

# THE MODERN URBANIZATION IN ROMANIA BETWEEN THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND THE POST-SOCIALIST PERIOD

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**ABSTRACT.** – **The Modern Urbanization in Romania between the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the Post-Socialist Period.** The history of modern urbanization in Romania has always been dominated by a strong “pro-urban sentiment”, where towns and cities were considered centers of development, wealth and well-being. This article presents the evolution and characteristics of Romanian urbanization from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the socialist period, highlighting the historical context, regional variations, and milestones of policy-driven urban development with a European insight.

**Keywords:** *modern urbanization, Romania, socialist period, planned urbanization, pro-urban sentiment, new towns.*

## 1. Introduction

According to Benedek (2006), urban development in Romania was influenced by three types of factors: historical background, political situation, and economy. Benedek starts from the idea that each society produces and reproduces its spaces, so a specific spatial structure corresponds to each society (Benedek 2006b, p. 51). This article summarizes the history of the modern urbanization in Romania from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the fall of the communist regime in 1989. These antecedents were very important in shaping the post-socialist processes in Romanian urbanization, because “we cannot turn our backs on the legacy of the past if we want to understand the present” (Harloe 1996, p. 5). I will argue that a “pro-urban sentiment” is rooted in Romania’s (as well as the whole Eastern Europe’s) historical development trajectory (Kulcsár and Brown 2011, p. 482). Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eastern European urbanization followed

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a different path from that of Western Europe. In contrast to the western part of the continent, the development of Eastern cities was connected to administrative functions, so urban status was more important for political than for economic reasons. An important change took place after 1945, when the pro-urban sentiment became motivated by its perceived connection to economic prosperity rather than by the political liberties which had previously been its main advantage. The half-century rule of a policy regime that favoured larger and denser settlements over their rural counterparts resulted in a “strong pro-urban legacy”, according to that urban areas are superior places to live and work (Kulcsár and Brown 2011, p. 482-483).

Modern urbanization in Romania encompasses the long period between the Middle Ages and the fall of the socialist system in 1989. Historians refer to this as the third phase of the history of cities and urbanization, following the Roman period and the medieval era. The first two stages have been extensively studied by researchers; therefore, this thesis will provide a brief overview of the third phase, since the evolution and processes of this era (especially those of the socialist period) played a decisive role in shaping the heritage for contemporary times.

The phase of modern urbanization can be divided into three stages: (1) until the mid-19th century, (2) from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Second World War, and (3) the socialist period between 1948 and 1989, respectively. I preferred to divide the “long 19<sup>th</sup> century” (as many historians do) into two parts because the economic and social processes that dominated this period began earlier and ended later than the century itself. Thus, the first part extends from the 1780s to the 1830s, while the second starts in the 1860s and lasts until the First World War (Meszaros et al. 2010).

In this article, I analyze the evolution of the urbanization rate in the referenced period, as well as the causes behind these changes. Emphasis will be placed on the declaration of new towns, the growth of the number of urban settlements, and the withdrawal of the urban status, respectively. However, I will not address changes in the ethnic and religious structure of the population, as these issues are less relevant for the present research.

## **2. Urbanization until the mid-19th century and its European context**

Modern urbanization began in Western Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The beginnings of the rapid urban growth were connected to the Industrial Revolution<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase “industrial revolution” became widespread (and adapted by numerous economic history trends) thanks to Arnold Toynbee, who published his book in 1884 on the topic (Meszaros et al., 2010).

which in turn, was preceded by an “agricultural revolution” that made a part of the agricultural workers unnecessary (Enyedi 2012). The condition of the existence of a numerous urban population is the increase of the labor productivity in agriculture so that agriculture can exceed the subsistence level (Meaşnicov 1977, p. 33). This population represented, on one hand, a consumer market for the (mostly textile) industry, and on the other hand, a multitude of potential workers (Meszaros et al. 2010).

Migration from villages to towns became the principal source of the urban boom. Industrialization-launched population growth not only increased the traditional urban network but created new towns as well (Enyedi 2012). It is important to note that this initial town-explosion did not take place in a predominantly rural area. Western Europe already had a developed town network at the beginning of industrialization, with commercial capital present in many cities. Town-explosion urbanized the entire settlement network: the proportion of the urban population has reached 70-75% by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The sudden urban growth following the Industrial Revolution transformed the until then barely changing settlement network, the inner structure and functioning of the cities, the relationship between towns and villages, but also the content and the spread of the urban civilization within the settlement network (Enyedi, 2012, p. 63).

This kind of urban growth had nowhere else incorporated into such a mature pre-industrial urban network like in Western Europe. The phase of urban explosion reached Central and Eastern Europe with only a slight delay, but despite the small time lag, it was marked by considerable differences. The sources of industrialization and urban growth were weak. The complete transformation of the urban network did not happen: a significant part of the towns remained in their pre-industrial state, and modern cities and traditional market towns coexisted side by side. Meanwhile, the rural population remained widespread, backward, and in majority for a long time (Enyedi, 2012).

In the states that existed on the territory of present-day Romania - Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania - there were diverse and different methods for population registration, such as conscripts, land records, and others (Mureşan, 1999, p. 42). These offered only approximate data on the population. In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Transylvania had a small number of urban settlements, namely 23, which represented an almost insignificant share within the total population (177,138 inhabitants in contrast with 835,460 inhabitants). The towns were small in size, except for Braşov with over 20,000 inhabitants, and Cluj and Sibiu with more than 15,000 inhabitants. The majority of the urban settlements had less than 10,000 or even less than 5,000 inhabitants (Deva, Orăştie, Haţeg, Dumbrăveni, Făgăraş, Miercurea-Ciuc, Odorheiu Secuiesc and Sfântu Gheorghe) (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 201).

Around 1831, the degree of urbanization reached 6.5% in Wallachia (Țara Românească) and Moldavia, with the largest towns being Bucharest with 65,000 inhabitants and Iași with approximately 60,000 inhabitants (Meaşnicov, 1977). Widespread ruralism had an important role in the urbanization process. This process unfolded differently across Europe: while in Western Europe the evolution of towns began to intertwine more and more with industry and industrialization, in East the primary role in urbanization was played by trade and commerce (Enyedi, 2012). The delayed process of town formation during the capitalist period in Romania, where the fundamental economic function was trade, had important consequences for urbanization. This delay affected both the location and structure of cities and the composition of the town network (Cucu 1968, pp. 16-17).

In Western Europe, urban places were an integral part of the development of industrial capitalism. As centers of production, trade, markets and other economic activities, they gained administrative functions in a rather organic way. In contrast, in Eastern Europe, the development of cities was strongly connected to administrative functions and the extraction of surplus from rural hinterlands. These administrative and extractive functions created opportunities, associating urban status with further development (Schöpflin, 1993). According to Kulcsár and Brown (2011), the urban status was more important for political than for economic ones, due to the strong agrarian character of these countries and their land-based political elite. Urban status conferred political autonomy, electoral representation and certain civic liberties, but not necessarily economic development advantages (Kulcsár and Brown, 2011, p. 483). However, I believe that urban status also brought economic benefits, but these were a consequence of the title.

### **3. From the second half of the 19th century to the Second World War**

In this phase, the Industrial Revolution began to gain ground in Central and Eastern Europe as well. In Romania, the beginnings of industrialization date from the second half of the 19th century, while the urbanization – as a result phenomenon – also started to emerge and to assert itself also in this period (Meaşnicov et al., 1977).

