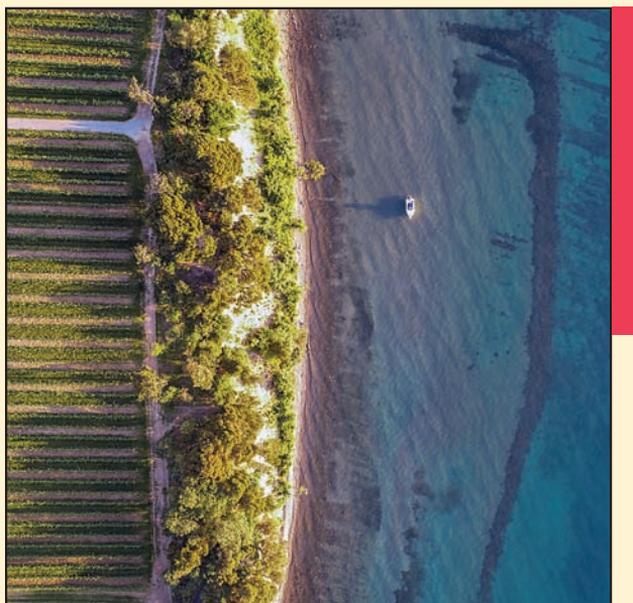


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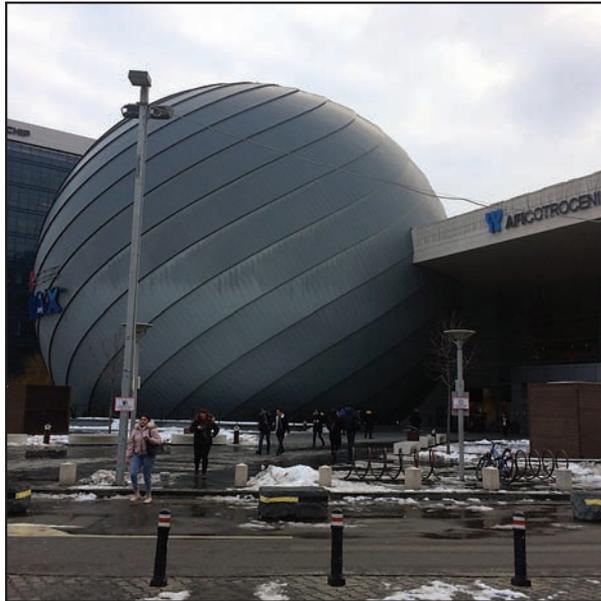
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COMMERCIAL SERVICES AND URBAN SPACE RECONVERSION IN ROMANIA (1990–2017)

Radu Săgeată



RADU SĂGEATĂ

»Afi Cotroceni«, the biggest mall in Romania (over 90,000 sqm, commercial surface), was open on Oct. 29, 2009. The structure was built in a former industrial area (Electrical Equipment Plant, Bucharest).

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Radu Săgeată¹

Commercial services and urban space reconversion in Romania (1990–2017)

ABSTRACT: Concentrating incomes in large cities has encouraged the development of specialist services and the opening of big commercial units. The downfall of ideological barriers east of the former Iron Curtain made global culture combine with endemic sub-cultures, influenced by the living standard. The only limitation of this process appears to be social segregation which restricts demand and creates preferential segments of users. In Romania, financial segregation is directly reflected in the commercial investment made in Bucharest and in the large cities, mostly in the centre and western part of the country. The paper analyses the correlation of financial and commercial services, as well as their location and dispersion strategies at the level of the Romanian urban system.

KEY WORDS: globalization, urban spatial reconversion, services, commercial investments, Romania

Trgovske storitve in ponovna preobrazba mestnega prostora v Romuniji (1990–2017)

POVZETEK: Zgoščanje dohodka v velikih mestih je spodbudilo razvoj specializiranih storitev in odpiranje velikih trgovskih središč. Zaradi padca ideoloških ovir vzhodno od nekdanje železne zavesse se je začela globalna kultura mešati z lokalnimi subkulturami, kolikor jim je to dopuščal življenjski standard. Edina slabost tega procesa je socialna segregacija, ki omejuje povpraševanje in ustvarja prednostne segmente uporabnikov. V Romuniji se finančna segregacija neposredno kaže v naložbah v gradnjo trgovskih središč v Bukarešti in večjih mestih, zlasti v osrednjem in zahodnem delu države. V članku avtor analizira povezavo med finančnimi in trgovskimi storitvami ter strategije, povezane z njihovim umeščanjem in razpršenostjo na ravni romunskega urbanega sistema.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: globalizacija, ponovna preobrazba mestnega prostora, storitve, naložbe v trgovska središča, Romunija

