

AN URBAN PERSPECTIVE UPON MOLDAVIAN SETTLEMENTS. FROM POLITICAL DESIDERATUM TO TERRITORIAL REALITY

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ABSTRACT – This research study focused on the current state of the urban space in the historical Moldavian Region from an urban legislative perspective. Since the 2003-2005 stage, the settlement system in North-East Romania has undergone severe transformation. Thus, some villages were raised to the rank of towns, without meeting the legally defined minimum conditions, in terms of quantitative and qualitative indicators. By using the GIS technique and basic statistics, it was possible to analyse the current network of urban settlements in Moldavia (21 cities and 33 towns) from the perspective of 16 urban indicators. The indicators ranged from demography, access to safe water, sewerage, central heating, number of beds in hospitals, number of doctors to education facility access, culture and sports, hotels, road access and wastewater treatment facilities. All of the 16 indicators were summed and a final urban coefficient was obtained. The results were interpreted and particularly pointed out in GIS environment. The conclusions emphasise that, after nearly a decade, none of the current towns meets the minimum conditions of being an urban settlement.

Keywords: Moldavian settlements, political desideratum, territorial reality, urban perspective, GIS, regional development

INTRODUCTION

Started in the years of socialism, the fast modernization of the settlement network has continued. Thus, after 1989, Romania - undergoing through a series of radical socio-economic transformations once with the transition from the totalitarian regime to the capitalist system and further to the integration into European Union macro-regional structure - was placed into a difficult position. The settlement network was not prepared to face the imminent European Union demands with a strong and dominant urban population. The EU officials observed that over half of the Romanian population lives in rural areas. In order to solve the current structural issue and by the help of legislation³, between 2001 and 2005, the Romanian central authorities rushed and lunched a national scale operation for transforming some rural settlements into towns. Although the rural entities did not meet the minimum quantitative and qualitative definition of urban areas, some local authorities were lured and by the help of a referendum have performed this jump. After all the requirements were accomplished (the local referendum and the decision of the Local Council), the Romanian Parliament only had the task to establish and enact the new status of settlements according to legislation.

In a three-year period (2003-2005), 48 rural entities were raised to the rank of towns. In comparison, from 1990 to 2003, only six rural settlements passed to the rank of towns. Although there are a series of research studies (R. Săgeată, 2004, 2006, 2011; I. Muntele, 2010) that emphasize which rural entities could and should become urban, settlements were selected by political criteria more or

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³ Law no. 351 of 6 July 2001 on the approval of the *National Territory Spatial Plan - Section IV- Settlement Network* defines in Annex II-6.0. and II-6.1. the zones without towns within a radius of about 25-30 km that require priority actions to develop settlements with inter-communal servicing role.

less justified. This is the reason why, in a short period, some rural entities have performed this jump, although they did not meet the criteria that define an urban area.

In Moldavia, during the 2003-2005 stage, there were 14 newly created towns. The current research proposes a "snapshot" of Moldavian urban space, oscillating between political aspiration and territorial reality.

MOTIVATION AND METHODOLOGY

The motivation of this approach was supported by the fact that there were a series of "suspicions" grounded on the urban localities of Moldavia that do not meet this status.

Territorial reality offered us premises to believe that the declaration of a town was or is just a political decision. Political desideratum can sometimes be more relevant than the "rigor" of the territorial reality, as seen also in the case of development regions⁴, where temporary structures have been proven real regional grids for public institutions (A. Covășnianu, 2011).

The obstacles that arose during this study were related to getting and processing the information due to the difficulty of correlating indicators from a diachronic and quality perspective. In addition, the lack of response from local, county, and regional authorities, sometimes even in conjunction with the bad intention of providing public access to data represented barriers in continuing this work. However, the approach could be developed by resorting to the legislation related to access to public data⁵, so that often petition and pressure yielded the expected results.

The analysis took into account all the 55 urban entities declared by law (21 cities and 34 towns) in Western Moldavia⁶. The information available covers a longer period, starting in 2008 and reaching the end of 2012. The study was conducted between March and October 2012. The legislative basis for this approach is Law no. 351 of 2001 on the approval of the National Spatial Plan - Section IV - Settlements Network, updated and amended by the Law no. 100 of 2007.

Thus, under Annex II, reference is made to "[...] minimum main quantitative and qualitative indicators of defining urban settlements"⁷. Because Romania is a member of the European Union and because the legislation in urban planning is out-dated, the current indicators were harmonized and adapted to the new economic and social requirements. Consequently, indicators in the areas of demography, labour, technical facilities (equipment housing with water, sewerage and central heating), health, education, culture and sports, accommodation, major public works (water network and sanitation), town management, civil protection, recreation and landscaping (public parks and gardens) were taken into account (Table 1). The values of these indicators have been updated with the most recent data available in the portal TEMPO-INS and the 2011 Population and Housing Census⁸.

Table 1. Minimal quantity and quality indicators (according to Law no. 100 of 2007- updated)

No.	Minimal quantity and quality indicators	City	Town
1	Number of inhabitants	40.000	10.000
2	(Medium) number of employees in non-agricultural activities (% of total employees)	85	75
3	Housing equipment with water supply facility (% of total housing)	80	70
4	Housing equipment with sanitation supply facility (% of total housing)	75	55

⁴ This is the case of choosing Piatra-Neamț as the capital city of the North-East Development Region instead of Bacău or Iași where most of the public authorities are located.

