

ROMANIA'S YOUNGEST TOWNS – HOW URBAN ARE THEY?

VERESS NÓRA-CSILLA¹

ABSTRACT. – **Romania's Youngest Towns – How Urban Are They?** After the collapse of the socialist regime, the urban system of Romania has changed significantly in a very short period of time: in a few years 60 rural settlements gained the town status, mostly without matching the quantitative and qualitative conditions set by the law. This paper examines those 17 indicators necessary to become a town, and compares the values of 2004 (the year, when a “mass declaration” was conducted which resulted in 38 new towns) with the values of 2014 (the latest available statistical data) in order to see the extent and direction in which the new towns developed (or not) in ten years after becoming urban. The paper discusses also the question of whether urbanization and development can be made via political decisions or not.

Keywords: *urbanization, commune, town, post-socialist, Romania, declaration of towns*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world has urbanized rapidly since 1950 when it was mostly rural: less than one-third of the population lived in urban settlements. In 2014 just over half of the global population was urban. This distribution is expected to shift further towards urban areas over the next 35 years so that, by 2050, the world's population will be one-third rural and two-thirds urban, roughly the reverse of the situation in the mid-twentieth century – says UN in one of its publications (United Nations – Population Division, Population Facts no. 2014/3). But in this “urban century” in which “mankind tends to become an urban species”, the structure of urbanization shows important variation in different regions of the world (Kourtit and Nijkamp, 2015, p. 2-3). Europe is counted among the most urbanized sites on the Terra, but Romania is well below that high European average.

¹ PhD Student, Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, Cluj-Napoca. E-mail: nora@veress.ro

A considerable amount of papers are addressing the issue of what is urban and what is urbanization, what is rural, what is the role of rural areas in the regional development. While before the rural and the urban were defined as a dichotomy, relative to each other, many recent commentators see a “blurring” of distinctions between urban and rural characteristics because of the increasing similarities between the two regarding economic structure and industrial activities (Caffyn and Dahlström, 2005), as a result of counterurbanization and of economic restructuring and globalization affecting both urban and rural areas (Shucksmith et al., 2009). New concepts have emerged in the literature, such as that of *rurbanisation* and *rurban areas*. While the former covers a process where the physical environment loses qualities that were traditionally associated with urban or rural settings (Bengs and Schmidt-Thomé, 2005), the latter represents those transitional areas between rural and urban areas, which are apparently the result of urban growth and related urban agglomeration advantages as main drivers (Kourtit and Nijkamp, 2015). Despite this positive trends, the *OECD's New Rural Paradigm report in 2006* (OECD, 2006) stresses that although rural regions conceal great disparities, and “rural” is not necessarily synonymous with decline, in general, rural regions are lagging behind national average economic growth. This weaker economic performance is driven by factors like out-migration and aging, lower educational attainment, lower average labour productivity and overall low levels of public service – and this often lead to a vicious circle driving rural decline². Despite that some of the researches indicate that urbanization not necessarily causes economic development, there is a growing literature that emphasises the strong positive relation between the two (Lewis, 2014). Moreover, cities are seen as economic drivers, while rural areas as lagging ones. A higher probability for being poor is associated with the rural households (Sandu, 1999), which experienced further impoverishment since the late 1980s (Sofer and Bordanc, 1998). They have also lower values on average life expectancy at birth, infant mortality and school enrollment (Veress, 2013). In turn, urban areas represent the cleanest way from poverty to well-being and prosperity (Glaeser, 2012), and not only for themselves: they are expected to be the drivers and the spaces for the renewal of the peripheral or declining regions, while they assure the regions' competitiveness as engines of economic growth (Rechnitzer, 2004). It is observed also, that those rural areas that are developing are to be find in certain, that is surrounding of big cities, tourist destinations and western border regions in the EU's neighboring countries (Kovacs, 2009).

² Although Romania is not yet a member of OECD, we consider its findings and documents as unmissable. Currently Romania is represented at 19 working structures of the OECD, and the country's accession is a strategic objective of Romanian foreign policy, included in the 2013-2016 government program (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mae.ro/node/18539>).

Urban-rural disparities are striking also in Romania. The problem is even more substantial if we consider that almost the half of the country's population is rural³, being occupied predominantly in (subsistence) agriculture. The rate of those working in this sector is much higher than its contribution to the country's GDP (Kurko, 2009). Foreign investments – considered a “regional development panacea” in Eastern Europe (Mackinnon and Cumbers, 2007, p. 162-164) – also avoided, in general, rural areas (Postelnicu, 2011), partly because of the poor infrastructure and a low diversity of raw materials (Drgona and Turnock, 2000).

In this social-economical context, converting communes in small towns represented a hope that they maybe can transform into centers of natural economic growth – in parallel with the new rank of municipality which represented a solution of salvation and revival for towns in decline (Dragomirescu and Săgeată, 2008). The emergence of new cities was also necessary because of the existence of vast areas that are “deeply rural” and poorly polarized by the existing urban settlements (Ianoş and Tălângă, 1994, p. 71).

The issue of the newest towns of Romania (fig. 1) was not comprehensively researched, although some authors addressed it on its own (Berekmeri, Săgeată), while others included the problem in broader studies that targeted the urban changes after the fall of the socialist regime (Benedek). Some case studies were made by Berekmeri (2006, 2007, 2009) – the new towns of Mureş county (Sângeorgiu de Pădure, Ungheni, Sărmaşu, Miercurea Nirajului), Dolhasca and Voluntari. The author not only presented to what extent the new towns do (not) fulfill the criteria, but tried to outline also the competitiveness of these towns, as well as the opportunities and constrains of their development. Recently, Covăşnianu and Covăşnianu (2014) analyzed the urban settlement network in Moldavia by summing the 16 indicators to become a town, defined by the law. The final urban coefficient they obtained shows that none of the new towns meet the minimum conditions of being an urban settlement, nor do the “traditional” towns such Iaşi, Galaţi, Botoşani. But while the latter accomplish 14 indicators from 16, most of the former achieve only 2-4. Their conclusion is that after nearly a decade none of the current towns meets the criteria defined by the law. In Moldavia, during the 2003-2005 stage, there were 14 newly created towns.