The actual territorial-administrative framework of the urbanization has been created after the Second World War. Until 1918, urbanization took place under different political powers and different administrative units. Thereby, the central and Western parts of the modern Romania - Transylvania, Maramureş, Crişana, and Banat - were parts of the Habsburg Empire (1711-1867), and of

the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918) respectively, and experienced a development path based on an early industrialization that began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, the Southern and Eastern parts of the country were influenced by the power center of Constantinople (Istanbul) where the first proto-industrial regions emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Benedek and Kurkó, 2010). The period of 1850-1918 was also marked by a succession of political regimes: neo-absolutism (1849-1860), liberalism (1860-1867) and Austro-Hungarian dualism (1867-1918) with continuities and discontinuities in economic policies, which in turn influenced the urban space and the process of urbanization (Lumperdean, 2011; Pop and Bodocan, 2000).

In Transylvania, in 1850, the number of towns was still 23. Most of them were located in the Mureș River catchment (Deva, Hunedoara, Simeria, Călan, Sebeș, Alba Iulia, Aiud, Turda, Târgu Mureș, Ocna Sibiului, Mediaș, Sighișoara and Odorheiu Secuiesc). Another six were situated in the Olt River catchment (Sibiu, Făgăraș, Brașov, Sfântu Gheorghe, Târgu Secuiesc and Miercurea-Ciuc), while four of them in the Someș River catchment (Cluj, Gherla, Dej, and Bistrița) (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 201).

In the following half-century, no significant changes were recorded in Transylvania from an urbanization point of view. Only three new towns emerged: Abrud, Aiud, and Reghin, with a total population of 32,485 inhabitants (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 205). By 1990, the total urban population numbered 356,252 inhabitants, i.e. 14,6% of the Transylvanian population. Only four towns had a population over 20,000 inhabitants: Cluj (50,908), Brașov (36,646), Sibiu (33,748), and Târgu Mureș (20,299). Eight urban settlements had a population between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants (Alba Iulia, Bistrița, Aiud, Dej, Sebeș, Turda, Sighișoara and Reghin), while the rest were under 10,000 inhabitants (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 205).

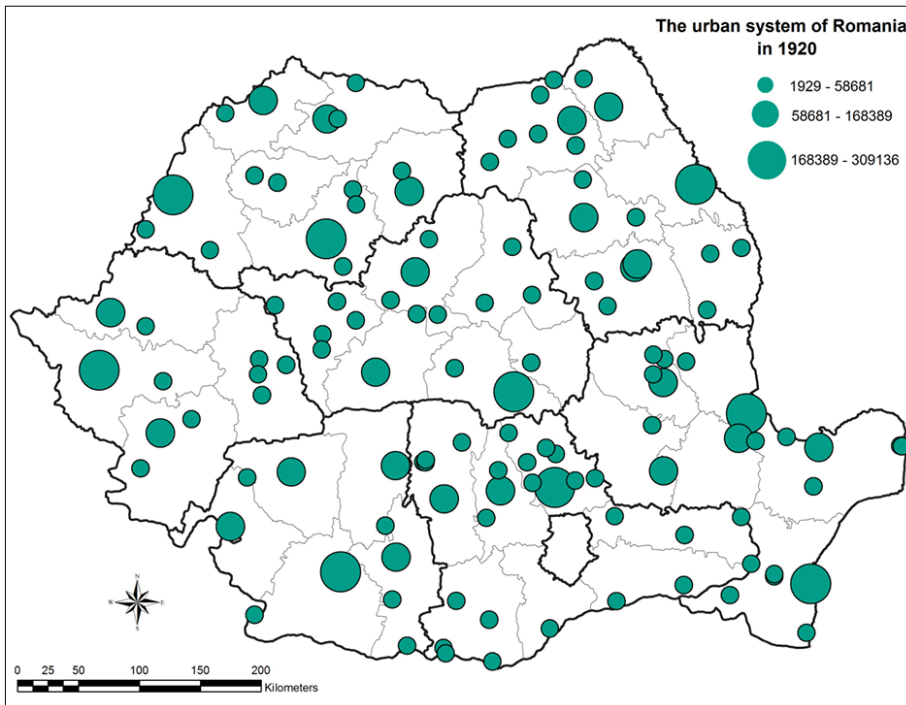
The period from 1900 to 1930 was marked by the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and the Union of Transylvania with Romania. During this time, East-Central Europe remained largely agrarian. Urbanization progressed slowly in the 1920s and stagnated in the 1930s. Industrial development was also in its early stages and depended heavily on foreign capital, which was concentrated in capitals and major agglomerations (Andrusz 1996, p. 35).

In Transylvania, the number of towns increased from 26 to 31. Six rural settlements gained urban status (Năsăud, Huedin, Blaj, Târnăveni, Gheorgheni, and Petroșani), while Ocna Sibiului lost its urban status, and regained it later during the socialist period (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 210). Gheorgheni and Vatra Dornei were declared towns in 1907, and Târnăveni in 1912, under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the same year, Slobozia was designated as an “urban commune” by a law enacted by King Carol I of Romania in Sinaia. Other

towns declared before World War I included Gura Humorului and Pucioasa (Săgeată 2002), while Mărășești and Moinești were granted urban commune<sup>3</sup> status later, in 1920 and 1921, respectively.

The number of towns in this period was low, as well as the share of the urban population. For example, before 1912, only seven towns existed in the Western Plain; these were Oradea, Timișoara, Lugoj, Satu Mare, Carei, Salonta, and Arad (Voiculescu, 2004).

The first modern, scientific, and objective general census of the population was conducted in 1930. According to this, the rural population constituted 78.6% of the total population (Mureșan, 1999, p. 45).



**Fig. 1.** The urban system of Romania in 1920

Note: the size of the circles represents the actual population of the towns

Source: own draft

<sup>3</sup> Before 1950, every settlement was a commune, either urban or rural (Varga, 1994). Rural communes were composed of one or more villages depending on their ability to sustain their own administration. Urban communes were further divided in two categories: towns, and suburban communes respectively. During the censuses of 1930, 1941 and 1948, data on suburban communes were subsumed to urban communes (Kardhordó, 1942, p. 142-143).

In Transylvania, by 1930, the urban population accounted for 20.2% of the total population. The increase of the urban population by 215,000 inhabitants over the past 30 years was a result of both the emergence of new towns and the natural population growth (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 210). One town had a population above 100,000 inhabitants, this was Cluj; two urban centers had a population between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants - Braşov and Sibiu -, while one town had between 40,000 and 50,000 inhabitants (Târgu Mureş). Turda had 21,429 inhabitants, while the rest of the urban settlements had less than 20,000 inhabitants (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 210). The most significant increases in population were recorded by the largest cities (Cluj 105%, Târgu Mureş 97%, Sibiu 64%, Braşov 62%) thanks to industrialization. Industrialization also contributed to the population growth in middle-sized towns. For example, Mediaş experienced an 84% increase, Turda 58%, Sfântu Gheorghe 46%, and both Dej and Deva 43% (Pop and Bodocan 2000, p. 201).

In the interwar period, significant changes took place in the settlement system of the country. The town network was expanded with 21 new settlements, as detailed in table 1 and illustrated in fig. 2.