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1 Introduction

With the collapse of ideological barriers at the end of the 1980s, deep-going economic mutations took place in the former communist space. In Romania, transition from a central-based economy to a free-competition system, destructured the economy, a new economic structures being put instead. However, corruption and failed privatizations made especially industrial units bankrupt, which eventually were among the first to disappear. A new space-dependency between production and consumption and new spatial poles that concentrated the population's incomes would develop (Ianoş and Heller 2006).

The main aim of the present study is to highlight changes in the urban space organization after the decline of industry and the development of commercial services which have re-balanced the territorial systems disturbed by oversized industrialization under communism. As a result, large rural-urban migration flows got momentum, associated with a fast-growing housing-stock in the city (Goodman and Marshall 2013). This process, which could be labelled »quantitative urbanization«, evolved faster than »qualitative urbanization«, that is, the development of a technical-building and services infrastructure (Novotný 2016).

The issues discussed in this paper highlight the relationships between territorial disparities, purchasing power and the location of financial-banking and commercial investments in Romania. After the industrial sector had collapsed, a services sector developed, these processes being characteristic of the former central-based economies in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 (Brühlhart, Carrère and Robert-Nicoud 2018). Also, the logic behind big commercial investments and the social impact of promoting the services sector through big commercial investments is discussed herein.

Deindustrialization means reducing the share of industry in a country's economy, or in a human community. This is specific to the periods of transition, or of economic crises and affects both the industrial production and people's lives as real wages and the living standard are declining and unemployment is rising (Rita Sedita, De Noni and Pilotti 2017). Transition from an excessively industrialized economy to a free-competition system is marked by globalization, deindustrialization preceding the development of the services sector. The complex relations between deindustrialization and the emergence of the services sector, as well as their impact on urban space organization within the general context of globalization, is a topical issue of major interest for the Central- and East-European countries (Jacoby and Korkut 2015).

The fall of the communist system and the elimination of ideological barriers created the premises for a closer connection among the urban systems in neighbouring countries (McFarlane 2006). Cities acted as polarization nuclei, redirecting human flows in the territory. And yet, urban development could not make up for industrial decline and its demographic, but especially social consequences (Crescenzi, Pietrobelli and Rabellotti 2016). After four decades of forced industrialization associated with hypertrophic development, the Romanian urban system experienced a radical change, basically de-urbanization of the city population and city-life quality, the functional characteristics of cities undergoing essential modifications (Holmén 1997).

Industry, which had been the main factor of urbanization, would be overcome by the services sector, a phenomenon specific mainly to the big cities. Thus, Romania's capital-city and the regional metropolises strengthened their positions of co-ordination in the territory (Ianoş, Pumain and Racine 2000; Bürkner and Totelecan 2018).

Big cities tended to assume the role of cosmopolite cities due to an increasing ethnical diversity, as well as to the development of specialist services and the large-scale assimilation of consumption products of the global culture that go beyond cultural frontiers (Stead, de Vries and Tasan-Kok 2015; Wikström, Jönsson and L'Espoir Decosta 2016). Food and fashion items have the greatest impact on the population. Immigration to Romania of some Arab, Turkish, and Chinese citizens dealing in trade, or having small industrial enterprises, the presence of foreign citizens studying in this country, the staff of diplomatic missions, of multinational companies, or of non-government organizations kept diversifying the services sector. So, Chinese, Lebanese, Italian, or Greek restaurants would open, as did French or German bakeries, African, Indian, Latin-American, or other artisanal shops (van Ham and Tammaru 2016).

The ever-greater concentration of incomes in the country's capital-city, or in large cities, stimulated the development of products and specialist services, profile commercial units cropping up, usually in big commercial centres of the mall and supermarket type. This would explain the importance of these units for spreading the items of the global consumerist culture at local level (Bezin and Moizeau 2017). The limits of this type of localization lie presumably in the growing social segregation through the ever-wider gap

between the population's income and demand, so that access is restricted to some particular segments of users (Picard and Zenou 2018). Hence, new spatial polarizations, directly proportional to social and cultural segregation, and dependent on the capacity of the Romanian urban system to take in globalizing flows. Thus, the growing financial segregation between the urban population, as a result of restructured economic activities, opens up the way to globalizing flows (Demetry, Thurk and Fine 2015). Even if the items of the global consumerist culture are easily penetrating at local level, the population's access to them is still fairly limited. Global culture tends to combine with local culture grafted on poverty and lack of education. In view of it, the quality of urban life is degrading through the development of urban subcultures and the proliferation of organized crime (Cohen 2016). Studying the distribution of banking investments could be a starting-point for looking at the spatial distribution of other types of services, commercial ones, in particular.

