

## PREMISES FOR SHAPING METROPOLITAN AREAS IN ROMANIA

RAULARIAN RUSU<sup>1</sup>, CIPRIAN MOLDOVAN<sup>2</sup>, DĂNUȚ PETREA<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT** - The setting up of metropolitan areas is a process which is still in progress in Romania. The legislative framework for the creation of these areas has been built up only since 2001, and there are still a number of juridical inconsistencies concerning the association of administrative units to form metropolitan areas. On the other hand, political reasons and the fear of losing a certain degree of authority and to become subordinates of the large cities (in the case of rural municipalities) also hindered the development of metropolitan areas in Romania. Nevertheless, the metropolitan areas already in existence are running a number of projects that are beneficial for most members of the association. Such positive examples may trigger the creation of the other metropolitan areas. Although the existing metropolitan areas did not yield spectacular results, the time passed since their foundation is yet too short to correctly assess their usefulness and territorial meaning. For the moment, the following metropolitan areas exist in Romania: Iași, Oradea, Brașov, Constanța, Bacău, Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureș and Craiova. Bucharest, Timișoara, Ploiești and Galați-Brăila metropolitan areas are still in process of setting up.

**Keywords:** metropolitan areas, Romania, cities, urban areas, urban cores

### OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

There are two main objectives of the paper. One is to present critically the legal framework for the creation of metropolitan areas in Romania, based on the analysis of criteria used for the setting up of metropolitan areas elsewhere in the world. The other objective is to assess the development and functionality of metropolitan areas in Romania from a comparative perspective, in terms of size (population), number of members (administrative units), importance of the urban core, percentage of the urban population and results achieved since their inception.

### THE CONCEPT OF METROPOLITAN AREA

The term “metropolitan area” has a very wide range of meanings across the world, which led to much confusion regarding the ranking of cities according to their population (Forstall, Green and Pick, 2009). In different contexts, a metropolitan area may coincide (or not) with an urban agglomeration, an urbanized area or even a conurbation. For Beaujeu-Garnier and Chabot (1971, p. 252), the urban agglomerations are the same with the metropolitan areas. However, most researchers consider that the urban agglomeration would represent a continuous built-up area, while a metropolitan area would consist of such an agglomeration (or an urban core) and its surrounding territory that is socio-economically linked to it by commuting. This territory may include both urban and rural settlements (*Federal Register*, 2000, p. 82228).

Therefore, a metropolitan area includes a central urban core (a metropolis) and its suburban and rural surroundings that are directly influenced by the urban centre. This peripheral territory may consist of smaller cities, towns and villages.

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<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, PhD, Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, 400006 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.  
E-mail: rrusu@geografie.ubbcluj.ro

<sup>2</sup> Teaching Assistant, PhD student, Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, 400006 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.  
E-mail: cmoldovan@geografie.ubbcluj.ro

<sup>3</sup> Professor, PhD, Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, 400006 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.  
E-mail: dpetrea@geografie.ubbcluj.ro

Rarely, a metropolitan area has more than one urban centre. A polycentric metropolitan area would have two or more urban centres, that are similar in size, but they need not to be physically connected by a continuous built-up area, thus distinguishing the concept from that of conurbation.

### **METROPOLITAN AREAS IN THE U.S.A. AND AROUND THE WORLD**

The term “metropolitan” was first used officially in the U.S.A. (Erdeli, 1999). For the 1910 census, the U.S. Census Bureau introduced the concept of “metropolitan district” for cities larger than 100,000 inhabitants. In 1930, the threshold was lowered to 50,000 inhabitants and in 1940 there were 140 such units. The boundaries of the metropolitan districts were drawn mainly according to the population density, and minor civil divisions were used to build up the metropolitan district (Plane, 2004, p. 90). However, other U.S. agencies and statistical groups did not use the concept, defining other statistical areas having a similar content, such as “industrial areas”, “labor market areas” or “metropolitan counties”. As a result, the Bureau of the Budget developed the then-called “Standard Metropolitan Areas” in time for their use in the 1950 census reports (*Federal Register*, 2000, p. 82228). Since then, comparable data products for metropolitan areas have been available, although their name slightly changed to “Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas” between 1960 and 1980 and “Metropolitan Statistical Areas” since 1980.