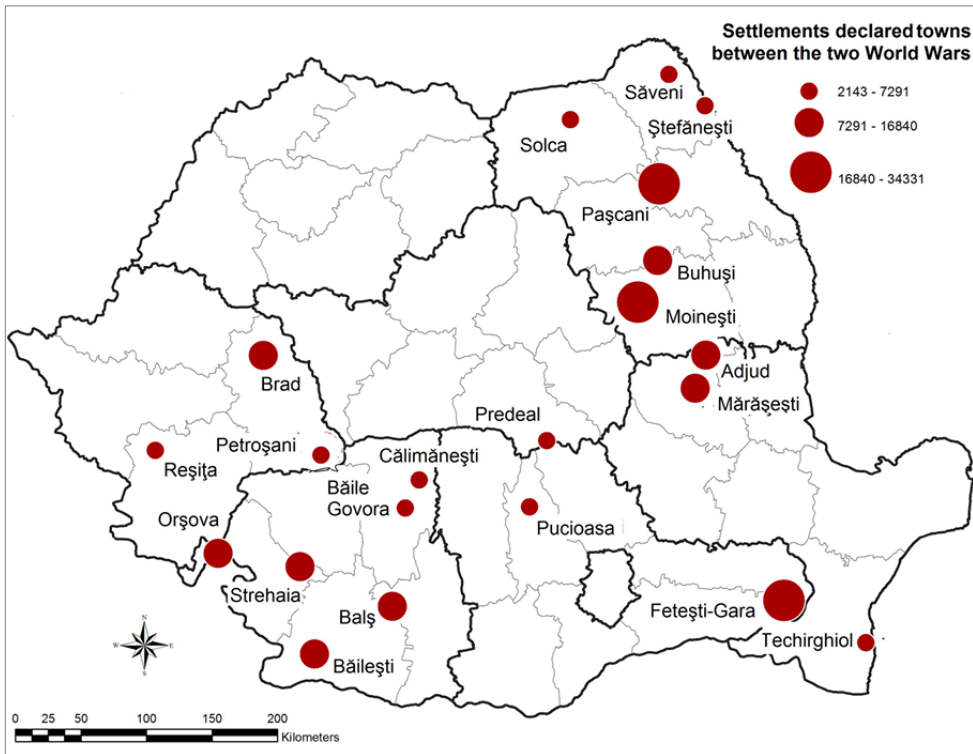
**Table 1.** Settlements declared urban in the interwar period by the year of declaration

Town	County	Year of declaration	Town	County	Year of declaration
Adjud	VN	1920	Paşcani	IS	1931
Băile Govora	VL	1927	Petroşani	HD	1930
Băileşti	DJ	1921	Predeal	BV	1935
Balş	OT	1921	Pucioasa	DJ	1938
Brad	HD	1927, 1941	Reşiţa	CS	1925
Buhuşi	BC	1930	Săveni	BT	1930 (?)
Călimăneşti	VL	1927	Solca	SV	1926
Feteşti	IL	1934 (?)	Ştefăneşti-Târg	BT	1930 (?)
Mărăşeşti	VN	1920	Strehaia	MH	1921
Moineşti	BC	1921	Techirghiol	CT	1928
Orşova	MH	1923	Lupeni	HD	1941

Source: Berekméri (2009), Săgeată (2002)

In most of the years between the two world wars, only one settlement gained urban status. The only exceptions were the year 1927, when three new towns were designated, and the years 1921 and 1930 with four new towns each.

However, granting urban status was not always a permanent decision. For instance, Brad became urban commune on 1st of April 1927, but was downgraded to rural commune on 1st of January 1930, in order to receive definitively its urban status at 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1941 (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 212; official site of the local council of Brad).



**Fig. 2.** New towns in the interwar period

Note: the size of the circles represents the actual population of the towns

Source: own draft

During this period, even the definitive withdrawal of the urban status was not uncommon. Certain settlements with urban status before the 1<sup>st</sup> World War were deprived by their rank before 1930: Chilia Veche, Cojocna, Mahmudia, and Ion Corvin (Berekméri, 2009).



#### 4. The socialist period (1948-1989)

The socialist period is of particular interest in the modern urbanization of Romania. There is considerable debate in the scientific literature about whether a “socialist model” exists (Enyedi, 1996, p. 101), whether cities under socialism developed differently from those in the West (Szelenyi, 1996, p. 286), and whether a distinctively socialist city existed (Smith, 1996, p. 70). Without contributing to this debate, I share the opinion that “it is important to understand the socialist antecedents, as far as the process of post-socialist urban transition does not operate in a vacuum, but it is embedded in the socioeconomic relationships inherited from the past” (Kovács, 1999). This applies not only for the spatial structure, but also the mentalities regarding urbanization.

The half-century of socialism had several phases marked by different development concepts. However, two basic principles of the socialist urbanization were egalitarianism (equalization of living conditions within the settlement network and within individual settlements) and planned urbanization (Enyedi, 1996, p. 109-110). As urbanization was exclusively government-defined - from the development of existing cities through the declaration of new towns to the territorial relocation of the population and the centrally controlled distribution of the resources - spontaneous phenomena of urban development were pushed into the background (Kovács, 2002). This period was marked by state-driven and state-controlled procedures, while the dominant regional development concept was the superiority of the urban settlements over rural ones. This meant the further development of existing cities (especially large industrial centres), the reclassification of several rural settlements as urban ones, and attempts to abolish villages. In the socialist perception, urbanization was viewed not only as the development of the actual towns, but also as the transformation of rural areas into urban ones. For this purpose, the “liquidation” of the contrast between village and town was necessary (Almășan-Radu, 1973). In other words, a characteristic feature of the socialist towns, as well as villages, was “the planned and rational development, designed to eliminate the excesses and contrasts that have deepened over times between the towns and the countryside” (Cucu, 1981). The approximation of these two living areas was, of course, ideologized: it was considered “the basic condition of the multilaterally developed socialist society” and aimed to “uplift the whole country to a high level of material and spiritual civilization” (Almășan-Radu, 1973, p. 3).

Before 1948, Romania had a rather low degree of urbanization, and the urbanization level was characterized by a slow growth starting from 1912 (16.3%) to 1930 (21.4%), and until 1948 (23.4%) (Trebici and Hristache, 1986). The apparently high urbanization level in 1948 (at least compared to

1912) was due to the large share of the urban population in the capital, Bucharest (28%). Without the capital, the urban population rate shrank to 18%. Significant differences existed between counties: values varied between the almost inexistent minimum of 6.3% in Gorj (but similarly low values in Sălaj – 7.5% and Bistrița-Năsăud – 8.4%) and the maximum of 35.2% in Brăila, 34.5% in Constanța, and 32.7% in Cluj (Trebici and Hristache, 1986). In the following half-century, the natural but slow urbanization process was replaced by a politically coordinated, state-driven, and extremely rapid urban development. Due to these state-controlled procedures, the spontaneity of urban development receded into the background (Kovács, 2002).

As a result of the socialist urban policy, the most intensive and accelerated stage of urbanization in the country took place from 1945 to 1989. During this period, the proportion of the urban population rose from 23% to 54% (Benedek, 2006a, 2006b; Ianoș and Tălângă, 1994). However, socialist urbanization was not a linear process (Benedek, 2006a). At the same time, a specific spatial structure emerged, characterized by the low level of development of the urban lifestyle and the low social integration capacity of the large cities (Benedek, 2006a, 2006b).

In the first years following 1948, urbanization began to grow more rapidly: while the total population increased at an annual average of 1.1%, the urban population grew by 3.5% per year. The highest rates of urbanization were registered by the counties of Hunedoara, Gorj, Maramureș, Harghita, Covasna, Bacău, thanks to the urbanization efforts (Trebici and Hristache, 1986).

The year 1948 was also marked by the withdrawal of town status, especially from small towns located in Moldova (Fălciu, Mihăileni, Ștefănești-Târg, Vama, Răcari, Filipești-Târg, Ostrov, Plenița). The main reason was that these settlements were only commercial centers without industry (Ianoș and Tălângă, 1994). Ștefănești-Târg, in Botoșani County, was an urban commune that lost its urban status in 1948. It changed its name to Ștefănești in 1968 and regained town status during the last town-awarding process in 2004. Săveni also lost its urban status in 1948 but regained it later in 1968 (Berekméri, 2009).