³ 46% of the Romanian population is rural, according to the latest census data (2011). This ratio is smaller with 1.3% if compared to the previous census (2002), but it is still very high in a European context.

The town of Ulmeni, Maramureş County was analyzed by Mojolic (2013), although not from a criteria point of view. The author analyzed the opportunities of local development, and observed that the settlement shows, to a high degree, the general aspects of a rural locality, where agriculture is the main economic component. The problem of eligibility of the communes turned in urban settlements was highly mediatized that time. Newspapers articles adopted a criticizing tone, made some case studies, interviewed local decision makers (for an overall review see Berekmeri, 2009).

After a decade of the mass-nomination we consider appropriate to reexamine the new towns from the criteria point of view, in order to see if a positive evolution took place following their change in status. The basic questions are: Became the new towns really urban? Can they fulfill their new duties? Can urbanization be made via political actions? Our assumption is that, with a few exceptions, they are mostly rural and are facing serious social, economic and infrastructural problems.



Fig 1. The map of the new towns of rank 3

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

On the following pages, a comparison will be made between the values of 2004 (the year of the declaration of the most towns in North-West development region) with the latest available statistical data (2011 if comes from census, 2014 if it is provided by the National Institute of Statistics). In case of indicators that are reported at 1000 inhabitants, we use the 2002 census data (for values of 2004) and 2011 (for values of 2014). We encountered the problem of missing statistical data by several points of the research, but we faced it by replacing the data from the missing year with the closest available in time (for example, the length of modernized roads was missing in Bragadiru for 2004, thus we considered data for 2005). The entire list of replacements can be found in the Appendix. There is no available statistical data regarding two of the requirements, *streets with external hydrant network against fire* and *landfills with provided access* respectively; this will be left out from the analysis. For other two indicators, *proportion of employees in non-agricultural activities* and *sewage water cleaning*, values are available only for 2004, hence we will be able to analyze just that year.

The 16 + 1 indicators will not be all treated in the order they appear in the law, but grouped in a more logical way (for example, indicator no. 3, the proportion of households with water supply facilities will be analyzed together with indicator no. 11, the proportion of streets with water supply).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Law no. 351/2001 enumerated 16 indicators and assigned to them precise quantitative thresholds that are to be fulfilled in order for a rural settlement to become a town (table 1). This was the first law since 1945 that conditioned the granting of the town status to concrete quantitative conditions (Benedek, 2006). Later, the list of requirements was supplemented in 2007, by Law no. 100/2007 with a new indicator, the proportion of households with central heating. The number of inhabitants was also increased from 5000 to 10000.

Law no. 351/2001 mentioned also, that there are such towns and municipalities that are not able to fulfill all the indicators required⁴. The fulfillment was a problem also for the new towns. There is not a single criterion that was met by all the 60 new towns in 2004, nor in 2014, but there are improvements for all the indicators (except for the number of beds in hospitals) between the two analyzed years, although to different extents.

⁴ MDLPL, Urbanproiect made a research on the degree of fulfillment of the indicators in all towns and municipalities of the county and demonstrated the shortcomings.

Table 1.**The 16+1 indicators set by the law**

No.	Indicators	Minimal value required by the law	Number of new towns that fulfilled the criterion in 2004	Number of new towns that fulfilled the criterion in 2014
1.	Number of inhabitants	5000 (10000 starting with 2007)	55	15
2.	Proportion of employees in non-agricultural activities (% of total employees)	75	23	No available statistical data
3.	Proportion of households with water supply facilities (% of total households)	70	2	16
4.	Proportion of households with bathroom and toilet facilities (% of total households)	55	5	22
5.	Number of beds in hospitals/1000 inhabitants	7	13	9
6.	Number of doctors/1000 inhabitants	1,8	7	11
7.	Institutions of education	Secondary schools	47	49
8.	Cultural and sport institutions	Public libraries, rooms for sport activities	56 with libraries No available statistical data for sport institutions	55 with libraries No available statistical data for sport institutions
9.	Number of hotel beds	50	5	8
10.	Proportion of modernized roads (% of total length)	50	14	27
11.	Proportion of streets with water supply (% of total length)	60	30	37
12.	Proportion of streets with canalization (% of total length)	50	9	8
13.	Sewage water cleaning	Cleaning station with mechanical technology	22	No available statistical data
14.	Proportion of streets with external hydrant network against fire (% of total length)	60	No available statistical data	No available statistical data

No.	Indicators	Minimal value required by the law	Number of new towns that fulfilled the criterion in 2004	Number of new towns that fulfilled the criterion in 2014
15.	Green areas (parks, public gardens) m ² /inhabitant	10; public garden	17	25
16.	Landfills with provided access	To have	No available statistical data	No available statistical data
16+1	Proportion of households with central heating (%)	35	3	12

Source: Law no. 351/2001, Law no. 100/2007

3.1. The Population Criterion

The *number of inhabitants* required by the law – the so-called population criterion – was one of the easiest to achieve by the settlements which wanted to become a town, and the great majority managed to fulfill it – at least before 2007, when the threshold of 5000 inhabitants was lifted to 10000 inhabitants. The initial limit of 5000 was relatively low if we compare it to the countries of Southern Europe, but it is high in comparison with Northern Europe. In Romania, a large number of rural settlements could satisfy this condition, the real difficulties were lying in fulfilling the social, economic and infrastructural conditions (Benedek, 2006).

Out of the sixty new towns, five were not able to fulfill the initial criterion (Bechet, Căzănești, Dragomirești and Miercurea Sibiului – all of them declared in 2004, the year of mass declarations, and all of them with population less than 4000 inhabitants, according to 2002 census; respectively Baia de Arieș, declared already in 1998, before the law came into force). Most of the new towns, 42 settlements, belonged to the category of 5000-10000 inhabitants, 12 had their population between 10000 and 20000 inhabitants, while only one (Voluntari in Ilfov County) surpassed 30000 inhabitants (Berekmeri, 2009).