2 Data collection and methods

2.1 Data-set

The present research relies on field investigation, bibliographical sources and quantitative analyses. In this way, correlations could be established between the analyzed elements and the statistical prognoses.

Field investigations focused on current land-use practices in certain urban and peri-urban areas and their situation in the 1988-1989 period, the peak of socialist industrialization in Romania (Dumitrescu 2008). The differences found show the changes occurred in the organization of the urban and peri-urban area, as well as in the functional zoning of cities in the post-communist period of deindustrialization.

Preferences in the distribution of commercial investments reveal the extent of socio-economic availability both at country level and in each city. Assessing the situation meant estimating the distribution of financial-banking investments. To this end, the internet sites of the 38 commercial banks in our study-sample were accessed. Investment distribution was compared with the territorial disparities highlighted by the poverty-level indicators reported in official statistics.

Collecting data on the territorial distribution of malls and supermarkets was made by consulting the internet sites of the main big commercial centres. A correlation was established between the territorial distribution of these centers and the financial-banking investments, corresponding to the population's poverty level. Our analyses covered all mall-type commercial investments of rank 0, I and II cities, as well as the stores of the 25 chains of big European retailers located in these cities.

2.2 Research methods

In order to get an insight into the changes of the urban space once industrial zones were turned into commercial and services zones, one should proceed by looking at the impact of the population's financial segregation when commercial investments are made (Mermet 2017). So, the analysis of the spatial distribution of a characteristic sample of 38 commercial banks, which proved to be relatively stable in the Romanian capital market, has been made by a bi-dimensional linear regression model, conceived as a correlation between the logic of financial-banking investment distribution area and commercial investments.

What underlies the dependency of placing investments in the services sector is the perpetuation, in time, of path dependency (Isaksen and Jakobsen 2017).

Once the logic of locating the main big investments was established, a correlation was made between the location of new commercial sites and what had previously existed in those areas. In this way, a few typologies of urban and peri-urban spatial reconversion were outlined in terms of the development of commercial services.

The impact of ethnical minorities on the physiognomy and functional particularities of commercial zones was analyzed as part of the process of large Romanian cities acquiring a cosmopolitan character. This phenomenon is ever more often met in Central and Eastern Europe.

There is a close correlation between the territorial distribution of poverty (i.e. minimum guaranteed income, labour employment rate, purchasing power/inhabitant) (Paugam 1998), and the distribution of

financial-banking and commercial investments. This distribution can be expressed by a bi-dimensional regression equation between the number of banking units and of commercial centres:

$$y = a + bx,$$

where x = number of banking units, y = number of commercial units and a = a point on the axis of commercial units when the number of banking units = 0 and b = regression slope specific to the relation between the two variables.

Bucharest is a hypertrophic city in the Romanian urban system and the correlation between both variables gives a wrong image on territorial distribution. This explains why it is necessary to analyze the urban system with and without Bucharest.

Synthetically, the main methodological steps which define our approach were as follows:

- a) Highlighting the main territorial disparities in Romania;
- b) Correlating territorial disparities with the purchasing power and the placement of financial-banking and commercial investments;
- c) Analyzing the correlation between the territorial distribution of financial-banking and commercial investments using the bilinear regression (with and without Bucharest);
- d) Defining the changes occurred within the urban space organization through deindustrialization and tertiarization, the development of commercial services and the establishment of a typology to this effect;
- e) Evaluating the impact of big commercial investments on Romania's cities.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Territorial disparities in Romania: General remarks

In order to better understand the logic behind locating new commercial investments in Romania, one should first look at the main characteristics of the urban system and the major territorial disparities in this country.

The Romanian urban system (Figure 1) contains 320 towns (Mitrică, Grigorescu and Urucu 2016). A four-rank hierarchy of towns had in view the economic and demographic polarization grade in the territory and the social-urbanism level.