The socialist period has been divided in various ways by several authors, depending on their perspective of study. Enyedi (1996), for example, analyzed the urban policy development of the socialist era across Eastern Central Europe. He outlined that in the 1950s an explicit urban policy did not yet exist; sectoral planning was dominant, while principles of socialist urbanization were applied sporadically. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the first comprehensive regional and urban strategies were elaborated and implemented. These strategies were based on the principle of industrial decentralization, thus cities were regarded first of all as sites for industry, and their development prospects were designated according to this criterion.

Urban and industrial development were identical; the growth and decline in cities depended on their industrial functions. In the 1970s, the view about the role of cities changes substantially. They were no longer simple sites for industrial production: their central place functions became the focus of interest. The long-term goal was to integrate the urban and rural settlement networks into a unified whole.

Benedek (2006a, 2006b) and Sandu (1984) identified five stages of urban development. In the first stage (1950-1953), the number of cities increased from 148 to 171. First of all, settlements with industrial and mining functions (such as Câmpia Turzii, Zărnești, Ocna Mureș, etc.) and those with tourist functions (Covasna, Sovata, Borsec, etc.) were declared towns, but also a range of communes which were the most populous centers of extensive areas with low population density (Toplița, Cristuru Secuiesc, Rupea). During this period, the urbanization rate was 2.71%, the highest in the socialist era, but it was followed by its lowest point (1.24%) in the second stage (1954-1962) (Sandu, 1984). The 1956 census registered 33 new towns (Nicolae, 2002, p. 294). Two of these new towns, Lipova and Buziaș, were spa resorts; however, Lipova also had a historic importance: it was a royal residence in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as well as a *libera regiae civitas* (free royal city) (Voiculescu, 2004). In the same year, 14 urban settlements were reclassified as rural ones: Baia de Aramă, Darabani, Filipești-Târg, Huedin, Hârlău, Fălciu, Mihăileni, Ostrov, Penița, Răcari, Săveni, Ștefănești Târg, Târgu Frumos and Vama. The relegation of these towns (some of which were historical) was “quite unusual”. This can be explained by the fact that all of them - except Vama - were simple market towns (*târguri*) and many were severely affected by the war from an infrastructural point of view (e.g., Ștefănești Târg). These towns simply no longer met the new political requirements. However, some of them maintained their administrative functions as raional seats (*reședinte de raion*), such as Baia de Aramă, Darabani, and Hârlău. In 1968, only these towns regained their urban status out of those 14 settlements (Nicolae, 2002, p. 294; Ilinca, 1999, p. 168).

Also, at the 1956 census, there were 183 localities classified as urban settlements (*localități asimilate urbanului*), whose population represented 13.3% of the total urban population. Most of the new towns of the coming decades will be selected out from these settlements. So, in the 1960s and 1970s, former workers' centers of Cugir, Luduș, Călan, Becaș, Boldești-Scăeni, Valea Călugărească, Țicleni, or tourist destinations like Băile Tușnad and Băile Borșa became towns. By 1989, additional towns included Teiuș, Tâlmăciu, Nehoiu, Bumbesti-Jiu, Colibași, Aninoasa, and Piatra Olt. However, a significant part of the localities classified as urban did not gain the rank of town: examples include Iașalnița (near Craiova), Brazi (near Ploiești), Săvinești (near Piatra Neamț), Chișcani (near Brăila) (Nicolae, 2002; Ilinca, 1999, p. 168).

At this stage, it should be noted that while acting on the existing settlement system, the socialist regime produced only two “totally new” towns, i.e. towns built starting from zero, which represented “the purest version of the planned socialist city” (Smith, 1996, p. 70). One of these was Victoria, a new center for the defence industry in Braşov County, whose construction began in 1948 under the name Ucea (Colonia Ucea, Ucea Roşie). The completely new town was renamed Victoria in 1954 (official website of the town of Victoria). The other town, Oneşti (Bacău County), was a centre for chemical industry established in 1960. It was known as Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej during the socialist era (despite the existence of a small village with the same name, the industrial area as well as the residential areas were separate developments) (Benedek, 2006b, p. 53).

In the year 1960, a total of 12 new towns were declared, thanks to their economic development (Copşa Mică, Luduş, Călan, Cugir, Bocşa, Bicăz, Oţelu Roşu, etc.) (Ilinca, 1999, p. 168). For example, Oţelu Roşu, was created by merging two settlements, Ohaba Bistra and Ferdinand, in 1943. The resulting town, Ferdinand-Bistra, was renamed Oţelu Roşu by the communists in 1948. When it was declared an urban area, it also incorporated two neighboring settlements, Cireşa and Mal, in its administration.

The spring of the year 1962 is of particular importance from the rural-urban migration point of view. The generalization of the collectivization took place, and this was the date when “the gates of rural-urban migration opened wide”: the coming period - that of the accelerated industrialization (1963-1981) - resulted directly in the “demographic emptying” of the rural space (Surd, 2010, p. 71).

In the third phase (1963-1970), the number of urban settlements first increased to 184 until 1966, then, in the period between 1966 and 1968, another range of settlements were promoted to the rank of town (Benedek, 2006a). Thus, in May of 1966, the locality of Motru was declared town, while following the measures for improving the administrative division, three other localities became towns in 1967: Marghita, Ineu, and Bălan. In this way, the country's urban network consisted of 187 urban settlements, out of which 45 were cities (Cucu, 1968, p. 17).

Especially the number of towns from the category of 20,000-50,000 inhabitants grew significantly: from 16 in 1930 to 25 in 1956, and to 43 in 1966. The number of towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants grew as well: from 3 in 1930 to 7 in 1956, and to 12 in 1966. At the same time, a noticeable fall occurred in the number of towns with a population less than 10,000, from 74 in 1930 to 70 in 1956, and to 60 in 1966 (Cucu, 1968, p. 21).

The period 1948-1968 represented also the first phase of the socialist industrialization, which aimed to develop the existing industrial centers, and in this way facilitated the further development of existing cities, especially the large industrial centers (Benedek, 2006b). The adopted Soviet-based model of planning relied on economic growth through hypertrophic industrial development, with highlight on industry (in particular on heavy industry), on the promotion of the working class and on defence-related investment (Săgeată, 2010, p. 81). The socialist industrialization of the country was reflected in the continuous growth of urbanization, as well as in the emergence and development of new urban centers (Cucu, 1968, p. 17). Ianoş and Tălângă noted that the hierarchical configuration of the Romanian urban system demonstrates a very close relationship between the industrialization and urbanization processes, which was especially true for the middle part of the hierarchy (Ianoş and Tălângă, 1994, p. 104).

According to Pop and Bodocan (2000), the new towns in Transylvania - 27 in total between 1948 and 1966 - resulted from the planned industrial process which begun after 1948 which had the effect of creating urban centers in the industrial area of Braşov (Codlea, Covasna, Râşnov, Săcele, Zărneşti, Rupea, and Victoria), as well as in the coal mining area of the Jiu Valley (Călan, Lupeni, Petrila, Uricani, and Vulcan), and in other industrial and service centers across Transylvania in the counties of Alba (Câmpeni, Cugir, and Ocna Mureş), Bistriţa-Năsăud (Sângeorz-Băi), Cluj (Câmpia Turzii), Harghita (Borsec, Cristuru Secuiesc, Topliţa), Hunedoara (Simeria), Mureş (Luduş and Sovata) and Sibiu (Agnita, Cislădie, Copşa Mică). In this period, in Transylvania the biggest town was Cluj-Napoca (183,663 inhabitants), while the smallest was Borsec (2,750 inhabitants) (Pop and Bodocan, 2000, p. 212).

