

A POLYCENTRIC APPROACH FOR AN EFFECTIVE URBAN SYSTEMATIZATION OF BUCHAREST

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Abstract

Studies show that world population is concentrated in urban centers, also called urban or metropolitan areas. The great cities of Europe such as London, Paris and Berlin are few examples. This paper presents the results of a study that sought to identify the extent to which the creation of the Metropolitan Area of Bucharest is necessary and appropriate and to find out the opinions of the local government officials related to the impact of this administrative change to the economic, social and cultural environment. The paper is based on a qualitative research with classical research methods used for collecting and processing data. The main beneficiaries of the research results are both public managers from local governments and politicians from central and local administration. The research has confirmed most of the research hypotheses and demonstrated that the creation of the Metropolitan Area of Bucharest is necessary, timely and expected and will have a positive impact on both economic and social development of Bucharest and the surrounding localities.

Keywords: metropolitan areas, polycentric, development, impact, quality of life

1. INTRODUCTION

Almost half of the world population lives in urban areas, and this percentage is expected to exceed 60% in 2030. Unfortunately, these large regions face complex environmental, social and economic problems. Inside these large urban areas changes in land use, spatial dynamics, urban sprawl, polycentric development and urban shrinkage can be observed and analyzed.

Many countries from Central and Eastern Europe have experienced radical socioeconomic transformations and intensive spatial development processes. Like other urban systems from post-communist countries (Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, etc.), metropolitan areas in Romania still face profound changes that cause an extensive and dynamic process of landscape reorganization at the urban and the suburban level.

According to the relationship between growth and decline of the urban center and urban edge, at the metropolitan level have been identified the following stages of evolution: urbanization, suburbanization, de-urbanization and re-urbanization.

The Spatial Development Strategy of Romania for the period 2007 – 2030 and The National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 - 2013 in line with EU cohesion policy set the following two priority objectives: balanced territorial development of the country and creation of poles of growth and development.

In this regard, in January 2008, the Romanian Government approved a *Memorandum on Supporting Integrated Development of Romania's network of growth poles*. This document supports the development of cities, so that they can achieve the basic urban functions, thus creating conditions for a balanced polycentric development of the country and the affirmation of solidarity, as a key principle of EU cohesion policy.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE LITERATURE

Spatial changes of land use, especially agricultural land on the outskirts of urban areas, have been schematically portrayed by Bryant et al. (1982). He acknowledged the existence of four "zones" around a big city. The first area of *land around the city* is most largely covered building or land with planning permission. A second *area surrounding the city* is characterized by people belonging to a rural lifestyle, although there are some elements oriented to urban style represented by some families living along highways. Along the first two areas reach up to 6-10 miles from the town. A third area is the *urban periphery*, where urban influence is minimal but present resident owned land. The fourth area is a *rural area* where metropolitan influence does not stop because they present certain items such as a second home. (Simion 2010)

In 2010, the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development from Germany conducted a special research study. Through this research, the researchers of the institute identified *several types of metropolitan areas* and a set of *indicators for their classification*. This typology is based on a theory of defined functions and provides a comprehensive picture of how a city or a metropolitan area can be characterized. The main types of metropolitan areas identified are the following:

- **metropolitan areas with a large variety of functions**

This type is found in 21 cities from the European Union and is corresponding to the administrative organization of the big capitals of the member states. Metropolitan areas in this group have a high functional significance and a variety of administrative functions illustrated by the fact that at least four of the five functional areas have a value above the average value of the urban index set by METREX (The Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas).

- **metropolitan areas with a considerable variety of functions**

This type of metropolitan area is located in 19 cities from the European Union. It is characterized by a medium level of representation of the administrative functions at the urban level. In these metropolitan areas, the urban index value for the political, cultural and social functions is greater than the average value.

- **metropolitan areas with a limited variety of functions and high dispersion**

This type is found in small and medium-sized cities from Europe. The group is comprised of 67 medium and small metropolitan areas whose significance is based on the aggregate index of metropolitan functions rather than on their type. National capitals are hard represented. The variety of the metropolitan functions in this group is limited. Most of them are dominated by a single functional area which is cultural.

- **metropolitan areas with a limited variety of functions and high degree of specialization**

In this group of 18 members, metropolitan areas have a relatively low functional significance and are highly specialized. In these areas dominate the aggregate urban index of at least 50%. Therefore, these metropolitan areas are not fully functional European metropolitan areas, but rather national exceptions.