The first three ranks (0, I and II) include 93 urban centres (29% of all of Romania's towns) with 8.6 million inhabitants (68.5%) of the urban population and ca. 43% of Romania's total population. These are best representative for the urban system in this country.

The poverty rate of the population is decisive for the purchasing power and the location of financial-banking and commercial investments.

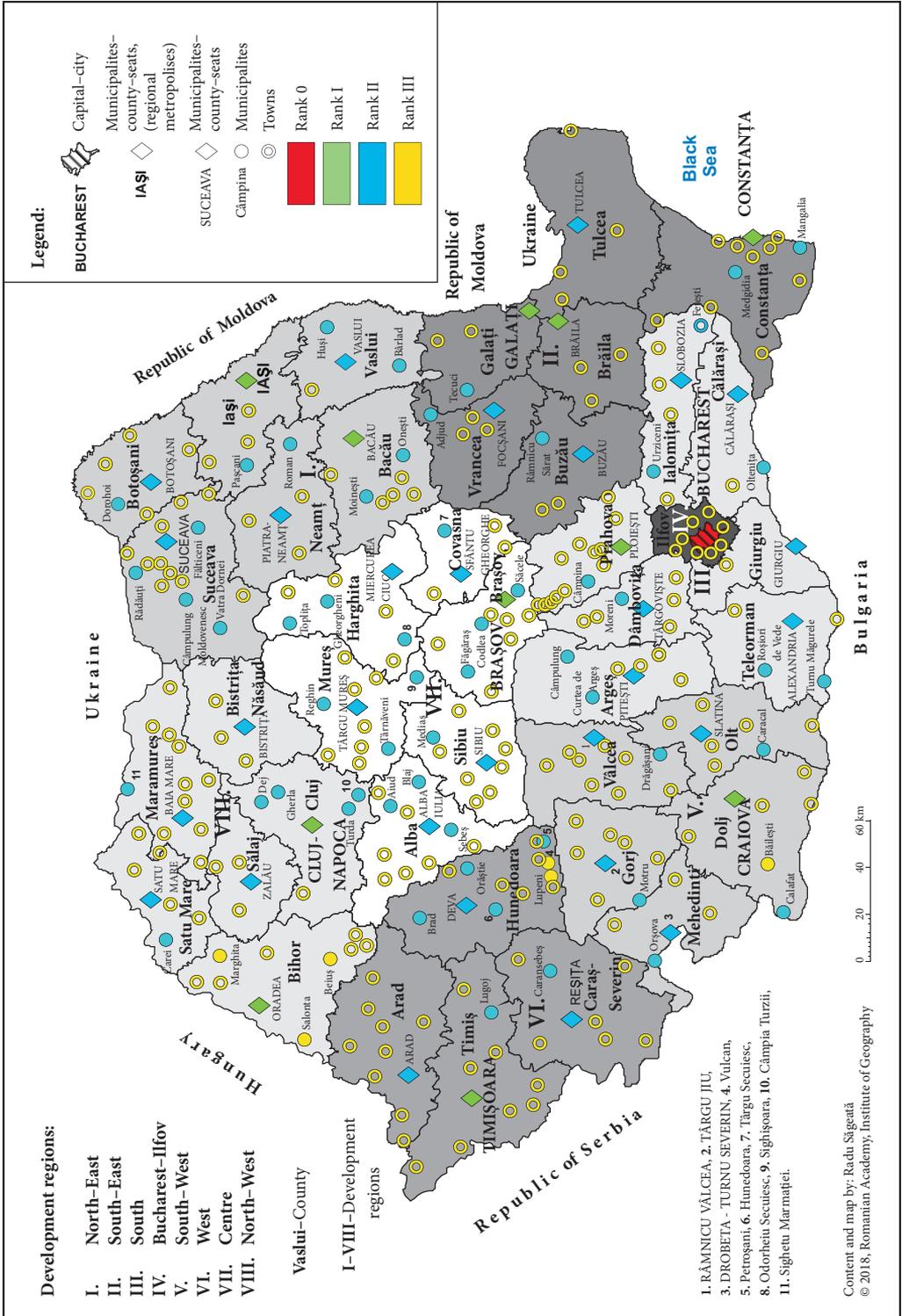
Territorial disparities show two poverty polarization areas:

- 1) in the east (Moldavia), extreme poverty (lack of means of daily subsistence) in the counties of Vaslui and Botoşani;
- 2) in the south, extreme poverty in Ialomiţa, Giurgiu and Teleorman counties.