The basic unit to form the metropolitan areas in the United States is the county, except for New England, where the towns are the most powerful units of government (Plane, 2004, p. 90). Therefore, a metropolitan area consists of at least one central county containing a core urban area and possibly by one or more outlying counties, if they have strong social and economic ties with the central county, measured in terms of commuting and employment. The general concept of the metropolitan area was that of “an area containing a large population nucleus and adjacent communities that have a high degree of integration with that nucleus” (*Federal Register*, 1999, p. 56628). The metropolitan areas may cross state boundaries if necessary in order to include qualified contiguous counties. The minimum population of a central city to form the nucleus of a metropolitan area is 50,000 inhabitants and the minimum total population of the metropolitan area is 100,000 inhabitants (although some exceptions were allowed). Other criteria involved are: at least 25% of the active population should work in other sectors than agriculture; at least 50% of the total population should live in areas with a density higher than 150 inhabitants/square mile (about 63 inhabitants/square km); the active population that works in other sectors than agriculture should be higher than 10,000; the population working in other sectors than agriculture in the outlying counties should be higher than 10% of the total population of the central county (Bastié and Dézert, 1980, quoted by Săgeată, 2004, p. 284). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000 there were 362 metropolitan statistical areas in the U.S.A.

Since 2003, as a consequence of a review of metropolitan area definitions, the U.S. Office for Management and Budget introduced the concept of Micropolitan Statistical Areas. Initially, the term “micropolitan” was used by Scott Thomas (1989, 1990) and gained currency in the 1990s for describing growing population centres that are far from larger cities. The micropolitan areas are similar to the metropolitan areas, but centered on smaller-sized central cities or towns, with a population between 10,000 and 49,999 inhabitants. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000 there were 560 micropolitan statistical areas in the U.S.A. (data available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).

Both metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas are collectively known as Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs). Under certain conditions, two or more CBSAs are grouped together to form a larger statistical entity named Combined Statistical Area (CSA).

The metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas are geographical entities defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for statistical purposes only. They are not legally incorporated, nor are they legal administrative divisions. According to the OMB, they should not serve as a general purpose geographical framework for non-statistical activities (*Federal Register*, 2000, p. 82228). Nevertheless, although originally intended merely as units to present more useful data tabulations, they have become rather extensively written into federal legislation for purposes of providing urban service, and the units have become not only widely recognized but also politically sensitive (Plane, 2004, p. 90).

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In other parts of the world, metropolitan areas are also defined officially. However, the criteria used for official definitions differ widely, with the result that metropolitan areas are not necessarily comparable across countries. A key aspect is the choice of the building block of the metropolitan area. While in the U.S.A, entire counties are used to form a metropolitan area, in Canada, for instance, smaller county subdivisions constitute the building blocks (Forstall, Green, Pick, 2009). The other criteria may also be totally different: the U.S. definitions make use of a commuting criterion of 25% of workers, while the Canadian requirement is normally 50% (Forstall, Green and Pick, 2009).

In Canada, a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) is the area formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centered on a large urban area (or urban core). The urban core should have a population of at least 100,000 inhabitants in order to form a CMA. In order to be included in the CMA, the adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by urban flows deriving from census data on place of work (Heisz, 2005).

As a consequence of this more restrictive definition of the metropolitan area, compared to the U.S. one, there are only 27 metropolitan areas in Canada.

The concept of metropolitan area is also widely used in different countries of Asia and Latin America, such as Japan, Mexico, Brazil (Forstall, Green and Pick, 2009).

In the U.S. and Canada, there is a high number of metropolitan areas defined for statistical purposes mainly and a smaller number of metropolitan areas or other forms of cooperation between local jurisdiction with the purpose of providing common public services or developing a certain area. Nevertheless, in Europe, the functional criterion is the most important one, as metropolitan areas (or other similar types of territorial cooperation centered on large cities) are meant to trigger the development and targeted to attract governmental and European funds.