**Table 2.** Towns declared between 1948 and 1968

<b>Name of the town</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Year of declaration</b>	<b>Name of the town</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Year of declaration</b>
Agnita	SB	1950	Lipova	AR	1956
Anina	CS	1952	Marghita	BH	1967
Azuga	PH	1948	Moldova Noua	CS	1956
Baicoi	PH	1948	Moreni	DB	no data
Baile Herculane	CS	1948	Motru	GJ	1966
Baile Olanesti	VL	1948/1956 (no exact data)	Negresti-Oas	SM	1964
Bicaz	NT	1960	Nucet	BH	1956
Bocsa	CS	1961	Ocna Mures	AB	1956
Borsec	HR	1956	Oonesti	BC	1956

Name of the town	County	Year of declaration	Name of the town	County	Year of declaration
Breaza	PH	1952	Otelu Rosu	CS	1960
Busteni	PH	1946	Petrita	HD	1948 (no exact data)
Buzias	TM	1956	Rasnov	BV	1950
Calan	HD	1961	Rupea	BV	1951
Campeni	AB	1961	Sacele	BV	1950
Campia Turzii	CJ	1952	Sangeorz-Bai	BN	1960
Cisnadie	SB	1948	Sannicolau Mare	TM	1956
Codlea	BV	1950	Simeria	HD	1952
Comanesti	BC	1952	Slanic Moldova	BC	1950
Copsa Mica	SB	no data	Sovata	MS	1955
Covasna	CV	1952	Stei (Petru Groza)	BH	1952
Cristuru Secuiesc	HR	1952	Toplita	HR	1956
Cugir	AB	1960	Uricani	HD	1965
Eforie	CT	no data	Vascau	BH	1956
Huedin	CJ	1961	Victoria	BV	1949 (no exact data)
Ineu	AR	1967	Viseu de Sus	MM	1956
Jimbolia	TM	1950	Vulcan	HD	no data
Ludus	MS	1960	Zarnesti	BV	1951

*Source: Voiculescu, 2004; Săgeată, 2002*

Benedek (2006a, 2006b) and Sandu (1984) note that an important event was the administrative reorganization from 1968, when the county system was re-established. The administrative classification had also a function-distribution and state aid distribution role. In this third phase, the pace of urbanization slowly increased (1.5%).

The year of 1968 appears as a watershed in other opinions and divisions as well. Law no. 2/1968 marked a large-scale transformation: a transition was made to a new administrative-territorial organization with the county as administrative unit, which replaced the Soviet-type model (Săgeată, 2002). Instead of the 16 regions, 39 counties (plus the city of Bucharest) have emerged, while the town and the village were established as basic units, and all the intermediate levels were removed (Ianoş, 1987, p. 40). The territorial structure based on counties highlighted the low economic potential of urban centres which could not develop in the shadow of the former regional seats. After the year of 1968, the new county seats - Botoşani, Bistriţa, Buzău, Slobozia, Miercurea Ciuc, Vaslui, Alexandria, Zalău, etc. - registered spectacular jumps (Ianoş, 1987).

Through Law no. 2/1968, 50 new towns<sup>4</sup> were declared, so the number of towns rose to 189, to whom a number of 47 cities must be added<sup>5</sup>.

A characteristic of the period preceding 1968, especially 1956-1968, was that the new towns were declared on a rural background. In these new towns, certain industrial units were implemented which have taken over a part of the industrial activity from the nearby towns (Voiculescu, 2004, p. 92).

Between 1948 and 1966, the number of towns increased from 152 la 183. In the same period, the number of towns/1000 km<sup>2</sup> increased from 0.6 to 0.8, while the number of towns/county from 3.7 to 4.5 (Ilinca, 1999).

**Table 3.** Towns declared in 1968

Towns declared in 1968	County	Towns declared in 1968	County
Aleșd	BH	Întorsura Buzăului	CV
Baia de Aramă	MH	Jibou	SJ
Băile Tușnad	HR	Nădlac	AR
Bălan	HR	Năvodari	CT
Baraolt	CV	Negrești	VS
Beclean	BN	Novaci	GJ
Berești	GL	Ocna Sibiului	SB
Boldești-Scăeni	PH	Pâncota	AR
Borșa	MM	Plopeni	PH
Brezoi	VL	Săveni	BT
Buftea	IF	Sebiș	AR
Cavnic	MM	Segarcea	DJ
Cehu Silvaniei	SJ	Tândărei	IL
Chișineu-Criș	AR	Târgu Bujor	GL
Comarnic	PH	Târgu Cărbunești	GJ
Costești	AG	Târgu Frumos	IS
Curtici	AR	Târgu Lăpuș	MM
Dărăbani	BT	Tășnad	SM
Deta	TM	Țicleni	GJ
Drăgănești-Olt	OT	Titu	DB
Făureni	BR	Topoloveni	AG
Fieni	DB	Vânju Mare	MH

<sup>4</sup> In the literature the number of newly declared towns do not match across the different studies and authors. For example, Ioan Ianoș (1987, p. 40) writes about 54 new towns, Ilinca (1999, p. 168) mentions 49 such towns in 1968, while the law itself contains 50 such settlements. I tried to go back, if possible, to the most original sources (the law, in this case), and interpreted these first of all.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that from a legal point of view the term *town* does not refer to all types of urban settlements, so cities and towns mean entirely separate categories.

Towns declared in 1968	County	Towns declared in 1968	County
Filiași	DJ	Videle	TR
Hârlău	IS	Vlahița	HR
Horezu	VL	Zlatna	AB

Source: Law no. 2/1968

Some towns declared this year have experienced changes in their status even up to three times in their history. For example, *Dărăbani* received town status in 1926, but was downgraded to commune in 1950, in order to be re-declared urban in 1968. *Deta* became urban for the first time in 1810 in the Austro-Hungarian era, while in 1968 received the town rank for the third time in its history. The town of *Hârlău*, initially part of Botoșani County, fulfilled different administrative functions (seat of the district - *reședința plășii* - Coșula, than Hârlău) until it was downgraded to the rank of commune in 1950. Hârlău became a town again in 1968, already as a part of Iași County (Anuarul Socec). Most of the towns declared in 1968 were located in agricultural areas (Segarcea, Topoloveni, Vânju Mare, Berești, Săveni, Dărăbani, Târgu Bujor, etc.), or were mining centers (Țicleni, Bălan, Cavnic, Zlatna), centers of industry of construction materials (Fieni, Comarnic, Aleșd) and wood industry (*Deta*, Brezoi, Întorsura Buzăului) (Ilinca, 1999, p. 168).

A characteristic of the urbanization of 1967-1968 is that two or more rural settlements were “stitched together” in the moment of their reclassification as urban (practically, villages were merged in order to make towns). One of the most prominent examples is the case of *Tășnad*, which was merged with five other rural settlements (Blaja, Gig, Rațiu, Sărășad and Valea Morii) when it became a town in 1968. Voiculescu notices: “It was intended, obviously, a contribution of the population which was necessary to fulfill the numeric criterion for a settlement to become a town. *Tășnad* has a rural character even today” (Voiculescu, 2004, p. 94). The author points out other declarations through merging as well in the Western Plain (Ineu, Pâncota, Chișineu Criș, Sebiș, Deta).