According to statistical data (2014), most poverty-prone people, running the risk of social exclusion, live in the South-East development region (53.4% / total population), North-East (48.9%) and South-West (45.6%). These territorial disparities are confirmed by the following analyzed indicators: percentage of population receiving a minimum guaranteed income, labour employment level, and purchasing power/inhabitant. In Romania, 1.1% of the population benefits from a guaranteed minimum (31.85 Euro/person) from the State budget; on average, most socially-assisted people live in the east (Vaslui County – 2.7%) and south (Teleorman and Mehedinţi counties – 2.4% each; Buzău and Dolj counties – 2.2% each). Labour employment level in Romania: 59.8% of the total active population (15–64-year olds) in 2016, minimum values being recorded again in the eastern and southern counties. Disparities are also shown by the purchasing power index: the poorest counties lying in the east and south (Vaslui: 3,054 Euro/inhabitant) (Figure 2).

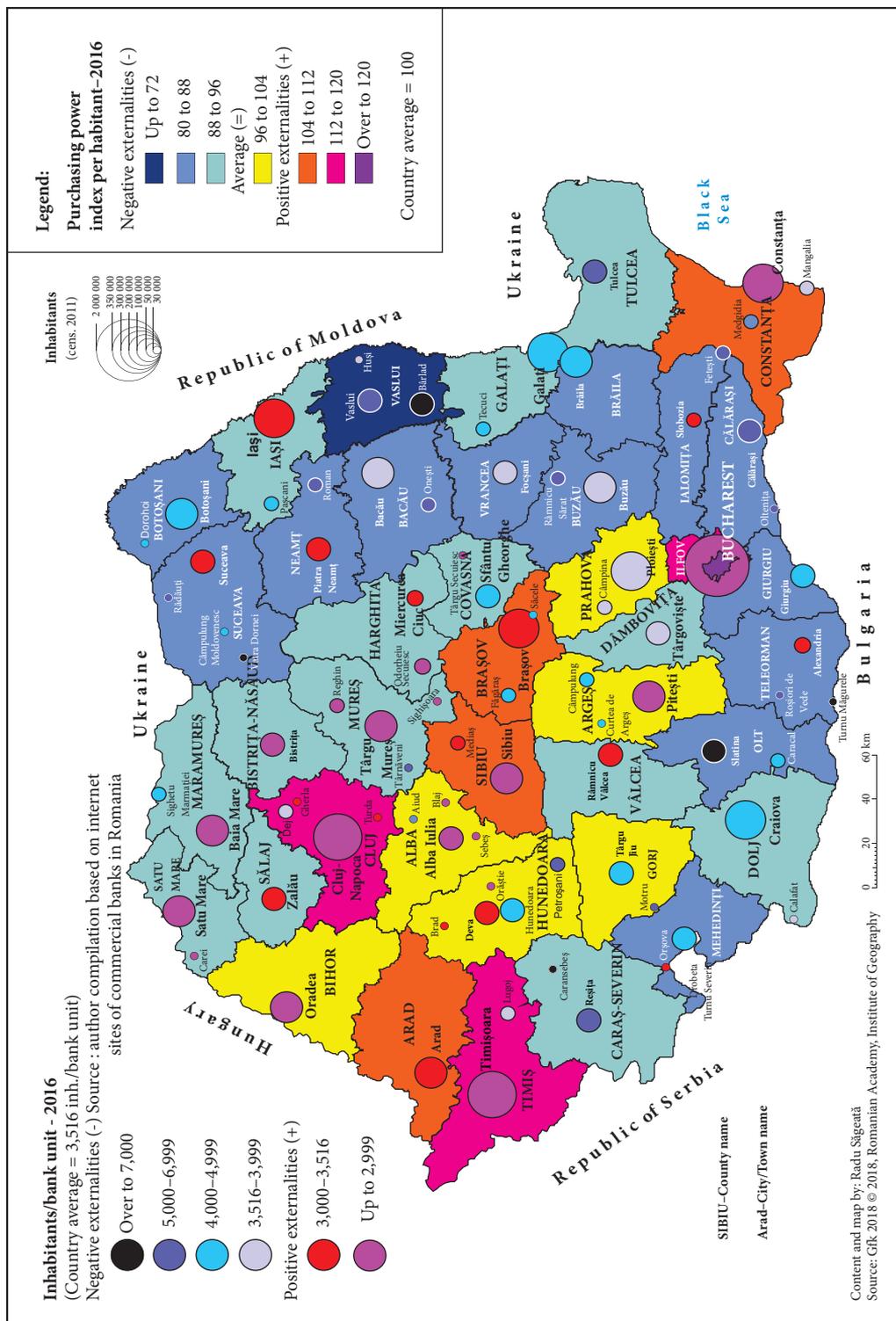
Figure 1: The urban system in Romania. ► p. 54