After the new threshold was set, not a single settlement was awarded the rank of town (this has ended in 2006). From the sixty towns created after 1989, only 15 met this new requirement in 2011, while 75% of them fail in matching it. Eleven new towns would not comply even with the initial 5000 threshold, due to population decline, while most of the towns – 33 – have a population between 5000 and 10000 inhabitants. Diminishing population is a general problem of the new towns of Romania (as well as the entire urban system of the country; for more on the topic see Mitrică, 2015): 46 new towns out of 60 experienced smaller or larger population losses. Population loss is not reflected however in the average number of inhabitants of all the new towns: this number was 8407 in 2002, but grew to 8639 in 2011.

The lucky exceptions are to be found mostly in the agglomeration area of Bucharest; the number of inhabitants has grown in a spectacular way especially in Bragadiru, Pantelimon, Popești-Leordeni and Voluntari – the latter surpassed 40000 inhabitants, thus is the biggest new town of post-socialist period. The rapid growing of these towns seems to counterbalance the wide population decline – this is the explanation why the average number of inhabitants is higher in 2011 than ten years earlier.

The new limit of number of inhabitants acts also as a slowing force, although not as a “freezing” one, of further proclamations, as 25 large communes have a population above 10000 inhabitants, according to 2011 census (the biggest is Florești in Cluj County with more than 22000 inhabitants, while the majority of them are from Iași, Ilfov and Prahova counties).

3.2. Economy

The only indicator which is related to the economy of the newly declared towns is the **proportion of employees in non-agricultural activities**, with a threshold of minimum 75%. This means that at most 25% of the employees should be working in agriculture, forestry and fishing.

In 2004, 37 new towns out of 60 (62%) did not match this criteria, while seven of them (Flămânzi, Ștefănești in Botoșani County, Dăbuleni, Dragomirești, Săliștea de Sus, Cajvana, Milișăuți) had the ratio of the employed population in agricultural activities extremely high, above 75% – exactly the opposite of the requirements. Another ten towns had their population between 50% and 75% employed in agriculture⁵, meaning that they predominantly had an agricultural profile. The best values – around 97-98% – were measured in certain towns of Ilfov County (Chitila, Pantelimon, Voluntari, Bragadiru), but some other towns had also high values above 90% (Teiuș, Ghimbav, Turceni, Otopeni, Popești-Leordeni, Băbeni, Berbești). In spite of these outstanding achievements, if we calculate the average of all the new towns, the value remains below the minimum criterion (64%).

According to Berekmeri (2009), in 2002 most of the new towns had mixed profile (34), while 18 an agricultural one. 6 were oriented predominantly to services, and only 2 to industry. Unfortunately, because of the lack of exact data, we are not able to analyze how the new towns evolved from this criterion point of view (the 2011 census of population and households did not record it anymore).

⁵ Sărmașu achieved 74.6%, which is 75% if we round it up, so we counted this town to those that fulfill the indicator.

3.3. Infrastructure

Most of the requirements of gaining the town status are connected to the infrastructural condition of the new towns, both public and household-related. Thus, the *proportion of households with water supply facilities* (criterion no. 3), the *proportion of households with bathroom and toilet facilities* (criterion no. 4), and the *proportion of households with central heating* (criterion no. 16+1) are targeting the equipment of the dwellings, while criteria 10-16 are mapping the public utilities, respectively the environmental condition of the settlements.

To much the infrastructural conditions was not easy, but was even harder on household-level, than on settlement-level.

In 2002, only two towns managed to achieve the minimum of 70% of **households with drinking water supply** (Ghimbav – 89.63% and Otopeni – 73.75%), and in an additional nine towns had at least the half of the dwellings equipped with this facility. The lowest values were recorded in Liteni (3.3%), Salcea (3.59%), Milișăuți (3.6%), Dolhasca (4.87%) and Cajvana (5.66%), all of them of Suceava County. Despite the bed records, this indicator evolved in the most spectacular way in the analyzed period: according to 2011 census data, already 16 new towns managed to reach the threshold⁶. The best values were around 95-96% and were measured in Ghimbav, Popești-Leordeni and Otopeni, while the lowest values were counted in Liteni (18.3%) and Murgeni (19.7%). The average of all the new towns has increased also in a spectacular way, from 33% in 2002 to 58% in 2011, but still remained below the 70% required by the law.

The next criterion, **the proportion of households with bathroom and toilet facilities** (minimum 55%) is a combined one: we do not have official data about the toilets, but we know the proportion of household with bathrooms inside (given by 2002 and 2011 censuses of population and households). From this point of view, the dwellings of the 60 new towns were somewhat better equipped, but the picture was still catastrophic in 2002: only 5 towns managed to fulfill the criterion of 55% of households with bathroom. These were Ghimbav (77.42%), Otopeni (68.77%), Bragadiru (58.59%), Baia de Arieș (56.85%) and Livada (just on the limit if we round up its 54.63%). Berbesti remained just below the limit (55.11%). The bottom of the list was occupied as well by Liteni (2.67%), Salcea (3.03%) and Dolhasca (3.38%). Until 2011, significant changes occurred: the biggest shares of households with bathroom exceeded 90% (Otopeni, Bragadiru, Popești-Leordeni, Ghimbav), and also the lowest values became two-digit numbers: 18.40% in Dolhasca, 18.50% in Murgeni. This time, 22 young towns fulfilled the criterion, and the average also rose from 27.99% to 49.50%. The improvement is not bad, but still insufficient to match the limit.

⁶ Amara reached the threshold just on the limit with 69.8% which is 70% if we round it up.