In Europe, Eurostat created the concept of "Larger Urban Zones" (LUZ) in an effort to harmonize the definitions of urban areas, similar to metropolitan areas, in the EU countries and even in the candidate countries. These definitions were agreed between Eurostat and the national statistics offices of the different EU countries at the occasion of the European Commission's Urban Audit of 2004. The LUZ definitions were changed and harmonized again in 2006, on the occasion of the Urban Audit III, significantly improving the comparability of LUZ definitions across different countries. There are about 120 metropolitan areas in Europe (Anghel, Florea and Pece, 2005), of which 49 are members of the Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas (METREX). Most of them are located in Germany, Italy and Spain. The only Romanian metropolitan areas which are part of this network are Oradea and Bucharest. METREX was set up in 1996 with the support of the European Commission on the occasion of Conference of Metropolitan Regions in Glasgow. According to METREX, the metropolitan area is an urbanized area which includes at least 500,000 inhabitants ([www.eurometrex.org](http://www.eurometrex.org)). The number of metropolitan areas in Europe is increasing as a result of the expansion of the concept in a number of European countries, including Romania.

The developments of the concept of metropolitan area (especially in Europe) had a certain influence on the creation of metropolitan areas in Romania. As in other Eastern European countries, there was no tradition of such areas in Romania, therefore the concept was clearly new and raised a certain number of questions among the local government actors. Although based on similar units throughout the world, the concept of metropolitan area was fundamented on the Romanian urban realities and borrowed only selectively the criteria for establishing the areas. The development of metropolitan areas after 2007 was also triggered by the opportunity to access European structural funds.

### **THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTING THE METROPOLITAN AREAS IN ROMANIA**

In Romania, there were numerous studies concerning the periurban or suburban areas (Iordan, 1973; Benedek, 2000; Nicolae, 2002; Minea, 2003; Cocean, 2007; Neamțu, 2008; Ghiolțan, 2008) although these concepts had no official recognition from an administrative point of view. The first task of the researchers was to delineate these areas. However, the term "metropolitan" was not used, either officially or unofficially, in the Romanian scientific literature, except for areas outside Romania. Erdeli (1999, p. 193) defines the metropolis as a large city having at least 1 million inhabitants and in

control of a region having between 5 and 30 million inhabitants. In these circumstances, the only Romanian city which might qualify is Bucharest. Therefore, the term “periurban” is rather preferred to “metropolitan” (Săgeată, 2004, p. 284).

In Romania, the first official reference to metropolitan areas was made in Law no. 350 of 6 July 2001, which defined in appendix 2 the “metropolitan territory” as being the area located around the large urban agglomerations, delineated by scientific studies, within which there are reciprocal economic, social, communication, infrastructure and cultural relations of influence. The law also states that the limit of the metropolitan area is normally beyond the administrative unit of the city and that it may even cross the boundary of the county where the city is located (*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 373, 10 July 2001). In appendix 1, the law lists the “metropolitan or periurban plan of cities and towns” as one of the territorial arrangement plans at zonal level.

More concrete reference to metropolitan areas is made in the P.A.T.N. (National Plan for Territorial Arrangement), section no. 4 – “The Network of Settlements” – approved as Law no. 351 of 6 July 2001. According to Appendix 1 of this law, metropolitan areas may be constituted by association based on voluntary partnership between large urban centres and neighbouring towns and rural communities, located within 30 km from the central urban core, which developed relations of cooperation (*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 408, 24 July 2001).

The large urban centres which qualify to form a metropolitan area are the cities ranked 0 (Bucharest, the capital city of Romania) and 1 (eleven cities: Bacău, Braşov, Brăila, Cluj-Napoca, Constanţa, Craiova, Galaţi, Iaşi, Oradea, Ploieşti and Timișoara) according to the same law. The main criterion to differentiate these cities from the others is their population, as they all have more than 200,000 inhabitants. However, except for Bucharest, none of them has more than 350,000 inhabitants according to the data of the 2002 census (www.insse.ro among other sources).

According to paragraph 2 of article 7, the metropolitan areas are independent entities, but they are not legal corporate bodies. It means that they are not legal administrative divisions. This fact considerably lowers their territorial significance and raises questions about their territorial meaning, taking also into account their voluntary creation.