Figure 2: Purchasing power and banking unit density in Romania (2016). ► p. 55



1. RÂMNICU VÂLCEA, 2. TÂRGU JIU, 3. DROBETA - TURNU SEVERIN, 4. Vulcan, 5. Petrosani, 6. Hunedoara, 7. Târgu Secuiesc, 8. Odorheiu Secuiesc, 9. Sighișoara, 10. Câmpia Turzii, 11. Sighetu Marmatei.

Content and map by: Radu Sîgăată © 2018, Romanian Academy, Institute of Geography



3.2 Purchasing power, financial-banking and commercial investments

The logic of making financial-banking and commercial investments lies at the base of the territorial disparities of the population's purchasing power.

An analysis of the 38 commercial banks reveals their clear-cut concentration in the urban area, with one exception (*CEC Bank*). Another characteristic feature of the Romanian banking system is the pyramidal distribution of banking units, most of them located in Bucharest (19% of all) and in rank I and II cities, regional and county polarization nuclei, which also have the best services coverage/inhabitant. Small, especially one-industry towns, or towns situated in high-poverty areas and occupational dependency, with little financial-banking investments, make the population dependent on the services offered only by certain banks, which implicitly have the regional monopole. The best coverage of banking services units (positive externalities) is in Bucharest, as well as in some large cities from the west of Romania, and in Constanța (a Black Sea port and tourist city). Here, there is a good correlation between income distribution and people's purchasing power. At the other end of the spectrum (negative externalities) stand the poor countries in the east (especially Vaslui and Botoșani) and in the south-east (Călărași, Ialomița, Giurgiu and Teleorman) (Mitrică et al. 2017).

There is an obvious path-dependency between the territorial distribution of the purchasing power and of banking services, visible in the population density/banking unit. Positive anomalies recorded some cities in which the industrial decline could be compensated for by tourism (e.g. Constanța, Piatra Neamț), enabling the employment of the industry-released labour surplus, or by some cities that have a good geographical position versus the big communication axes (e.g. Suceava). At the other end of the spectrum one finds negative anomalies which largely affect the iron-and-steel industry centres (Galați, Hunedoara, Reșița, Călărași and Târgoviște) and the mining ones (Petroșani and Motru), in which the process of economic reconversion, generated unemployment and a low purchasing power, or towns located in the neighbourhood of some regional metropolis (Săcele), where the labour force is taken in by the city (Brașov) (Figure 2).