The last criterion related to dwellings is the ***proportion of households with central heating (%)***. Being added to the system of criteria in 2007, was not a duty of the settlements wishing to become a town to fulfill it. Nonetheless, we examined how the new towns look like also from this point of view. Data collected with the occasion of the 2002 population and household census show devastating results: the number is 0 in more than the half of the new towns (exactly 31 of them), meaning that not even a single household was equipped with central heating. Three out of sixty had values above the minimum of 35%, these were Otopeni (44.32%), Turceni (42.08%) and Bucecea (35.24%). There were six towns with records between 8% and 27%, while the remaining 20 had values between 0.2% and 3.9%.

In 2011, already 12 towns managed to match this criterion, the best records being around 80%, in the town of Otopeni (88.7%), Popești-Leordeni (80%) and Bragadiru (78.2%). The lowest value was 0.8% and was measured in Murgeni, so there is an extremely high disparity among the new towns regarding this issue. Calculating the average, we can notice an improvement from 3.98% in 2002 to 22.03% in 2011, but this latest value – like all the previous ones – is below the actual minimum rate.

The law does not include other installations, such as the proportion of households connected to the public sewage system or with electricity.

The public sewage system is present, however in the settlement-level requirements. Most of the infrastructural requirements are defined in a relation of the length of streets, such as the proportion of modernized roads (% of total length), the proportion of streets with water supply (% of total length), the proportion of streets with sewerage system (% of total length) and the proportion of streets with external hydrant network against fire (% of total length).

The law stated that at least 50% of the roads of a settlement willing to become a town has to be modernized. The criterion of ***the proportion of modernized roads (% of total length)*** was fulfilled in 2004 by 14 settlements, out of which two presented 100% – Broșteni and Salcea, however, their total length of roads was only 4, respectively 6 km. Good values – above 65% – were also calculated for Măgurele, Bălcești, Turceni, Ștefănești (AG) and Dragomirești. The smallest ratio of modernized roads was recorded in Sălișteea de Sus (4.88%) and Bechet (5.63%). Until 2014, the number of settlements matching this criterion has risen to 27, with the best values of 96.08% in Chitila, 93.33% in Făget, respectively 91.30% in Ardud. The lowest values were below 20%: 13.64% in Sărmașu, 14.29% in Dăbuleni and 17.39% in Sălișteea de Sus. Most of the towns showed better values in 2014 than in 2004, but it must be mentioned that not only the absolute length of modernized roads, but also that of total length of roads experienced changes in many cases in the analyzed period, due

to particular reasons for each settlement (for example from 69 km to 170 km in Măgurele). The general improvement is indisputable, as the 2004 average of 29% of the proportion of modernized roads turned into 45% in 2014.

The further conditions – the proportion of streets with water supply (% of total length), the proportion of streets with sewerage system (% of total length) and the proportion of streets with external hydrant network against fire (% of total length) – make somewhat a nonsense, as the utilities do not follow the path of the streets, and were already requested before (at least the drinking water). Data availability is also a problem. Because there is no evidence on the indicators below, we calculated the share of the total length of the utilities in the total length of streets, thus our results are not exact, but approximate.

In 2004, exactly 30 new towns fulfilled the criterion of at least 60% of **proportion of streets with water supply**, but 17 of them had exaggerated values above 100% (the far more hyperbolic was in the case of Șomcuta Mare with 612.50%, which is the result of 8 km of streets, but 49 km of drinking water system). There were also three towns with 0 km of total length of drinking water system (thus 0 km proportion of streets with water supply): Miercurea Sibiului, Cajvana and Milișăuți, but low values around 3% were also found in Bechet, Bragadiru and Miercurea Nirajului.

In 2014, there were already 37 new towns which faced successfully this challenge, while two others were just below the limit (Săcueni – 59.28%, Băbeni – 59.48%). The same exaggerated results above 100% were present in 20 settlements (this time with Tismana on top – 682.86%). Sadly, Miercurea Sibiului, Cajvana and Milișăuți did not managed in the past ten years to build up a drinking water system, so their results were 0% again. The average of the 60 young towns went up from 44.98% in 2004 to 70.32% in 2014 – this latest value being the first average value which passes the test of our analysis (that is, it is above the minimum required by the law).

The next issue, **the proportion of streets with sewerage system** theoretically goes hand in hand with the previous one, but we found less exaggerated numbers. In 2004, 9 settlements have passed the threshold of 50%: the best were Broșteni with 112.59% (only 4 km of streets and 4.5 km of sewer pipes) and Voluntari with 109.24% (this time with 119 km of streets and 130 km of sewer pipes). Many towns had their values above even 60%, such as Ghimbav, Geoagiu, Amara, Ungheni and Făget. Unfortunately, 10 towns did not have any sewerage system (out of which five were from Suceava County). A general setback occurred in the coming years: in 2014, only 8 towns managed to achieve the limit. Ghimbav, Tismana, Amara and Broșteni gave their way to Chitila, Ardud and Săliște. With few exceptions, the length of sewer pipes has grown in the towns, but the total length of their streets has grown even harder.

This time, Ungheni (297.50%) and Geoagiu (153.68%) were on the top, while seven towns had 0 km of sewer pipes (Sălișteea de Sus, Liteni and Salcea had constructed their sewer system in the meantime). The average of the 60 towns has increased from 19% in 2004 to 26% in 2014, but it is still incredibly low.

The next criterion is also related to the sewage water. The law requested a **sewage water cleaning station with mechanical technology** from each of the candidates to the town status. Unfortunately, none of the statistical databases provides us with information whether a settlement has such a cleaning station or not. The National Institute of Statistics collected data about the flow of the stations in operation for wastewater between 1993 and 2004, so we considered that those settlements being in the database have such a cleaning station, while the rest do not. Even so, we can determine how many towns fulfilled the requirement only in 2004: 22 out of the 60 new towns.

Such a lack of data hinders the analysis regarding further indicators, the **proportion of streets with external hydrant network against fire (% of total length)**, and **landfills with provided access**.

3.4. Health Care

The criteria related to health care was – and still is – the weakest point of the new towns. This is not surprising in a context in which the Romanian health system is among the worst, according to different European level rankings by various indicators (Vlădescu and Astărăstoae, 2012; Vlădescu et al., 2010).