According to studies conducted so far, the Bucharest Metropolitan Area (BMA) would be composed by the city of Bucharest and 94 other towns and municipalities from neighboring counties. In 2005, Bucharest City Hall approved a project for supporting the setting up of the BMA. According to this project, the Bucharest Metropolitan Area integrates partially or fully the following five counties: Ilfov - 100%; Călărași - 35.3%; Giurgiu - 27.9%; Dâmbovița - 5.7% and Ialomița - 1.5%. The BMA spatial borders correspond roughly to the limits rural-urban edge, within a radius of 50-60 km, but can reach up to 70 km in the south-east. (Simion, 2010). An overview of the Bucharest Metropolitan Area is shown in Figure 1.

Yet, even today, the metropolitan area is not recognized by the Romanian Government and the National Institute of Statistics as a distinctive administrative unit. The research studies indicate that Bucharest is in the second round of the urban cycle life called suburbanization. The cycle is characterized by an increase and intensification of relations between the metropolis and the metropolitan area of Bucharest. (Plăcintescu et al. 2005).

According to the Law nr.351/2001, Annex I, the metropolitan area is constituted by the association based on voluntary partnership between urban and rural areas, among which were developed

from neighboring counties, and in the third stage would bring together administrative territory up to the Danube.

3. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The **purpose** of this research was to know the opinions of the local civil servants about the necessity and opportunity of setting up the metropolitan area of Bucharest, like an administrative alternative based on a balanced polycentric managerial approach for a more effective local development.

Specific objectives of the research were:

O1: To know how public servants perceive the administrative changes determined by the establishment of Bucharest Metropolitan Area (BMA).

O2: To know opinions about the impact of BMA to the administrative, economic, social and cultural development.

3.1. The research hypothesis

As a result of the performed analysis, the main research hypotheses that I have identified, are:

- **H1** - Setting up the BMA is a political project necessary, appropriate and expected.
- **H2**- The establishment of BMA will influence the economic, social and cultural development of the localities surrounding Bucharest;
- **H3** - Creating BMA will positively influence quality of citizens' life from the localities integrated.
- **H4**- The decision-making autonomy does not change significantly by creating BMA.

The **target group** of this research is composed by the citizens from the neighboring settlements of Bucharest, which may be part of BMA. The main beneficiaries of this research can be both the local governments and the politicians from central and local administration. The other beneficiaries are citizens and the economic agents and also any other persons and organizations interested in the subject.

The **sample** was composed of 21 civil servants from local administration. Even so, the sample is representative and the results are relevant to the research theme. Almost 38% of the respondents have management positions and other 62% have executive positions. The risk margin considered was 10%.

3.2. The research method

In order to achieve objectives and to check the hypothesis, I have chosen the research questionnaire in electronic format, like an effective research instrument appropriate in this research process. The questionnaire includes an introduction with a brief description about the research objectives and 12 questions. The content of the questions was formulated clearly, concisely, using simple language. The questionnaire contains both questions with single and multiple choices and questions with different alternative answers. For framing the answers of some questions I have used **Likert's scale** with various degrees of intensity.

The questionnaire was sent electronically to 45 municipalities from the counties of Ilfov, Călărași, Giurgiu, Dâmbovița. 32 questionnaires were received. After a preliminary evaluation, 21 completed questionnaires were selected for analysis in the research process.

The second research instrument used was the **analysis of documents**. Part of the documents used were identified on the websites of the existing Romanian metropolitan areas: Oradea, Iași, Constanța and the other documents were provided by few city halls involved in the research process. The research issues considered in the documentary process were: the legal status of these metropolitan areas, the missions, their objectives and projects in which they were involved or have been implemented or coordinated by them so far.

4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The first topic addressed in this research process was *the necessity and opportunity for setting-up the metropolitan area of Bucharest*. The opinions of the respondents are summarized in Figure 2.

The results show that more than half of respondents, 62% believe that the establishment of Bucharest Metropolitan Area is required and expected in a very large measure. Other 38% consider that the new metropolitan area is necessary and appropriate, but the level of necessity and opportunity is medium. Related to the answers to the question about the time frame in which the metropolitan area should be found, more than half of respondents (52%) believe that this administrative reorganization should be completed in the next three years. The rest (48%) think that it would take at least five years until the new administrative structure of the metropolitan area will become functional (Ciobanu, 2013). Almost 38% of respondents believe that the towns and villages they are living are largely ready and prepared for integration. Other 43% believe that local authorities are prepared at an average level for integration and only 19% believe that the local authorities are prepared for integration, but at a very low level.