Because of the turning into towns of settlements which were rural before, “jumps” were recorded in 1956, 1966 and 1968 in the accentuated, but linear evolution of the urban population. In general, in the period between 1950 and 1974, the growth rate of urban population was about three times higher than the growth rate of total population (Meașnicov, 1977). Of course, this meant differentiated rates of urban population growth by type and by size of the towns in the same period (1956-1974). The fastest rates were recorded by towns with 20,000-100,000 inhabitants and with predominantly secondary and tertiary functions. In turn, small towns with population less than 20,000 and mostly employed in agriculture had the lowest rates (Meașnicov, 1977, p. 59).



In the fourth stage (1971-1980) identified by Benedek (2006a, 2006b) and Sandu (1984), the urbanization rhythm escalated sharply. As a result of an administrative action, 49 settlements were declared towns: all the settlements with mining functions (for example Baraolt, Bălan), those with considerable tourist functions (such as Băile Tușnad), but also several agricultural settlements in order to strengthen the bottom level of settlement network. Tóth (1988, p. 191) calls the 1970s the period of a balanced yet faster-than-necessary concentration of the population in urban areas.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1974 the Law of systematization of the territory and of the urban and rural settlements (*Legea sistemizării teritoriului și localităților urbane și rurale*) was adopted. Theoretically, the goal of the systematization was “to provide dynamic organization of space in order to increase the welfare of the population” (Cucu, 1977, p. 18), but it was ideologically supported by the idea of the superiority of the urban settlement and lifestyle. Systematization as an “objective requirement of contemporary and future development” aimed the approach of the rural lifestyle to that of the urban one, and the gradual erasure of the differences between the village and the city (Cucu, 1977, p. 13), in favour of the urban, of course. The destruction of villages was intended, which involved two different processes, redevelopment and complete elimination of small villages by planned bulldozing (Turnock, 1991). The systematization of the rural settlements meant also for the coming 15-20 years the selection of 300-400 communes with more than 5,000 inhabitants which will become new urban centers, through “vast, conscious and directed activities” (Cucu, 1977, p. 52-53). Thus, the future urban network would contain about 350 towns in 1980, 450 towns in 1990, and 580 towns in 2000 (Cucu, 1977, p. 130).

The new regional development concept of the seventies meant not only the destruction of villages, but also the strong development of the towns (Benedek, 2006b). In 1979, through the Decree no. 281 of 27<sup>th</sup> July 1979, certain county seats were upgraded to the rank of city; these were Alexandria (Teleorman), Bistrița (Bistrița-Năsăud), Miercurea Ciuc (Harghita), Sfântu Gheorghe (Covasna), Slatina (Olt), Slobozia (Ialomița), Vaslui (Vaslui), and Zalău (Sălaj). The decree modified the Annex of Law no. 2/1968 accordingly (source: Decree no. 281/1979).

The fifth stage (1980-1989) coincides with the stagnation of the socialist era. The urbanization slowed down. No promotions were made until 1989, except one special case: Rovinari, a mining center, was declared town in 1981, bringing the total number of towns to 237 (Turnock, 1991). In 1989 one last town declaration program occurred before the revolution: 23 new towns joined the urban system. Many are centers of industry and services (Avrig, Colibași, Dărmănești, Nehoiu, Tălmăciu), while others are to be found in areas remote

from existing towns (Turnock, 1991). Muica et al. (2000) highlights the political nature of the town proclamations. They note that for example in Buzău County in the 1970s four villages were selected for promotion to urban status (Beceni, Berca, Nehoiu, Pătărlagele), along with Pogoanele in the plains. Eight other promotions were to follow during the 1980s, including Pârscov, “which was later dropped in favor of Zărnești” (Muica et al. 2000, p. 158). But only two of them, Nehoiu and Pogoanele received the urban status in 1989.

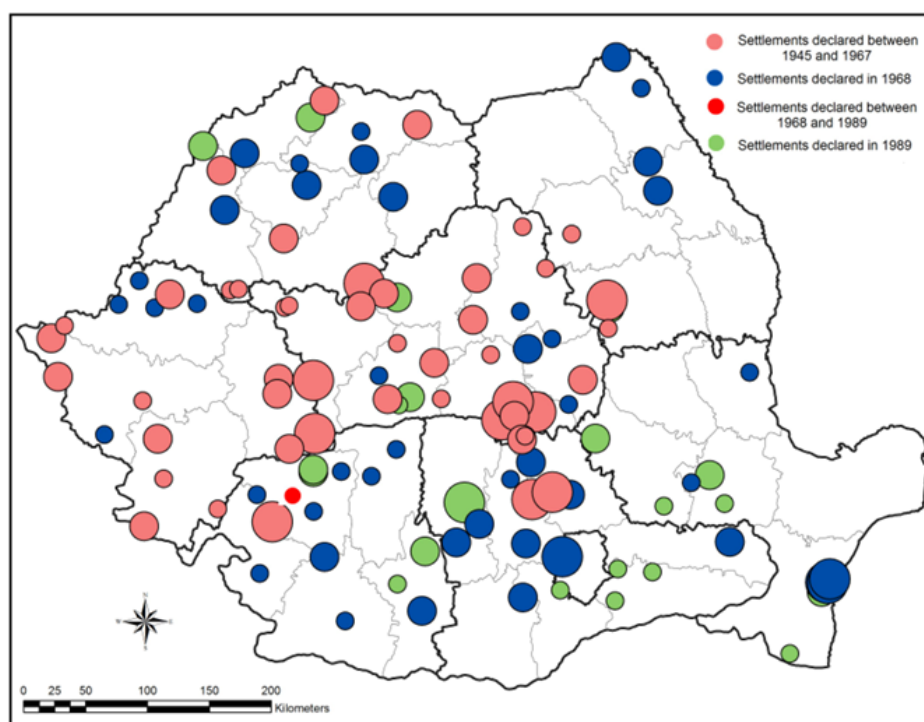
**Table 4.** Towns declared in 1989

Name of the town	County	Name of the town	County
Aninoasa	HD	Mioveni (Colibași)	AG
Avrig	SB	Murfatlar (Basarabi)	CT
Bolintin-Vale	GR	Negru Vodă	CT
Budești	CL	Nehoiu	BZ
Bumbești-Jiu	GJ	Ovidiu	CT
Dărmănești	BC	Piatra-Olt	OT
Fundulea	CL	Pogoanele	BZ
Ianca	BR	Scornicești	OT
Iernut	MS	Seini	MM
Insuratei	BR	Talmaciu	SB
Lehliu-Gară	CL	Valea lui Mihai	BH
Mihăilești	GR		

*Source: Turnock (1991), with a small correction: the author enumerates 24 towns, but one of them - Gurahonț - was not an urban settlement.*

Ioan Ianoș (1987) divided the period after 1968 in three stages. The first started in 1968 and was ended by the XI. Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist Român* - P.C.R.) in 1974, when emphasis was placed on the economic development of the new county seats. The second stage took place between the XI. Congress and the XII. Congress (1979) of the P.C.R., and was marked by industrial reanimation of other towns, especially small and medium-sized ones, which were part of the county level urban networks (for example, Șimleu Silvaniei, Lipova, Dorohoi, Mangalia, Urziceni, Mizil, Strehăia, Tășnad, Toplița, Cristuru Secuiesc, etc.). The third stage lasted, basically, until the fall of the regime, and was characterized by the industrial and economic development of numerous rural localities, in general. In this last stage the regime intended the strengthening of the economic base of the future urban centers, which would complete the national urban network, and especially the network of certain counties with a lower degree of urbanization

(Ianoş, 1987, p. 40). This “reverse” urbanization - modernizing first the top of the urban hierarchy, then the medium-sized cities, finally developing and expanding the number of small towns - was typical everywhere where modern economic development was delayed (Enyedi, 1996, p. 114).