In terms of **number of hospital beds/1000 inhabitants**, only 13 managed to reach the minimum of 7 (out of which Roznov just on the limit with 6.9 beds/1000 inhabitants, which is 7 beds/1000 inhabitants if we round it up). The best values were presented by Gătaia (62.4), Geoagiu (50.3) and Bragadiru (32.7). Nine towns had values between 7 and 20 beds/inhabitants, while 13 towns had this indicator very low, between 1.3 and 5.3 hospital beds/1000 inhabitants. The biggest problem was however, that the majority of the new towns – 33 – did not possess any hospital in 2004.

The situation seemed worse in 2014. The National Strategy of Hospital Rationalization envisaged the reducing the number of public hospitals by 15% starting from 1st April 2011 (Decree no. 303/2011), through the dissolution of those hospitals that had proven unprofitable from an economic point of view and which were not able to close contracts with the National Health Insurance Agency (Bilașco et al. 2015). Due to this health care reform, 67 hospitals were closed nationwide, out of which 8 were located in one of the newly declared towns (Baia de Arieș, Sântana, Pătârlagele, Băneasa, Sărmașu, Roznov, Ciacova,

Bălcești)⁷. So, in 2014, only 9 towns managed to fulfill the 7 hospital beds/1000 inhabitants, 12 had values between 1.03 and 6.07, while 39 did not have any hospital. This year, the best values were reached by Gătaia (81.67) and Geoagiu (65.36). The better values in 2014 compared to 2004 (the case of Gătaia, Geoagiu, Turceni, Murgeni) are the result of population loss and not that of a capacity increase in the hospitals. There are also some shrunked values due to the capacity diminution (Ștefănești in Argeș, Sângeorgiu de Pădure, Făget). New hospitals were established in Otopeni, Voluntari, Răcari and Fierbinți-Târg, but because of the close-downs, the average of the 60 new towns for the hospital beds/1000 inhabitants experienced a little decrease from 5.26 to 5.25, remaining below the threshold set by the law.

The number of doctors is highly related to the number of hospital beds. In 2004, 7 new towns fulfilled this criterion. The best values were showed by Sângeorgiu de Pădure (3.64 physicians/1000 inhabitants) and Otopeni (3.62 physicians/1000 inhabitant), while 5 towns had values between 2.08 and 2.91. Out of the rest of 53 towns, 42 had less than 1 doctor/1000 inhabitants. The worst values (around 0.3) were recorded by Flămânzi, Liteni, Milișăuți and Berbești.

In 2014, 11 new towns fulfilled the minimum, out of which three – Bechet, Sângeorgiu de Pădure and Ciacova – just on the limit with 1.78-1.79 (which is 1.8 if we round it up). The top positions were occupied by Otopeni (5.68), Gătaia (5.14) and Turceni (4.13), while on the bottom is Bucecea (0.24). The list of eligible towns in 2004 has changed considerably during the next ten years: Băneasa, Șomcuta Mare, Sângeorgiu de Pădure and Bălcești were cut off, but Dăbuleni, Geoagiu, Bragadiru and Voluntari entered the list. There is an indisputable improvement regarding this indicator in the analyzed period: the best value has grown from 3.64 doctors/1000 inhabitants in 2004 to 5.68 doctors/1000 inhabitants in 2014, and the average of the sixty towns also has risen from 0.96 to 1.12 (although remains below the limit set by the law). But it must be mentioned that the changes in the absolute number of doctors are not so spectacular (except for some cases like Bragadiru from 6 to 31 physicians, Otopeni from 37 to 72 physicians, Voluntari from 14 to 83 physicians); mostly they decreased, remained constant or increased a little, but in relative terms the indicator appears enhanced because of the population loss.

⁷ The hospital in Șomcuta Mare was also closed, but reopened later. Some of the closed hospitals were reopened by the court, others were transformed in elderly homes or into family physician's consulting rooms (a detailed analysis was made by Mediafax in 2012, <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/un-an-de-la-inchiderea-spitalelor-majoritatea-sunt-centre-de-permanenta-cateva-transformate-in-camine-de-batrani-9470497>)

3.5. Education

Criterion no. 7 refers to education, and imposes the new towns to have **secondary schools**. In 2004, this indicator was fulfilled by most of the towns on the third place (after the population criterion and the public libraries), in a number of 47. Secondary schools were missing for example in some towns of Suceava County (Frasin, Milișăuți, Salcea) and Ilfov County (Bragadiru, Chitila, Pantelimon, Popești-Leordeni). The majority of the towns had one such school, while Săcueni, Dăbuleni, Ulmeni and Vicovu de Sus had two of them.

In 2014, the number of secondary schools has grown to a little extent: already 49 towns passed the test (Popești-Leordeni and Tăuții-Măgherăuș joined the list). Ștefănești in Argeș, Pătârlagele, Voluntari and Livada had two such schools instead of one. The only setback was registered in Dăbuleni, where only one school operates instead of two since 2010.

3.6. Leisure and Recreation

We include in this category indicator no. 8 and no. 15.

Regarding the **cultural and sport institutions** (criterion no. 8) the law requested public libraries and halls for sport activities (it is not evident however if both of them, or just one of them). There is no available data on sport institutions (very likely most of the towns did not have such halls, at least in 2004), but we know if a settlement has a public library or not. In 2004, every young town had exactly 1 public library, except four settlements – Chitila, Măgurele, Popești-Leordeni and Voluntari – which have none. Nothing changed in the next ten years, except that Pantelimon has closed its public library. It is interesting that the new towns of Ilfov County have very good result in almost all of the indicators (and their indicators improved constantly since 2004), but do not excel from a cultural point of view. We consider that they do not have libraries because they do not need them: located next to Bucharest, they can find everything culture-related there, not only libraries.