The next paragraph of the same article asserts that the metropolitan areas may function independently from the limits of local administrative units. In this case, parts of a municipality (for instance, one or two villages) may be included in a metropolitan area, while other parts of the same municipality may lie outside the boundaries of the metropolitan area. This provision adds more controversy to the role of the metropolitan areas, as they are not necessarily based on the local administrative units, which are the lowest level of planning unit. Moreover, in many cases, areas of units smaller than the municipalities (such as the villages) are not exactly known and difficult to be included (or excluded).

According to the article 8 of the law, the Association of the Metropolitan Area adopts the development programme of the area, which the local councils and the population should agree upon (*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 408, 24 July 2001).

Metropolitan areas are also mentioned in the Government Decree no. 53/ 16 August 2002, regarding the status of the administrative-territorial units. Article 4, paragraph 3, mentions that the municipalities neighbouring Bucharest City and other cities ranked first (the eleven cities mentioned above) may be organized in the metropolitan area of that city. The next paragraph indicates that the metropolitan areas are organized and function according to the law (*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 633 of 27 August 2002). This decree confirms the possibility for creating metropolitan areas in Romania, but brings nothing new compared to the provisions of Law no. 351/2001.

Law no. 286 of 6 July 2006, for the amendment and completion of Law no. 215/2001 concerning the local public administration, states that article 11 of the above-mentioned act has the following contents: two or more administrative units have the right, within the limits of the powers of their deliberative and executive authorities, to cooperate and to associate lawfully, forming associations of inter-community development, which are private legal entities of public utility. The next paragraph implies the idea that the metropolitan areas are such associations of inter-community development (*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 621 of 18 July 2006). This law makes no reference to the size of

cities or other administrative units allowed forming such associations. On the other hand, it makes specific reference to administrative units as the building blocks of such associations, contrary to the stipulations of Law 351/2001, which allowed parts of administrative units to be included or excluded from a metropolitan area. The most important fact is that these associations may have juridical personality, as they are private legal entities of public interest.



**Figure 1.** Romanian cities allowed to have metropolitan areas in 2001

Nevertheless, the most difficult task is to get the local councils to agree upon the very creation of a metropolitan area, because several mayors and local councillors are against the association of their municipality with the neighbouring city, being afraid of losing some of their attributes as local authorities. This is a consequence of the lack of tradition regarding the cooperation between local government units.

Administrative fragmentation is also a highly debated issue and an administrative reform is on the agenda of all political actors.

However, during the last years, a high number of inter-community development associations were set up as a result of the opportunity of accessing post-EU accession funds by means of operational programmes. According to the Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs ([www.mai.gov.ro](http://www.mai.gov.ro)), there were more than 600 inter-municipality cooperation partnerships in 2010. The provision of common public services is their main target. Many of these associations were successful in attracting EU funds, especially for infrastructure, by means of the National Programme for Rural Development, Measure 322 ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)). In the case of metropolitan areas, some (as in the case of Cluj) were created in order to draft the integrated urban development plans by means of POR (Regional Operational Programme).

Apart from better access to the European structural funds, the creation of metropolitan areas in Romania may bring a number of advantages, of which one may mention: the decongestion of the city and of the urban agglomeration, a higher supply of dwellings for the population, bigger budgetary funds for municipalities with low incomes, economic benefits due to the higher attractiveness of the area for the potential investors, improvement of the infrastructure and a higher degree of integration of the urban and suburban public transport, the creation of new jobs, the extension of gas, water, sewage and communication networks.

However, a number of weaknesses may also be considered: real estate speculations which determine the increase of prices for land and houses, difficulties concerning the administration of such an area which is not a legal corporate body, the possible increase of local taxes in the case of rural communities, the degradation of the environment as a result of the urbanization of former rural areas, a reduction in the local autonomy, the centralization of funds and the risk of their preferential distribution, according to improper criteria (such as political ones).

For Săgeată (2004, p. 283), the metropolitan areas in Romania, as structures of inter-municipality cooperation, result from the complementarity of the two types of local administrative units: the cities, with a high degree of urbanization, characterized by a high population density and a

small administrative area, and the rural municipalities located near the cities, characterized by limited budgetary funds, and low-priced lands that may be available for investors. Therefore, the cooperation between the two structures – the city and the rural municipalities surrounding it – would bring benefits for both, as the rural communities would be interested in improving their living standards at the cost of the city, while the city would expand its territory beyond its formal administrative boundary at the cost of the neighbouring municipalities. This way, the rural areas evolve from polarized space to integrated space (Sârbovan, 1996, quoted by Săgeată, 2004, p. 283).