**Fig. 3.** New towns in the socialist period by the year of their declaration  
*Source: own draft*

The most representative phenomenon of the above-mentioned 1966-1985 period is the significant modification of the median sector of the urban hierarchy, namely the much faster population growth in medium-sized cities compared to other urban settlements (due to the role of county seat, first of all). Compared to 1966, the population of these cities in 1982 exceeded increases of 150-200%<sup>6</sup> (Ianoş 1987, p. 40).

<sup>6</sup> For example, 255% in Râmnicu Vâlcea, 241% in Slatina, 235% in Slobozia, 213% in Zalău, 202% in Vaslui, 189% in Sfântu Gheorghe, 174% in Miercurea-Ciuc, 175% in Deva, 169% in Târgovişte, etc. (Ianoş, 1987, p. 40).

The growth of the urban population was an important issue of the socialist urbanization. The urban population actually doubled between the censuses of 1956 and 1977 (+ 98%), and increased by 32% between those of 1977 and 1992 (Mureşan, 1999, p. 106). Researchers dealing with the socialist era identified three main ways of the urban population growth that explain the continuous increase of the urbanization in the period of 1948-1990: (1) the high rate of natural growth of the population in the majority of towns; (2) the rural-urban migration (these two are interrelated also: the migration flows were constituted first of all by young persons between 18 and 40 years with high fertility, and they not only led to an increase in the population of towns, but also to better values of the natural growth of the population), and (3) increase of the share of the urban population through administrative measures. These measures had three specific forms: declaration of new towns, delimitation of new suburban communities, and the inclusion of some villages as parts of the towns (Ianoş and Tălângă, 1994; Cucu, 1968; Ilinca, 1999; Benedek 2006; Sandu, 1984).

Rural-urban migration is considered the most influential cause by the researchers of the socialist period (Cucu, 1968; Mureşan, 1999, etc.). The migration was mainly from rural to urban areas, as “urban-based employment offered the prospect of higher living standards at a time when collectivization removed much of the satisfaction in looking after the family estate”, all over Eastern Europe (Drgona and Turnock, 2000, p. 235). The balance of switching from one environment to another is favorable for the urban one for the entire period. Net emigration rates from rural were always positive (Mureşan, 1999, p. 106). The evolution of the number of rural inhabitants demonstrates the same: Rotariu (1997) - quoted by Mureşan (1999, p. 106) - stated that the rural population has fluctuated around 12 million inhabitants for a long period of time, which proves that the whole natural increase has been lost through migration. After 1980, there was even a demographic drop of the number of rural inhabitants, that is, the rural areas lost more than their natural increase. According to Sandu (1987), the rural to urban migration flow - together with the natural growth rate of population specific to the residential environments and with the reclassification of settlements - led to a redistribution of the population between rural and urban areas, which had a changing amplitude over time<sup>7</sup>. But despite the changing amplitude, it was the main contribution to urban population growth in all stages of the socialist period (Mureşan, 1999, p. 103).

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<sup>7</sup> Sandu (1987, p. 191) defines: (1) stages of low amplitude characterized by a low level of urbanization and development and a dispersed rural-urban migration (1940-1948/1950; 1955/1956-1966; 1982-1985), (2) stages of high amplitude realized first of all through intensive rural-urban migration (1970-1976/1978; 1950-1954/1955), and (3) stages of medium redistribution, realized by a combined effect of rural-urban migration and differentiated natural growth (1966-1970; 1979/1980-1982).

Until 1948, internal migration had an “anarchic” nature and was directed especially towards Bucharest and other big cities. During the years 1948-1989 the flow of rural population to towns had a planned character. The Romanian state wanted to avoid excessive concentration of population in cities, as well as the inherent economic and social difficulties, public health problems, the shortage of residential space and issues arising from it, encouraging thus the establishment of the migrants in medium-sized cities with industrial character. Starting with 1982, bans were introduced which forbade residence in big cities, which were declared “closed towns”. In 1990 all access barriers in these cities have been removed (Mureşan, 1999, p. 103).

Opinions vary about the second most important way of the urban population growth. The natural growth is emphasized by Mureşan (1999), Ilinca (1999) and others. Ilinca argues that the total increase of population recorded by the 183 cities existent in 1966 was achieved mainly through migration (70%) and natural growth (22.2%), while the contribution of new cities was only 7.8% (Ilinca, 1999). Mureşan states that in the period of 1948-1966, the natural increase makes a substantial contribution to the growth of the urban population, because, despite of the decrease of birth rate, death rate suffers a serious diminution. But in the period of 1967-1989, natural increase was not the main cause of the urban population growth, despite that it had positive values constantly (Mureşan, 1999, p. 102). Natural growth was strongly related to the pro-natalist legislation. The “natalist period” lasted two decades, between 1966 and 1989, and strongly influenced fertility. Fertility in Romania almost doubled, from 1.9 to 3.6 children per woman (Mureşan, 1999, p. 125).

Based on the ratio of natural increase and migration in the evolution of cities, Ilinca defined towns with population originated predominantly from migration (Galaţi, Brăila, Oneşti, Craiova, Hunedoara); towns with population originated predominantly from natural growth (located close to big urban centers, like Curtici, Buftea, Topoloveni, Râşnov, Cîsnădie, Bocşa, or thanks to their predominantly agricultural economic profile, for example Băileşti, Dărăbani, Cehu Silvaniei, Drăgăşani, Strehaia, Salonta); finally, towns with population coming in almost equal proportions from natural growth and migration (emerging urban areas from economic and sociocultural point of view) (Ilinca, 1999, p. 169).

Administrative measures, namely the reclassification of the settlements from one category to another - i. e. from rural to urban - are the second most important, at least in the opinion of Cucu (1968, p. 24), Ianoş and Tălângă (1994). The latter note that in 1990 there were 124 more towns compared to 1948, which means about 0.9 million inhabitants. Two phases are considered

as more important in the town declaration process: 1968 (50 rural settlements were made towns<sup>8</sup>) and 1989 (23 new towns appeared). The territorial distribution of these settlements is diffuse, without a particular concentration in certain areas (Ianoş and Tălângă, 1994). Regarding the reclassification of the settlements, there were no clear demographic, economic or lifestyle criteria for a village to become a town in this period. Most of the towns have emerged through decrees, laws and decisions of Parliament, encompassing a big amount of subjectivity (for example, settlements of origin of dictators, rural settlements with important role in labor movement) (Ianoş, 2004). In the opinion of Mureşan (1999), the declaration of new towns had a reduced contribution to the urbanization, because the new towns were small in terms of number of inhabitants, thus contributed very little to the increase of the urban population (Mureşan, 1999, p. 102).

The creation of suburban communes resulted also in the growth of the urban population, however in an artificial way. The category of the suburban communes summed about 700,000 inhabitants, namely 6% of the total urban population (Ilinca, 1999, p. 167). The demographic yearbook of Romania subsequently incorporated the population of the towns declared in 1968 to the urban population counted at the 1966 census, while between 1977 and 1992, 77 settlements were attached to the nearby towns (Mureşan, 1999, p. 102). Ensuring the continuous growth of the share of urban population was important also, because a high proportion of rural population represented a symbol of the backward past (Enyedi, 1996, p. 114).

A characteristic of Romania is the extremely fast pace in which urbanization occurred. This is demonstrated by the high values of the average annual growth rate between the population censuses: 4.97% between 1948 and 1956; 2.93% in the period of 1956-1966; 2.31% between 1966 and 1977, and 1.86% in the period of 1977-1992 (Mureşan, 1999, p. 101) respectively. The urban population has increased four times after 1930 up to and including 1992 (Mureşan, 1999, p. 103), as indicated in the table below.

