 1998). According to Rose (2005), metropolitan regions are not a new concept, but they are new in the sense of size and form, and in terms of importance in the global economy. As a result of the changes in the structure of metropolitan areas and the growing importance of metropolitan economies in the global system, the concept of the metropolitan region has also received a new meaning.

4. DEALING WITH METROPOLITAN REGIONS AS A NEW CONCEPT FOR SPATIAL PLANNING. EVIDENCE FROM THE CEE COUNTRIES

Beginning with the new century a new concept of regional planning has established itself in Europe, being strongly related to long-term development, especially in post-industrial countries. Although the conceptual debate about such regions started relatively late, it has gained an important role in spatial planning and research. The main processes which have brought about the necessity for a new spatial planning concept were (according to Blotevogel, 2001): the structural change in the economy, the change towards a flexible network economy, the process of globalization and also the decreasing significance of the nation states. In fact the traditional form of governance in a nation state seems to be less able to cope with the new global economic and political challenges. The need for a development towards a complex political multi-level system (supranational, nation states and local-regional) has become indispensable in a globalized world. An international undertaken in Germany, France, The Netherlands and Switzerland has shown that metropolitan regions are an important strategic tool for economic and regional development in all countries (Megerle, 2009). Metropolitan areas greatly differ across Europe in terms of function and size, governance structure, history and specialization therefore a "one size fits all" definition cannot be regarded as the right choice. E.g. in Germany, the polycentric settlement structure emphasizes the role of metropolitan regions, while the French spatial structure centred on Paris has underlined the necessity of secondary centres. In Scandinavia, due to the sparsely populated regions, much attention is given to stabilizing small and medium–sized towns (Göddecke et al., 2011). This different settlement structure also had an impact on individual organization and governance concepts.

But why has the debate on metropolitan regions in Europe received such a noticeable character in the last two decades? Most political discourses emphasize the strengthening role and the power of such large areas not only in intra-European- but also on an intercontinental level in order to achieve further economic development. Another important aspect would be to reduce the existing interregional differences and to capitalize on the polycentric functions of regions. Despite these efforts in most of the European countries regional disparities still exist and are still very obvious.

The increasing role of metropolitan regions, the dominance of urban centers – which in many cases have contributed to a deepening marginalization/polarization process – have become the most important topics in the spatial planning policy discourses in most CEE countries. This is mainly due to the fact that parallel to increasing competition, networks of cities coupled with uneven development and polarisation have created new winners and losers, both in terms of social and spatial issues. In Poland for example more than 30 years ago, but especially starting from 1998, studies related to spatial planning and development have dedicated much attention to metropolises related issues (metropolitan reform) although with no or insignificant effects in terms of raising awareness among policy makers. According with several authors, restructuring processes in Poland suggest that metropolitan areas are developing way faster than the provinces they are situated in, the most eloquent examples being Krakow, Warsaw or Poznan (Ehrlich *et al.*, 2010). The neglect of small towns in development policies can also be observed within the Polish National Development Strategy 2007-2013 which does not refer to the role of small and medium sized towns whatsoever. Only the National Cohesion Strategy for 2007-2013 specifies the relevance of small towns as potential regional growth poles. What's more, at present there is a lack of an integrated national urban policy or formal legislation for metropolitan areas. The only form of integrated planning in metropolitan areas could be provided by some "bottom-up" initiatives based on the cooperation of local governments or administration.

This is also the case with large metropolitan areas in the Czech Republic, such as Prague, Brno and Plzen which have witnessed faster growth as a result of their diversified economic structure, highly skilled workforce and more developed infrastructure. Prague in particular has set itself apart from the rest of the country resulting in the over-concentration of the population and economic activities (Illner, 2001).

Similar trends can be observed in Hungary, where the centrality of Budapest has increased following the implementation of the Regional Development Plans of the last years, leading to a strong aggregation of economic, political and demographic resources within the capital city.

Another Visegrad country, Slovakia has also witnessed a transformation process favouring large urban centres, especially the capital city. In the last ten years Bratislava has shown a much faster development pace than the rest of the country (Davoudi, 2006). This process could also be observed in the case of Kosice, as the capital city of Eastern Slovakia, which has slowly become the focus of population and economic concentration (Pasiak *et al.*, 2001).

Similar trends could also be observed in Romania, where – in order to decrease the polarization of urban areas – decision makers have first based their actions on "growth pole" theories, hoping that the development of certain regions could be increased by concentrating resources on selected "centres" which – through the effects of radiation and attraction - would trigger the development of the whole area. The statute of member in

the growth poles' group represented a special stake for all the big cities from the country, because it facilitates the access to approximately one billion of euro's, money especially granted through the ROP, funded by the EU until 2013. Another positive characteristic of the growth pole policies is that funding is given much easier to cities which form metropolitan areas and elaborate integrated urban development plans. Law no. 351 of July 6th, 2001 on the National Territorial Management Plan, Section IV-Settlements, defines the metropolitan area as the area established in partnership through the voluntary association of the main urban centres and the adjoining urban and rural settlements up to a 30 km distance which would cooperate at different levels. The legislation also indicates the functioning of these metropolitan areas, stating that: "Metropolitan areas work as independent entities without legal personality". According to this definition, besides Bucharest, other cities tried to develop metropolitan areas in Romania. So far, empirical analyses have shown that these approaches have only lead to increasing disparities between the urban areas and their neighbouring areas, at least as far as social and economic indicators are concerned.