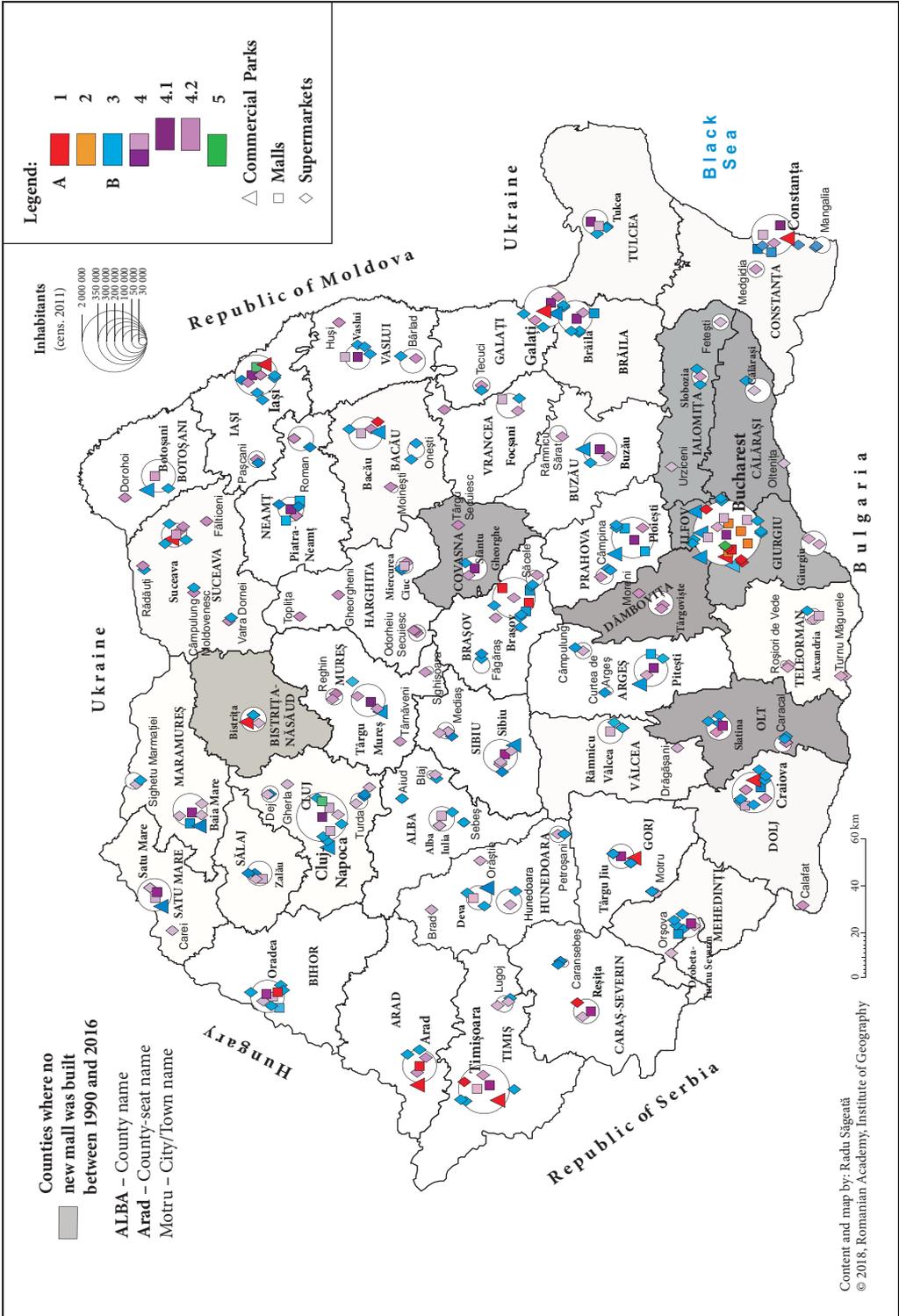
The same pyramidal distribution of financial investments holds also for commercial units, the extent of investments being directly proportional to town-size. Big commercial units are frequently opened in large regional polarization cities with a positive economic dynamic, offering a fairly competitive financial market that ensures profitability. Commercial investments made in towns situated at the lower end of the urban hierarchy (under 30,000 inhabitants) are mostly of the small supermarket type, because making big commercial investments in such towns is not profitable. In the territory of Romania, the east/west financial segregation is the direct reflection of commercial services, too; big commercial investments are attracted mainly by Bucharest, Constanța and the large cities in Banat and Transylvania (Timișoara, Arad, Oradea and Cluj-Napoca).

Analyzing this regression equation for the 93 urban-rank centres 0, I and II, yielded a 0.85 correlation coefficient which confirms the close correlation among these variables. This strong correlation is the result of the high hypertrophic character of the Capital-city (H index is 5.8) within the Romanian urban system. If Bucharest were excluded, this coefficient would be equal to 0.67, which shows a weaker, yet significant, correlation ($R^2=0.45$).

3.3 The spatial impact of commercial investments on urban areas

The first malls in Romania were opened by changing the destination of some buildings designed (in the years of the centralized economy) to host big food stores. In the second stage, the policy of centralized industrialization focussed on the building of large agro-food and public food units within industrial areas, or on their boundary with dwelling quarters to enable the workers' rapid access to these services and thus reduce meals-and-shopping breaks. In 1990, these constructions were abandoned; later on, they would be taken over by foreign investors who turned them into mall-type centres (all in Bucharest). Since urban development policies had in view developing industrial and residential areas (to take in industry-employed migration flows), locating big commercial and services units inside these areas to make up for a shortage of commercial and services facilities. Investments proved profitable and contributed to diminishing people's migration from the city-centre to the periphery (Shertzer, Twinam and Walsh 2018).

Figure 3: Typology of localizing commercial investments in Romania. ►



Other big commercial investments were placed on farmland on the outskirts of cities, or on the terrains of some former industrial units (that had been demolished), using the available rail-and-road facilities (Mirea 2011). Here are some examples of former industrial zones turned commercial: in Bucharest (*Miorița* milk factory, *Electric Machine Plant*, *Semănătoarea*), Craiova (*Electroputere*), Timișoara (former slaughterhouse), Brașov (former rubber items and agricultural equipment factories), etc.