**Table 5.** Rate of urbanization in Romania during the socialist period (%)

Residential area	1948	1956	1966	1977	1982	1992
Urban	23.4	31.3	38.2	43.6	51.5	54.3

*Source: Trebici and Hristache, 1986; Mureşan, 1999, p. 102*

<sup>8</sup> As mentioned earlier, Ianoş and Tălângă are speaking about 52 new towns in 1968 (Mureşan is speaking even about 53), but the analysis of the law itself made clear, that there were only 50 new towns.

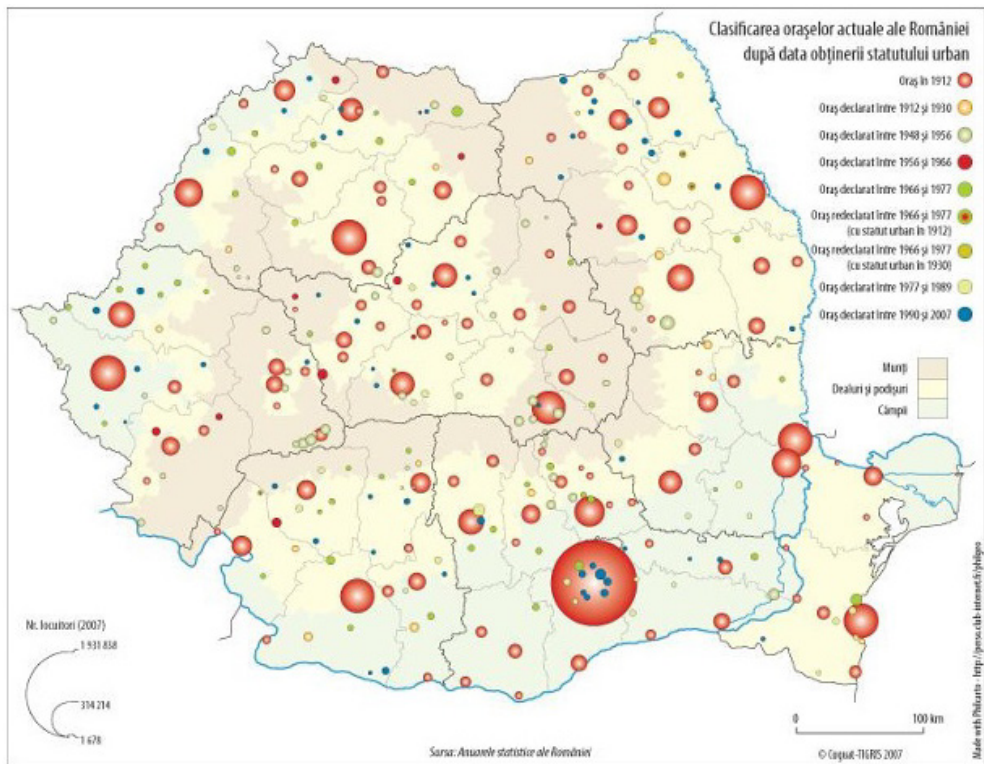
In 1982, the number of urban settlements was 237, while the average population of a town consisted of 45,875 inhabitants. But the level of urbanization was very differentiated on county level, ranging from 17.2% (Giurgiu) to 75.3% (Braşov). Highly, medium and poorly urbanized counties could be separated (Trebici and Hristache, 1986). Trebici and Hristache (1986) mentions also, that in this period the urbanization correlates significantly with the industrialization. The highest levels of urbanization are characteristic to counties with old industrial centers (such as Braşov, Huedin, Sibiu, Cluj, Timiş, Caraş-Severin, Prahova), or new ones (Galaţi) – apart from a few exceptions like Constanţa and Brăila.

At 1<sup>st</sup> July 1985, the population of those 237 towns accounted for almost 11.4 million inhabitants. If counting also the suburban communes, the urban population represented 53.1% of the total Romanian population (Ianoş, 1987, p. 37). Ianoş pointed out that the towns have polarized the whole territory of the country, but with differentiated intensity from one county to another. On average, every town of the country corresponded to an area of approximately 1000 km<sup>2</sup>, which encompassed 11.4 communes and 56.2 villages. But the values were spread between 335 km<sup>2</sup>/town (Prahova) and 3810 km<sup>2</sup>/town (Giurgiu), respectively between 5.2 communes/town (Harghita) and 57 communes/town (Giurgiu), as well as between 24 villages/town (Covasna) and 187 villages/town (Giurgiu). The striking differences between the counties have imposed the overtaking of certain polarizing functions by certain rural settlements, which benefited from economic development, as well as social-cultural endowments in order to become capable of exercising command functions in the territory (Ianoş, 1987, p. 37).

After a somewhat stabilized increase of 0.6-0.8% in the period of 1982-1988, a sharp upward move of 1.3% was registered in 1989 (determined in a proportion of more than 2/3 by the declaration of those 23 new towns) (Ianoş and Tălânga, 1994).

But because of the fast pace and short period of urbanization, the development level of the urban lifestyle remained low (Benedek, 2006a). The settlements were exposed to “forcible urbanization, but only insofar as quantity was concerned”, due to artificial multiplication of towns and of the town population. The politically maneuvered oversized urbanization was not correlated with the absorption capacity of the urban centers, thus could not integrate the big migratory flows from the countryside (Săgeată, 2010, p. 81). The socialist conditions in which the urban system evolved after 1948 eliminated the “natural” competition between the towns, letting policy decisions to play the predominant role in organizing the network of cities (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, [www.mdrl.ro](http://www.mdrl.ro)). While the

hierarchy of the socialist urban system had an artificial character (on national, but especially on regional and county level) (Ianoş and Tălângă, 1995, p. 101), the urban system found itself also in a fake state of equilibrium by the end of the communist period: whereas some cities with a traditional and consolidated territorial role with specific functions were artificially pulled back, the new ones had no time to develop the normal urban structures and strengthen the territorial relations (Pascariu and Elisei, 2012, p. 3). After the modifications of the transition period - because of its relative youth and still immature character -, the Romanian urban hierarchy needs to complete its maturation process (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, Territorial Atlas of Romania, [www.mdrl.ro](http://www.mdrl.ro)).



**Fig. 4.** The towns of Romania according to the year of their declaration  
 Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, Territorial atlas of Romania (<http://www.mdrap.ro/>)



## 5. Conclusions

From the 18th century to the post-socialist period, the history of modern urbanization of Romania was characterized by a strong pro-urban sentiment, with towns and cities seen as centers of development and well-being. Initially, urbanization in Eastern Europe, including Romania, was driven by administrative functions rather than economic development, unlike in Western Europe where industrial capitalism played a key role. By the mid-19th century, the rate of urbanization in Romania was low, with small towns and a predominantly rural population. The Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 19th century began to influence the country, leading to gradual urbanization, however, the urban growth in Romania was slower compared to Western Europe.

The socialist period (1948-1989) marked a significant shift in Romania's urbanization, driven by state-controlled and planned urban development. The regime's policies focused on egalitarianism and the superiority of urban settlements over rural ones, leading to the expansion of existing cities, the creation of new towns, and attempts to eliminate villages. This period saw a deliberate effort to transform rural areas into urban ones, aiming to uplift the entire country to a "higher level of civilization". The planned development and the attempt to reduce contrasts between urban and rural areas, together with the idea of superiority of the urban areas resulted in a legacy of a strong pro-urban sentiment that had a significant influence on the post-socialist urbanization of Romania.

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