### **THE METROPOLITAN AREAS IN ROMANIA**

The first attempts at setting up metropolitan areas in Romania were made only a few years after the Law 351/2001 had been sanctioned, as a result of the difficulties emerged at the level of local authorities and the voluntary character of the association. A much higher number of metropolitan areas were set up after the accession to the EU in 2007.

*Iași Metropolitan Area* was the first to be created on April 8, 2004. It comprises the city of Iași and 13 adjacent municipalities: Aroneanu, Bârnova, Ciurea, Holboca, Lețcani, Miroslava, Popricani, Reditu, Schitu Duca, Tomești, Ungheni, Valea Lupului and Victoria ([www.zmi.ro](http://www.zmi.ro)). Iași County Council is also a member. The total population of the metropolitan area is about 400,000 inhabitants, of which the population of the city of Iași represents more than 75%. Some of the municipalities included - such as Tomești, Holboca, Ciurea, Valea Lupului – are characterized by a high number of employees in industry and services (Stoleriu, 2008, p. 37). Although some of them are employed in their own municipality, most of them work in Iași on the basis of commuting. The other municipalities are also well connected with the urban core of the metropolitan area, yet they have a higher percentage of the active population employed in agricultural activities.

Despite the projects which are meant to develop Iași metropolitan area, this delineation is still rather theoretical, as it only take partly into consideration the general criteria to be accomplished in order to become a functional region: proximity, strong connections, accessibility, commuting, economic and functional relations, a certain level of urbanization and provision of urban services (Stoleriu, 2008, p. 36). Moreover, the limits of the metropolitan area are arbitrary, as it does not include municipalities which have strong ties with the city (in the South-West and West), while it comprises municipalities that are less integrated, in the North-East and South-East (Stoleriu, 2008, p. 40).

*Oradea Metropolitan Area* was created on May 9, 2005, comprising the city of Oradea and nine municipalities: Biharia, Borș, Cetariu, Nojorid, Oșorhei, Paleu, Sânmartin and Sânanđrei ([www.zmo.ro](http://www.zmo.ro)). The area is shaped almost symmetrically around the urban core - Oradea. This metropolitan area was the first to join the Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas (METREX). There are several projects under development in this metropolitan area.

*Brașov Metropolitan Area* was set up in 2005, and then re-established in 2007 as an association of inter-community development. It comprises the city of Brașov, the towns of Codlea, Ghimbav, Predeal, Râșnov and Săcele, and the rural municipalities of Bod, Cristian, Hălchiu, Hărman, Prejmer, Sânpetru, Tărlungeni and Vulcan. Brașov County Council is also part of the association ([www.metropolabrasov.ro](http://www.metropolabrasov.ro)). A number of projects are also under development in this metropolitan area, which has the highest percentage of urban population of all the Romanian metropolitan areas.

*Constanța Metropolitan Area* was created in February 2007 and markets itself as the “first European-type administrative structure in Romania” ([www.zmc.ro](http://www.zmc.ro)). It consists of Constanța City, the towns of Eforie, Murfatlar, Ovidiu, Năvodari and Techirghiol, and eight rural municipalities: Agigea, Corbu, Cumpăna, Lumina, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Poarta Albă, Tuzla, Valu lui Traian, to which Constanța County Council is added as a member. The objectives of the association are: the improvement and development of the transport, telecommunication and energy infrastructure, the reduction of disparities between the settlements located in the metropolitan area, the development of new residential areas, the development and improvement of public services, the environmental protection and sustainable development, the attraction of new investments and the increase of access to resources.

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*Bacău Metropolitan Area* was founded in 2007 and includes the city of Bacău and the municipalities of Berești-Bistrița, Buhoci, Faraoani, Filipești, Gioseni, Hemeiuș, Itești, Letea Veche, Luizi-Călugăra, Măgura, Mărgineni, Nicolae Bălcescu, Prăjești, Sărata, Săucești, Tamași and Traian.