The next criterion – **green areas** – is not so likely to be fulfilled compared to the previous one. This indicator, related to the protection of the environment quality gave an ecological dimension to the accession to the town status (Benedek, 2006). This minimum value of 10 m²/inhabitant was reached by 17 new towns out of 60 in 2004. Outstanding values were measured in Amara (86.53 m²/inhabitant, 66 ha of green areas) and Miercurea Sibiului (54.15%, 22 ha). One town, Bragadiru had a value above 30 m²/inhabitant, another 5 above 20 m²/inhabitant. There were, however four towns without any green areas: Cajvana, Dolhasca, Milișăuți and Salcea.

In 2014, already 25 towns did match this criterion. The top towns managed to keep their places – Amara with 93.22 m²/inhabitant, Miercurea Sibiului with 58.02 m²/inhabitant –, however, the size of their green areas remained the same: the better values are a consequence of population loss. The lowest values were measured in Ulmeni (1.41 m²/inhabitant) and Turceni (1.43 m²/inhabitant). But there is nothing to worry about: in absolute terms, the extent of green areas had grown from 384 ha to 626 ha in the analyzed period. It must be mentioned, that the youngest towns of Romania are probably also the greenest, but not because their vast landscaped parks, but because of their rurality.

3.7. Tourism

The *number of hotel beds* is related to tourism, and is the only requirement that does not serve the well-being of the inhabitants, but the economic development. Tourism is seen as a general remedy for the areas lagging behind (and even so for rural areas), not in the regional policies, but also in a considerable amount of scientific literature. And at this point we come back to our assumption that these settlements were not awarded the rank of town because they deserved it, but in a hope that it facilitates development.

Before anything, we must state that in general, there are accommodation units in the new towns, but these are typical for rural areas – guest houses, agrotourism pensions, even motels and school camps – but the existence of hotels is very rare. In 2004, only 7 towns had at least one hotel, out of which only 5 had a number of beds in them above 50. These were Amara (1763), Otopeni (510), Geoagiu (505), Măgurele (128) and Miercurea Sibiului (101).

In 2014, 8 towns managed to pass the threshold: Ștefănești Argeș, Voluntari and Ungheni entered the list, while all the towns already on it increased their number of beds (Amara is still the first with 1894 beds). Other four towns had at least one hotel, with a total of beds below 50: Tismana, Făget, Recaș and Băbeni.

It is interesting that, if we calculate the average of hotel beds, this indicator is the only one from the entirely list of eligibility that meets the minimum value: it was 51.45 in 2004, and it has grown to 78.03 in 2014.

If we count how many indicators were fulfilled by each of the towns in 2004 (Table 2) and in 2014 (Table 3), we can outline certain groups of settlements. For 2004, we took into account the requirements of that year (number of inhabitants: 5000, no criterion on central heating), a total of 14 indicators (because of the missing data on streets with external hydrant network

against fire, respectively landfills with provided access). For 2014, we calculated the modified requirements (10000 inhabitants, central heating) minus the four indicators that were missing this time (proportion of employees in non-agricultural activities, sewage water cleaning, streets with external hydrant network against fire, landfills with provided access), gaining thus 13 indicators.

The number of fulfilled indicators ranged from 2 to 10 both in 2004 and 2014, but while there was only one town with 10 fulfilled indicators in 2004 (Otopeni), ten years later there were four such settlements (Otopeni, Geoagiu, Voluntari, Făget). Most of the towns achieved four criteria in the analyzed years; 13 towns in 2004, 14 in 2014.

Comparing the tables below, one can state if a town has improved its situation or not. For example, Voluntari evolved in the most spectacular way from 4 to 10 indicators, while Tismana experienced a fall from 8 indicators to 5.

Table 2.**Fullfilled indicators in 2004**

Amount of fulfilled indicators in 2004	List of towns that fulfilled them	Number of towns that fulfilled them
2	Chitila, Dragomirești, Săliște de Sus, Milișăuți	4
3	Săcueni, Bucecea, Flămânzi, Ștefănești (BT), Fierbinți-Târg, Pantelimon, Tăuții-Măgherăuș, Cajvana, Frasin, Vicovu de Sus	10
4	Răcari, Bechet, Dăbuleni, Căzănești, Podu Iloaiei, Popești-Leordeni, Voluntari, Ulmeni, Miercurea Nirajului, Potcoava, Miercurea Sibiului, Liteni, Salcea	13
5	Teiuș, Șomcuta Mare, Sărmașu, Ungheni, Dolhasca, Ciacova, Recaș, Berbești	8
6	Baia de Arieș, Pecica, Sântana, Pătârlagele, Bragadiru, Ardud, Livada, Gătaia, Murgeni, Băbeni	10
7	Ștefănești (AG), Băneasa, Turceni, Amara, Măgurele, Sângeorgiu de Pădure, Săliște, Roznov	8
8	Ghimbav, Tismana, Broșteni, Bălcești	4
9	Geoagiu, Făget	2
10	Otopeni	1

Table 3.

Fulfilled indicators in 2014

Amount of fulfilled indicators in 2014	List of towns that fulfilled them	Number of towns that fulfilled them
2	Dragomirești, Săliște de Sus, Potcoava, Frasin, Milișăuți, Salcea	6
3	Flămânzi, Ștefănești (BT), Pătărlagele, Răcari, Fierbinți-Târg, Livada, Cajvana, Liteni, Vicovu de Sus, Băbeni	10
4	Săcueni, Băneasa, Căzănești, Podu Iloaiei, Pantelimon, Șomcuta Mare, Ulmeni, Miercurea Nirajului, Sărmașu, Roznov, Broșteni, Recaș, Murgeni, Bechet	14
5	Baia de Arieș, Bucecea, Dăbuleni, Tismana, Sângeorgiu de Pădure, Miercurea Sibiului, Săliște, Dolhasca, Gătaia, Bălcești, Ciacova	11
6	Teiuș, Pecica, Turceni, Ardud, Berbești, Amara	6
7	Sântana, Ghimbav, Bragadiru, Chitila, Măgurele, Tăuții-Măgherăuș, Ungheni	7
8	-	0
9	Ștefănești (AG), Popești-Leordeni	2
10	Geoagiu, Otopeni, Voluntari, Făget	4