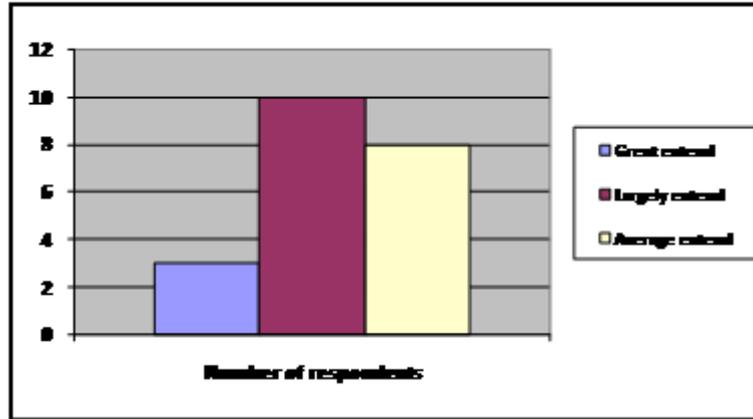


FIGURE 2 - TO WHAT EXTENT THE SETTING-UP OF THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF BUCHAREST IS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE?

Analyzing the results obtained, we can conclude that the respondents' opinions about the BMA setting up is a favorable one. According to those who responded to the questionnaires, the Bucharest Metropolitan Area is necessary and appropriate, and the local public institutions are largely ready to take new attributes and administrative functions. *The answers confirm the first research hypothesis.*

With respect to the main benefits of local communities, as a result of their integration in BMA, I have got a variety of answers, which are presented in Figure 3. In the figure below we can see a wide variety of fields which respondents think will grow-up, as a result of included their locality in BMA. It demonstrates that polycentric managerial approach can be a *viable alternative for developing their local communities.*

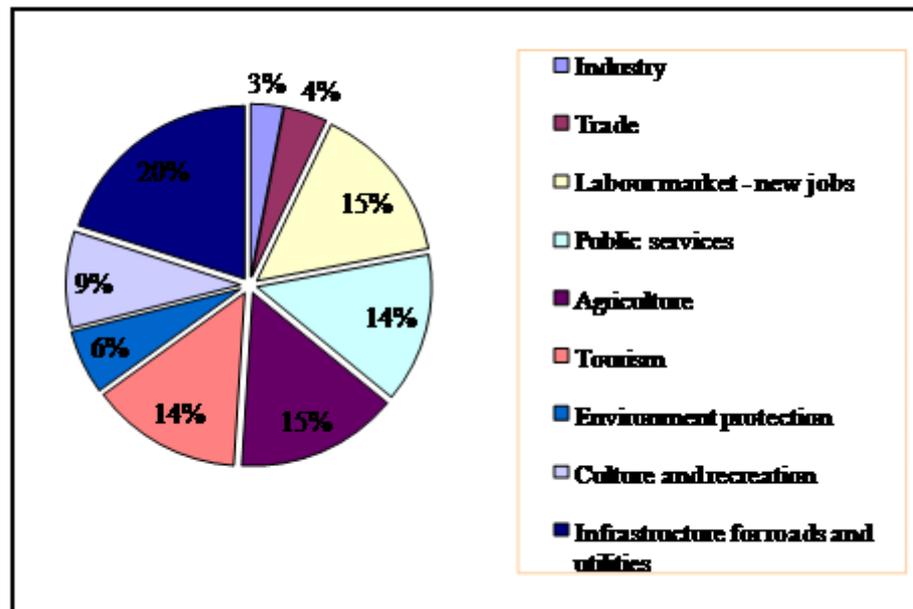


FIGURE 3 - WHAT ARE THE FIELDS THAT YOU APPRECIATE AS VERY BENEFICIAL FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY WHEN IT WILL BE PART OF BUCHAREST METROPOLITAN AREA?

Respondents chose the following areas with a higher frequency: *sustainable agriculture and creating new jobs* by a percentage of 15 %, 14 % appreciated that the *utility infrastructure* will be extended and upgraded and 9% think that *the local tourism* will develop and *new recreation centres* shall be established. Most territorial units are in rural areas, hence it explains the need for a larger and modern utility infrastructure (water, sewer). The fact that part of the respondents mentioned local tourism development like a benefit of the new administrative reorganization is based on the fact that their cities and villages have a considerable number of sights (monasteries, churches, archaeological sites, eg. Gumelnița Călărași county, etc.). They expect and want a considerable increase of new jobs on the local labour market, because many citizens are working now in Bucharest and have to commute daily to and from Bucharest.

Regarding the impact of the BMA to the development of local social and economic environment, I found that most respondents believe that integration will have a strong impact, as can be seen in Figure 4. More than half (57%) of respondents believe that the impact of the new metropolitan area will be very high on the local social and economic development. Only 10% of respondents believe that the impact will be low. These figures shows the fact that the respondents believe that by integrating their localities in BMA, the local economic environment will be significantly improved and the social and economic development will be consistent and sustainable.