One of the metropolitan areas which had a very difficult birth was that of Cluj-Napoca. Initially, it included a number of municipalities around the urban core of Cluj-Napoca, and several villages of other municipalities, located farther away. The initial project was a failure, due to the misunderstandings between the local authorities, as well as the different interpretation regarding the delineation of this area. Finally, *Cluj Metropolitan Area* was set up on December 22, 2008, comprising the city of Cluj-Napoca and the municipalities of Aiton, Apahida, Băciu, Bonțida, Borșa, Căianu, Chinteni, Ciurila, Cojocna, Feleacu, Florești, Gârbău, Gilău, Jucu, Petreștii de Jos, Săvădisla, Sânpaul, Tureni and Vultureni ([www.cjcluj.ro/zona-metropolitana-urbana](http://www.cjcluj.ro/zona-metropolitana-urbana)). A general plan of development for this area is in progress. Though the metropolitan area is too young to assess its usefulness, one may assert that it is a bit larger than the area of direct influence of the city, making little use of the main corridor along Someș River and including municipalities which are closer and more connected to other towns (Turda or Gherla).

The smallest metropolitan area yet to be created is that of *Craiova*, which was set up on January 29, 2009, and it is made up only by the city of Craiova and six surrounding municipalities: Breasta, Ghercești, Mischii, Pielești, Predești and Simnicu de Sus.

Other metropolitan areas emerged around cities which are not ranked first according to Law no. 351/2001. However, they make use of the constitutional right of association and the provisions of Law 286/2006, which provides the right of any administrative units to associate into associations of inter-community development.

Such is the case of *Târgu Mureș Metropolitan Area*, set up in 2005 at the initiative of Mureș County Council, comprising the city of Târgu Mureș, the town of Ungheni and the municipalities of Acățari, Ceuașu de Câmpie, Corunca, Crăciunești, Cristești, Ernei, Gheorghe Doja, Livezeni, Pănet, Sâncraiu de Mureș, Sângeorgiu de Mureș and Sânpaul. Other cities, like Sibiu, Arad, Pitești, which are not ranked first, may also follow the example of Târgu Mureș.

Other metropolitan areas are still in project. The largest and more important of all is *Bucharest Metropolitan Area*. A project for this metropolitan area was in progress since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ianoș *et al.*, 1999). Săgeată (2004, pp. 286-287), following the ideas of this project, also made a proposition for a very large metropolitan area of Bucharest, which would extend to the Danube and includes not only Ilfov County, but also a high number of municipalities of Giurgiu and Călărași counties, as well as municipalities in Ialomița and Dâmbovița counties. More recently, in 2010, a project of law emerged concerning the creation of Bucharest Metropolitan Area, including 62 urban and rural municipalities (Diac, 2010).

Other metropolitan areas which are still undergoing certain problems concerning their setting-up are those of *Timișoara*, *Ploiești* or *Galați-Brăila*. Galați-Brăila would be the only metropolitan area in Romania which is based on two cities that are almost the same size. Săgeată (2004, p. 285-286) proposed a metropolitan area of these cities that would include also the town of Măcin and nine rural municipalities of the counties of Galați, Brăila and Tulcea.

The existing metropolitan areas may be compared according to several criteria, such as: size (population), number of members (administrative units), importance of the urban core, percentage of the urban population and, most important, functionality (table 1).

According to size, one may easily remark that the eight metropolitan areas have rather similar numbers of inhabitants, roughly between 200 000 and 450 000. The most populated metropolitan area, that of Constanța, is about twice the size of the least populated one, that of Târgu Mureș. However, the creation of Bucharest Metropolitan Area may change completely this ranking, as it would be by far the largest metropolitan area in Romania. For now, the metropolitan areas may be divided into two groups: the larger ones, having more than 350 000 inhabitants (Constanța, Brașov, Iași, Cluj-Napoca) and the smaller ones, below that value (Craiova, Oradea, Bacău, Târgu Mureș).

The size of the urban core and the number and type of composing municipalities play a determining role in this ranking of the metropolitan areas. The larger cities usually have larger

metropolitan areas. The only exception is Craiova, which, nevertheless, has the lowest number of municipalities included in the metropolitan area. Braşov, on the other hand, benefits from the cooperation with other five towns, just as Constanţa, which is yet the largest metropolitan area of all. Apart from these two, only Târgu Mureş metropolitan area includes another town (Ungheni) than the urban core.