There are many other situations of big investments localized on the territory of some communes that lie in the proximity of large cities, where land price is lower. The advantages offered by easy access account for the development of peri-urban commercial parks: in the proximity of Bucharest, on the motorways to Ploiești, to Pitești and to Urziceni; near Sibiu, on the motorway to Bucharest; close to Ploiești, on the highway to Brașov; Constanța (to Mangalia); Brașov (to Ploiești and Bucharest); Galați (to Brăila); Pitești (on the motorway to Bucharest), etc.

Another tendency is to update the big commercial units, built before 1989 in county-seats, and turn them into malls. For example, the big universal store *Unirea* in Bucharest, updated and turned into mall-type centre. In some 1st and 2nd-rank cities, they built commercial units in the central parts of the city, or of big residential areas (Figure 3).

Some commercial complexes are located in the proximity of large student camps. In Bucharest, a typical example is *Carrefour Orhideea* sited in the close vicinity of the Regie-Grozăvești student camp; similar examples in Cluj-Napoca and Iași. The same location pattern holds for entertainment services complementary to the shopping ones.

3.4 The social impact of commercial investments. The Romanian city from traditional to cosmopolitan

Whether located on the outskirts of large cities, or within their central sections, of great demographic concentration, the impact of big commercial investments is worth considering. The »mall« concept transcends a strictly commercial function, it being associated with luxury and fashionable; one goes to the mall to see new trends, to socialize, to become acquainted with a certain segment of the population (Skivko 2016). So, financial segregation goes hand-in-hand with social segregation, both being embodied in commercial segregation, and the best way of expressing it is going to the mall. No wonder, therefore, that in some big commercial centers, commercial facilities are associated with social and business facilities (in Timișoara, Bucharest, etc.).

Apart from fashion garments, cosmetics, or electric items, malls have fast-food restaurants, coffee-bars, cinemas, casinos, entertainment areas, destined to disseminate global consumer products within the Romanian urban society. Looking at the number of visitors going to these places, the social function of malls is quite obvious. At the same time, the global character of this commercial type is reflected in the countries these products originate from, they being sold by over 90% of the commercial network in Romania.

Incomes are concentrated in Bucharest and in the large cities; this determined specialist goods and services to be concentrated in big commercial complexes. Their location appears to be connected with ever-greater social segregation, tending to delimit the areas where such goods and services can be distributed, that is, areas in which a certain type of users can be found. Thus, a new kind of urban-rural polarization emerged, directly proportional to social and cultural segregation, which depends on the Romanian urban system's capacity to take in globalizing flows.

The deep-going financial disparities among the urban population, caused by industrial restructuring, filter the penetration of globalizing flows. On the other hand, the global consumerist culture, combined with endemic poverty-induced lack of culture, is a fertile ground for the resurgence of urban subcultures and organized crime. This phenomenon is increasingly affecting Romania's towns, and especially the large cities (Ban 2014).

4 Conclusion

Developing the commercial services sector has become one of the main characteristics of the Romanian economy after 1989, in line with evolution trends in the global economy. Changes in the urban functional zone have been made as commercial and services areas kept replacing the industrial ones.

The density of modern commercial areas goes hand-in-hand with the financial-banking investments, and is directly proportional to the population's state of well-being. In Romania, the commercial area outside Capital-city is 2,43 million m² (density: 184 m² / 1,000 inh.) and of 1.19 million m² in Bucharest City (651 m² / 1,000 inh.) (C&W Echinox 2018).

Big commercial investments have been made on the site of former industrial units that had been demolished (Cercleux, Peptenatu and Merciu 2015), or on some former production spaces, former farm lands located on the outskirts of large cities, or in peri-urban zones (using existing road access), in some residential areas short of services facilities, or in the proximity of some student camps.

The global economic and financial crisis had a serious impact on commercial investments in Romania, the investment-market becoming saturated as people's purchasing power dropped. Some projects were abandoned for lack of investors (e.g. in Craiova, Buzău, Constanța and Bucharest), others were turned into office-rooms, or residential areas.

Globalization, through big investments in commercial and agreement areas has materialized in that over 90% are held by international store chains in Romania's commercial structure. This country is among the European states with the fastest economic dynamics in this field.

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