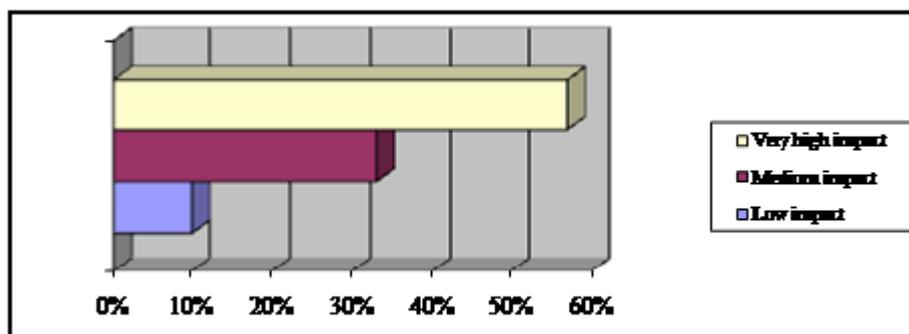


FIGURE 4 - THE IMPACT OF THE MAB TO THE LOCAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Among the important positive effects of integration in MAB, I found that *quality of life* is on the first place (Androniceanu 2012). As can be seen in Figure 5, setting-up the MAB will have a significant positive impact on quality of citizen's life. 57% of respondents believe that the impact will be positive with an average influence on quality of life of citizens. Other 33% perceive positive impact as significant and only 10% believe that the positive impact will be insignificant. These results confirm the third research hypothesis.

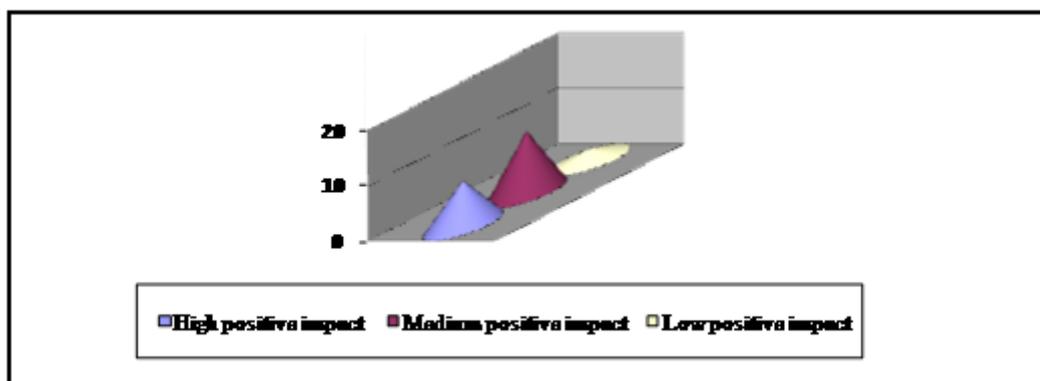


FIGURE 5. THE IMPACT OF THE BUCHAREST METROPOLITAN AREA TO THE QUALITY OF LOCAL CITIZEN'S LIFE

About the respondents' perception regarding administrative autonomy, I found that 67% of them believe it will decrease, 24% believe that it will remain at an average level, and only 9% believe it will remain unchanged. These results refute the fourth research hypothesis. Therefore, respondents believe that an important part of their decision-making attributes will be considered by the new administrative system of BMA. Even so, the respondents consider this change acceptable, both because they will have community representants in the decision-making process and the entire management system will be based on an effective administrative cooperation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the results, the research pointed out the fact that by setting up the Bucharest Metropolitan Area the chances of the integrated localities to grow-up will increase. This will influence positively the quality of life and will create citizens the feeling that they belong to a new administrative structure which should be more effective.

The management of a metropolitan area is based on polycentric approach that has prove effective in many countries in Europe. The research confirms the fact that this new managerial approach associated with the new MAB can be a viable alternative for a better urban balance and a suitable solution for urban development.

The research has shown that the current metropolitan areas in Romania are largely functional and effective. This means that the creation of MAB will be beneficial both for the macro and the micro urban administrative level.

By creating BMA, both the capital and its surrounding villages will evolve better economically and socially. The new administrative reorganization may reduce administrative costs and can increase efficiency of the decision-making process.

Research has shown that the creation of the Bucharest Metropolitan Area is needed, timely and expected and demonstrated by its results that by implementing such a project both the capital of the country and surrounding villages can enter into another phase of their sustainable economic and social development.

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