**Table 1.** Existing metropolitan areas of Romania. Basic facts

Metropolitan area	Number of settlements			Total population	Pop. of the urban core	Urban population (%)	No. of projects in progress
	Urban core	Other urban centres	Rural municipalities				
Iaşi	1	-	13	395,298	305,978	77.4	8
Oradea	1	-	9	240,800	207,000	86	30
Braşov	1	5	8	408,249	284,596	89.4	17
Constanţa	1	5	8	446,595	302,040	84	10
Bacău	1	-	17	248,214	177,087	71.3	2
Cluj-Napoca	1	-	19	385,059	317,953	82.6	14
Craiova	1	-	6	316,730	299,429	94.5	5
Târgu Mureş	1	1	12	212,808	150,041	73.6	2

Source: www.insse.ro and the websites of metropolitan areas

However, Cluj-Napoca, Bacău and Iaşi metropolitan areas consist of a large number of rural municipalities. Some of them (Floreşti and Holboca, for instance) rank among the best populated rural municipalities in Romania and are larger than some towns.

The weight of the urban population within the metropolitan areas varies between 70% and 95%. The highest value (94.5%) is registered in the case of Craiova, due to the high relative importance of the urban core within a small metropolitan area. The lower values are recorded in metropolitan areas with a smaller urban core (Târgu Mureş, Bacău) and a high number of composing municipalities.

The most important criterion in differentiating metropolitan areas is their functionality. However, this is yet difficult to assess, because many metropolitan areas have been set up recently. A good indicator would be the number of projects which the metropolitan areas are involved in or the amounts they succeeded to access. Counting the projects (table 1), it comes out that the older metropolitan areas are the most successful ones. For instance, Oradea Metropolitan Area has about 30 projects that are finalized or in progress. Among the newer metropolitan areas, Cluj-Napoca seems to be the most active one (14 projects). The lowest number of projects under development is registered in the case of Bacău and Târgu Mureş metropolitan areas.

Metropolitan areas, as inter-community development associations, are usually involved as partners in many projects, often cooperating with the county council or the local government of the urban core. However, they have just begun to play an important part in the accession of funds by means of operational programmes. Therefore, their role should increase in the coming years, when a more detailed analysis of the projects and amounts accessed should be made, along with their impact on the development of the region.

## CONCLUSIONS

The setting up of metropolitan areas is a process which is still in progress in Romania. The legislative framework for the creation of these areas has been built up only since 2001, and there are still a number of juridical inconsistencies concerning the association of administrative units to form metropolitan areas. On the other hand, political reasons and the fear of losing a certain degree of authority and to become subordinates of the large cities (in the case of rural municipalities) also hindered the development of metropolitan areas in Romania.



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The much expected administrative reform in Romania should also clarify the legislation in the case of metropolitan areas. Their functionality as inter-community development associations is rather restricted to accessing European funds, while there is no obvious pattern of community development. One suggestion for a future act involving metropolitan areas would be the introduction of the NUTS 4 territorial level in the Romanian administration, including all such areas and strengthening the links between local communities beyond specific projects.

For the moment, the following metropolitan areas exist in Romania: Iași, Oradea, Brașov, Constanța, Bacău, Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureș and Craiova. Bucharest, Timișoara, Ploiești and Galați-Brăila metropolitan areas are still in process of setting up. In terms of size, the number of inhabitants varies roughly between 200 000 and 450 000 but this could be changed by the creation of Bucharest Metropolitan Area. Brașov and Constanța metropolitan areas are more urbanized as they include five more towns apart from the main urban core, while the other metropolitan areas mainly comprise rural municipalities in addition to the main urban centre. However, such rural municipalities (Florești, Holboca) are sometimes larger than some towns.

In terms of functionality, the metropolitan areas already in existence are running a number of projects that are beneficial for most members of the association. Such positive examples may trigger the creation of the other metropolitan areas. Although the existing metropolitan areas did not yield spectacular results, the time passed since their foundation is yet too short to correctly assess their usefulness and territorial meaning.

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