4. CONCLUSIONS

The promotion of the 60 new towns was a political action, motivated also by the accession negotiations with the European Union. But the system which created, maintained and controlled this kind of urbanization, could not do anything with the product of the process: neither the central authorities nor the local power has a long-term vision to make use of the new status (Berekmeri, 2006, p. 96). Multiplying the number of towns tends to become only a declarative action in the context of the inability to transform the towns into real local polarization cores (Săgeată, 2011). This is reflected in the eligibility of the new towns for their new rank: none of the 17 criteria was fulfilled by all of the 60 settlements, neither in 2004 nor in 2014. It was the hardest to achieve the minimum in case of indicators related to household-level facilities (proportion of households with water supply facilities and proportion of households with bathroom and toilet facilities) in 2004, while in 2014 the biggest shortcomings are to be found in the health system. However, in 2004 it was the easiest to

fulfill the population criterion, as well as the requirements of libraries and secondary education. Libraries and secondary education were the easiest ones also in 2014.

Indisputable improvements occurred however in all the indicators – except two of them – which is reflected both in the number of towns that fulfill the criteria, and in the average value of the sixty young towns. One exception is the number of inhabitants – the setback is the result of the increased limit and of population loss. Another exception is the number of beds in hospitals, which has its explanation in the hospital rationalization strategy of the country by dissolution of the unprofitable hospitals. The biggest improvements were showed in indicators regarding the equipment of households, the proportion of households with water supply facilities and proportion of households with bathroom and toilet facilities.

As a general conclusion: there are some winners that experienced a real change from rurality to urbanity (for example, the rapidly growing towns around Bucharest), and some losers which would like to return to their previous status of commune (these intentions are also proved by the referendums initiated for this purpose).

Certain researchers suggest that it would be useful to establish an intermediate category of settlements between urban and rural areas, to serve as “nurseries” for new urban settlements that will get this status only after really achieving the criteria set by the law (Săgeată, 2011). But in our opinion, it would be a pity to decrease the status of these settlements (also because the urbanization rate of the country is low, and because of the sense of failure of these new towns), instead of creating real opportunities for them to become real urban settlements. In order to do this, however, much money is needed - enough to be a real support, and something especially reserved for the small towns, so that they do not have to compete with their much bigger rivals.

REFERENCES

1. Benedek, J. (2006), Urban Policy and Urbanization in the Transition Romania, *Romanian Review of Regional Studies*, Volume II, Number 1.
2. Bengs, Ch., Schmidt-Thomé, K. (ed.) (2005), *Urban-rural Relations in Europe*, ESPON 1.1.2 Final Report.
3. Berekméri, M. (2006), Új városok Maros megyében (New Towns in Maros County), *Erdélyi Társadalom*, vol. IV, no. 2, p. 83-98.
4. Berekméri, M. (2009), *Urbanizarea post-socialistă în România. Teză de doctorat*, Cluj-Napoca.

5. Bilaşco, St., Filip, S., Cocean, P., Petrea, D., Vescan, I., Fodorean, I. (2015), The Evaluation of Accessibility to Hospital Infrastructure at Regional Scale by Using Gis Space Analysis Models: The North-West Region, Romania, *Studia UBB Geographia*, vol. LX, no. 1, p. 27-50.
6. Boţan, C. N. (2011), Public Health in Maramureş County - Current Status, Problems And Strategies, *Studia UBB Geographia*, LVI, no. 1, p. 216-230.
7. Caffyn, A., Dahlström, M. (2005), Urban–rural interdependencies: Joining up policy in practice, *Regional Studies*, 39:3, p. 283-296.
8. Cămară, G. (2011), Demographic Evolution of the Small Towns in The North-East Development Region in the Post-Communist Period, *Romanian Review of Regional Studies*, Vol. VII, Nr. 2, p. 105-110.
9. Covăsnianu, A., Covăsnianu, L. (2014), An Urban Perspective upon Moldavian Settlements. From Political Desideratum to Territorial Reality, *Romanian Review of Regional Studies*, Vol. 10, Nr. 2.
10. Dragomirescu, S., Săgeată R. (2008), Statutul de municipiu – o necesitate obiectiva, o moda a perioadei de tranzitie sau o incercare de reabilitare a unor asezari urbane fara perspective de dezvoltare? (The Status of Municipium – an Objective Necessity, or a Fashion of the Transition Period in an Attempt to Rehabilitate Towns with no Development Prospects?), *Historia Urbana*, XVI, no. 1-2, p. 251-260.
11. Drgona, V., Turnock, D. (2000), Policies for rural Eastern Europe in transition: the case of Slovakia, *GeoJournal*, 50, p. 235-247.
12. Glaeser, Ed. (2012), *The Triumph of The City. How Urban Spaces Make Us Human*. Pan Books, London (first published in the United Kingdom in 2011 by Macmillan).
13. Ianos, I., Talanga, Cr. (1994), *Orasul si sistemul urban romanesc in conditiile economiei de piata*. Academia Romana – Institutul de Geografie, Bucuresti.
14. Kourtit, K., Nijkamp, P. (2015), Cities of the Future: Research Challenges in The 'Urban Century'. *Romanian Journal of Regional Science*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 1-16.
15. Kovács, Z.(2009), Az urbanizáció keresztútja Kelet-Közép-Európában, *Változó Föld, változó társadalom, változó ismeretszerzés*. 460, p. 44-51.
16. Kurkó, I. (2009), Regional Disparities In The Transition Period, *Romanian Review Of Regional Studies*, Vol. V, No. 2, p. 23-30.
17. Lewis, D. B. (2014), Urbanization and Economic Growth in Indonesia: Good News, Bad News and (Possible) Local Government Mitigation, *Regional Studies*, vol. 48, no. 1, p. 192-207.
18. Mackinnon, D., Cumbers, A. (2007), *An Introduction to Economic Geography: Globalization, Uneven Development and Place*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, England.
19. Mitrica, B. (2014), Changes in the dynamics and demographic structures of the Romanian urban population. An overview of the post-communist period, *Revue Roumaine de Géographie*, vol. 58, 2, p. 201.
20. Mykhnenko, V., Turok I. (2008), East European cities – patterns of growth and decline, 1960–2005, *International Planning Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, p. 311–342.