A new approach to the urban development system in Romania is currently being elaborated by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration. In consequence, if for the 2007 – 2013 programming period the ROP has allocated funds for 3 main types of urban areas (growth poles, urban development poles and other types of urban areas), now we can talk about 8 types of towns and cities included in two main categories:
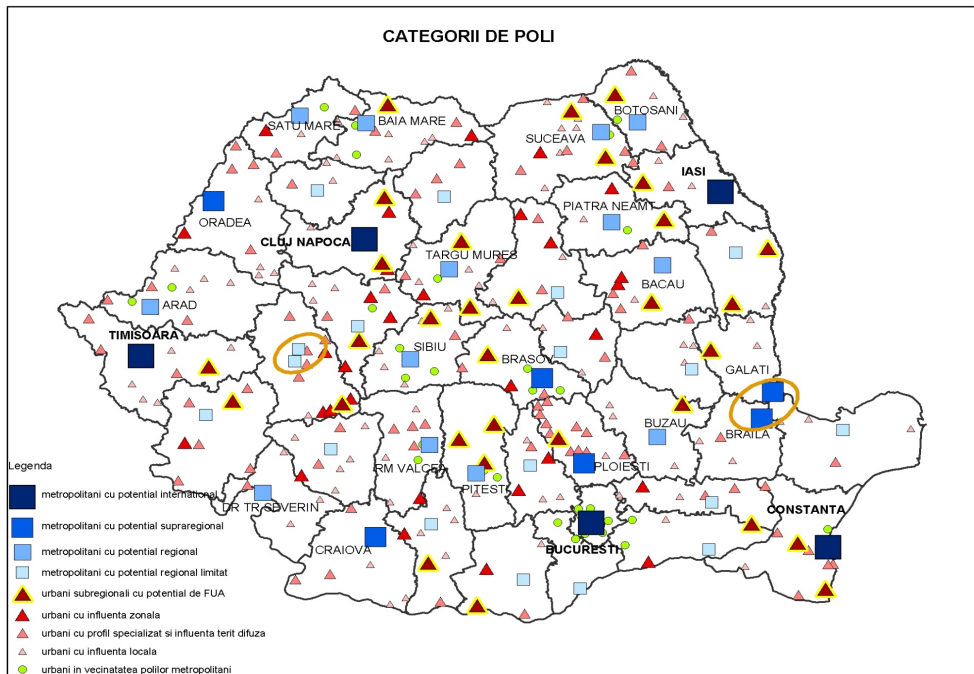

Fig. 1. The network of urban poles proposed for the 2014-2020 programming period.
Source: The Romanian Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration (2012)

I. Metropolitan Poles divided in 4 categories:

- with international potential: Bucharest, Timişoara, Cluj-Napoca, Iaşi, Constanţa;
- with supra-regional or inter-regional potential: Braşov, Craiova, Galaţi-Brăila (urban system), Oradea, Ploieşti;
- with regional potential: Bacău, Arad, Sibiu, Târgu Mures, Baia Mare, Satu-Mare, Suceava, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Piteşti, Buzău, Botoşani, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Piatra Neamţ;
- with limited regional potential: Resiţa, Târgu Jiu, Slatina, Alexandria, Târgovişte, Giurgiu, Slobozia, Călăraşi, Tulcea, Focşani, Vaslui, Deva-Hunedoara, Alba Iulia, Zalău, Bistriţa, Miercurea Ciuc, Sfântu Gheorghe.

II. Urban poles/centers (a total number of 243) – generally towns with less than 50.000 inhabitants.

All these examples illustrate that the most important challenge in CEE countries' strategic spatial planning is to achieve a more balanced territorial development within the country. Lessons can also be learned from cohesion countries which have experienced different spatial development trends. In Spain, for example, structural aids have managed to counterbalance the polarization effects with the help of a more balanced distribution of economic activities across the country. Among the new Member States, Slovenia has also become a good example in this sense. The elaboration of the National Spatial Strategy shows a positive step for implementing a polycentric settlement structure based on eight regional development centres, trying to avoid the over-concentration of economic activities in just a few major urban areas.

5. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion it must be stated that most political discourses emphasized the increasing role and power of such large urban agglomerations not only on European- but also on an intercontinental level. Metropolitan regions also help to achieve a balanced economic development through their increasing ability to reduce the existing inter-regional differences and to capitalize on their polycentric functions. On the other hand, up until now there has been very little empirical proof of spill-over effects resulting from metropolitan regions acting as engines of growth, what's more, regional disparities are still very much present in these areas.

Further on, there is a problem related to the effects of metropolitan development on adjacent areas, thus the reluctance on behalf of the areas outside of the delimited metropolitan areas, fearing the fact that the aggressive promotion of the metropolitan regions concept could lead to the decreasing importance and the weakening economic power of the surrounding rural areas. Potential outcomes are many, but the main question remains: do they gain significance by participating in those metropolitan regions or do they lose their specific character and endogenous development potential?

This is why further investigation and deeper research about the implementation and success of the concept is absolutely necessary in order to show its long-term effects on the regions outside the metropolitan catchments areas and to decide whether this new policy instrument could be considered as a new spatial planning concept or a paradigm shift.

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