21. Mojolic, D. (2013), Opportunities of Local Development Using Natural and Anthropogenic Resources in Tourism Activities. Case Study: Ulmeni, Maramureș, *Analele Universității din Oradea – Seria Geografie*, XXIII, no. 1, p. 123-133.
22. Postelnicu, C. (2011), *Investitiile straine directe in Romania - oportunitati si riscuri locale si regionale*. In: Balog, Iosif Marin; Graf, Rudolf; Lumperdean, Ioan (coord.): *Economia regionala: ipostaze rurale si urbane*. Presa Universitara Clujeana, Cluj-Napoca.
23. Rechnitzer, J. (2004), A városhálózat és a régiók formálódása, *Magyar Tudomány*, 9. szám, 978-990.
24. Săgeată, R. (2011), Evolutia structurilor administrativ-teritoriale din mediul rural in Romania in ultimele doua decenii (1990-2010), *Economie Agrară și Dezvoltare Rurală*, serie nouă, VIII, nr. 1, p. 79–88.
25. Săgeată, R. (2002), „Ruralul” în mediul urban, *Revista Geografică*, Institutul de Geografie, Academia Română, VIII, p. 157-165.
26. Săgeată, R. (2010), The Role of Political Factors in the Urbanisation and Regional Development of Romania, *Journal of Urban and Regional Analysis*, vol. II, 1, p. 81-88.
27. Sandu, D. (1999), Community and Regional Poverty in Rural Romania, *Romanian Journal of Sociology*, X, 1-2, p. 127-147.
28. Shucksmith, M., Cameron, S., Merridew, T., Pichler, F. (2009), Urban-Rural Differences in Quality of Life across the European Union, *Regional Studies*, vol. 43, 10, p. 1275-1289.
29. Sofer, M., Bordanc, F. (1998), Opportunities, constrains and pluractivity in rural Romania during the transition period; preliminary observations, *GeoJournal*, 44, 4, p. 283-296.
30. Turok, I., Mykhnenko, V. (2007), The trajectories of European cities, 1960-2005, *Cities: The Internatinal Journal of Urban Policy and Planning*, vol. 24, no. 3, p. 165-182.
31. Veress, N. Cs. (2013), Gazdasági diszparitások Észak-Nyugat Erdélyben, *Collegium Geographicum*, no. 10, p. 51-58.
32. Vlădescu, Cr., Astărăstoae, V. (2012), Policy and politics of the Romanian health care reform, *Revista Română de Bioetică*, vol. 10, no.1, p. 89-99.
33. Vlădescu, Cr, Astărăstoae, V., Scîntee, S. G. (2010), A health system focused on citizen's needs. Romania. Situation analysis (I), *Revista Romana de Bioetica*, vol 8, no. 2, p. 87-96.
34. *** United Nations – Population Division, Population Facts no. 2014/3
35. *** Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2006), *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*. Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, Paris. Available online (latest access on 16.10.2015): http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/the-new-rural-paradigm_9789264023918-en#page1
36. *** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mae.ro/node/18539>
37. *** Romanian Government, National Strategy for the Rationalization of the Hospitals (Decree no. 303/2011 for approving the National Strategy for the Rationalization of Hospitals). Available online: <http://www.ms.ro/?pag=207>

38. *** Analysis on the closed hospitals made by Mediafax in 2012, available online (latest access on 25.11. 2015): <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/un-an-de-la-inchiderea-spitalelor-majoritatea-sunt-centre-de-permanenta-cateva-transformate-in-camine-de-batrani-9470497>)
39. *** Law no. 351/2001 (Lege nr. 351 din 6 iulie 2001 privind aprobarea Planului de amenajare a teritoriului national - Sectiunea a IV-a - Reteaua de localitati).
40. *** Law no. 100/2007 (Lege nr. 100 din 19/04/2007 pentru modificarea si completarea Legii nr. 351/2001 privind aprobarea Planului de amenajare a teritoriului national - Sectiunea a IV-a - Reteaua de localitati).
41. ***MDLPL, Urbanproiect.
42. *** 2002 Population and Households Census.
43. *** 2011 Population and Households Census.
44. *** National Institute of Statistics, Tempo Online database.

Appendix

Missing data:

Indicator	Town	Year missing	Closest available
Green areas	Podu Iloaiei, Tăuții-Măgherăuș, Ungheni, Ardud	2004	2006
	Bragadiru, Chitila, Măgurele, Pantelimon, Liteni, Săliște de Sus	2004	2005
Total length of sewer pipes	Săcueni	2004	2006
	Săliște de Sus	2004	1999
	Răcari	2014	2004
	Tăuții-Măgherăuș	2004, 2014	1999
Total length of roads	Podu Iloaiei	2004	2006
	Bragadiru, Chitila, Măgurele, Pantelimon	2004	2005
Modernized roads	Podu Iloaiei	2004	2006
	Bragadiru, Chitila, Măgurele, Pantelimon	2004	2005
Public libraries	Pantelimon	2004	2005
	Teiuș	2014	2013
	Sângeorgiu de Pădure, Miercurea Sibiului	2014	2012
Total length of water supply	Fierbinți-Târg	2004	2006
	Salcea	2004	2005
Number of beds in hospitals	Săcueni, Flămânzi, Stefansti (Botosani), Răcari, Fierbinți-Târg	2004, 2014	2002
	Geoagiu	2004, 2014	1991
	Podu Iloaiei	2004, 2014	2003
	Șomcuta Mare	2014	2010
	Miercurea Nirajului	2004	2013
	Broșteni, Vicovu de Sus	2004, 2014	2006
Secondary schools	Ștefănești Argeș	2004	2005