⁵ Law 544 of 2001 - Law of free access to public information.

⁶ Western Moldavia is the name given to the macro-regional entity comprising the counties in the northeastern part of Romania (Botoșani, Suceava, Iași, Neamț, Vaslui, Bacău, Galați, and Vrancea).

⁷ <http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/geydmobrgi/legea-nr-100-2007-pentru-modificarea-si-completarea-legii-nr-351-2001-privind-aprobarea-planului-de-amenajare-a-teritoriului-national-sectiunea-a-iv-a-reteaua-de-localitati>

⁸ The preliminary data available at the end of 2012.

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5	Housing equipment with central heating supply facility (% of total housing)	45	35
6	Number of beds in hospitals related to 1.000 inhabitants	10	7
7	Number of doctors related to 1.000 inhabitants	2.3	1.8
8	High school/college education units (e.g. nursing college)	yes/no	yes/no
9	Sports and culture facilities: theatres, musical institutions, public libraries, stadium, sport halls	yes/no	yes/no
10	Places in hotels	100	50
11	Modernized roads (% of total street length)	60	50
12	Streets with water distribution networks (% of total street length)	70	60
13	Streets with sewage pipes networks (% of total street length)	60	50
14	Wastewater treatment : connection to a wastewater treatment plant with mechanical and biological stage	yes/no	yes/no
15	External fire hydrants (for 1.000 meters of street length)	2.8	2.8
16	Green areas (parks, public gardens, squares) square meters/inhabitant	15	15

The 16 indicators used in defining urban settlements have different values depending on the hierarchy, either towns or cities. All the 16 indicators are interpreted as a percentage of the maximum values required by the Law no. 100 of 2007. The matrix interpretation of results is of the form:

$$IND_{total} (\text{township/town}) = \text{SUM}(Ind_1:Ind_{16})/16$$

The sources available for the current study were diverse, starting with statistics data (the 2011 national census, the county statistics and TEMPO portal - available on the website of the Institute of Statistics) and the official documents of local authorities (development strategies of towns and cities, general urban plans, integrated development plans, press releases and other official documents).

The gathered information was organized in a spreadsheet structure for every settlement (town and city). Using geographic methods such as comparative and quantitative methods (I. Donisă, 1977), the urban indicators were pointed out. Then, the urban indicators were mapped by using GIS software (Figure 1). For creating the cartographic representation, the defined interval method and the cartodiagram technique were applied.

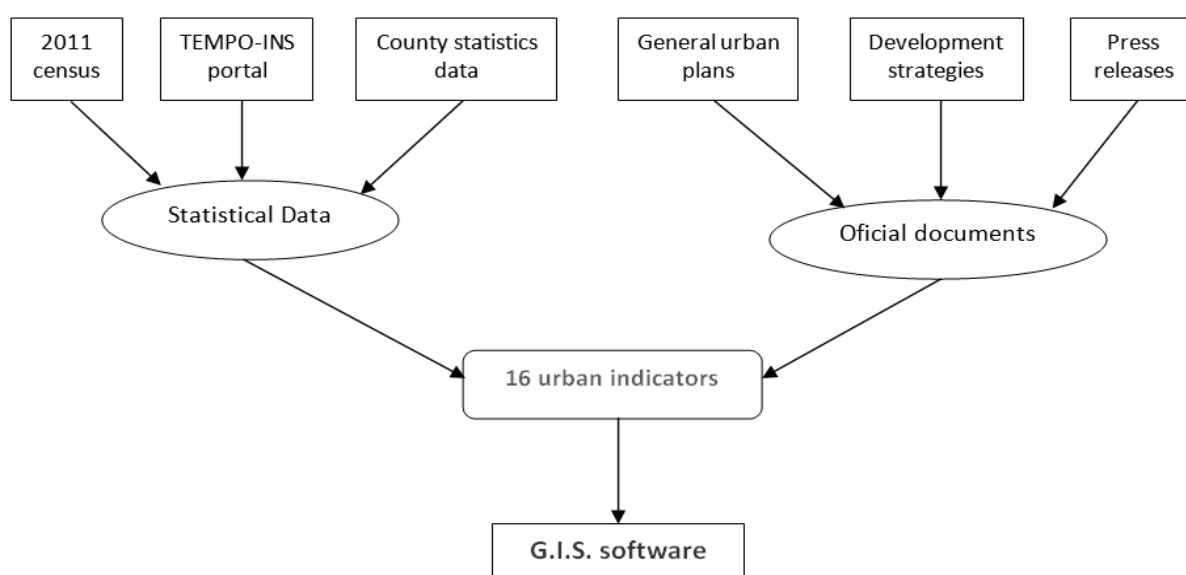


Figure 1. Methodology of the data used in the current research

RESULTS

After analyzing all 16 indicators, it is easily to observe that none of the settlements with urban ambitions meets the minimal defining quantitative and qualitative indicators. The results obtained were mapped and expressed by cartographic representations. In order to better emphasize the characterization of the Moldavian settlements, two cartographical representations were made. In the first map, the quantity indicators were expressed (the achieved indicators were numbered and interpreted from the total number of 16) and, in the second cartographical representation, the quality indicators were represented (as percentage from the total of 100%).

Thus, it can be easily observed that the most disadvantaged localities are the "towns" of Milișăuți, Cajvana and Berești, which hardly accomplish two indicators of the maximum 16 (Figure 2).

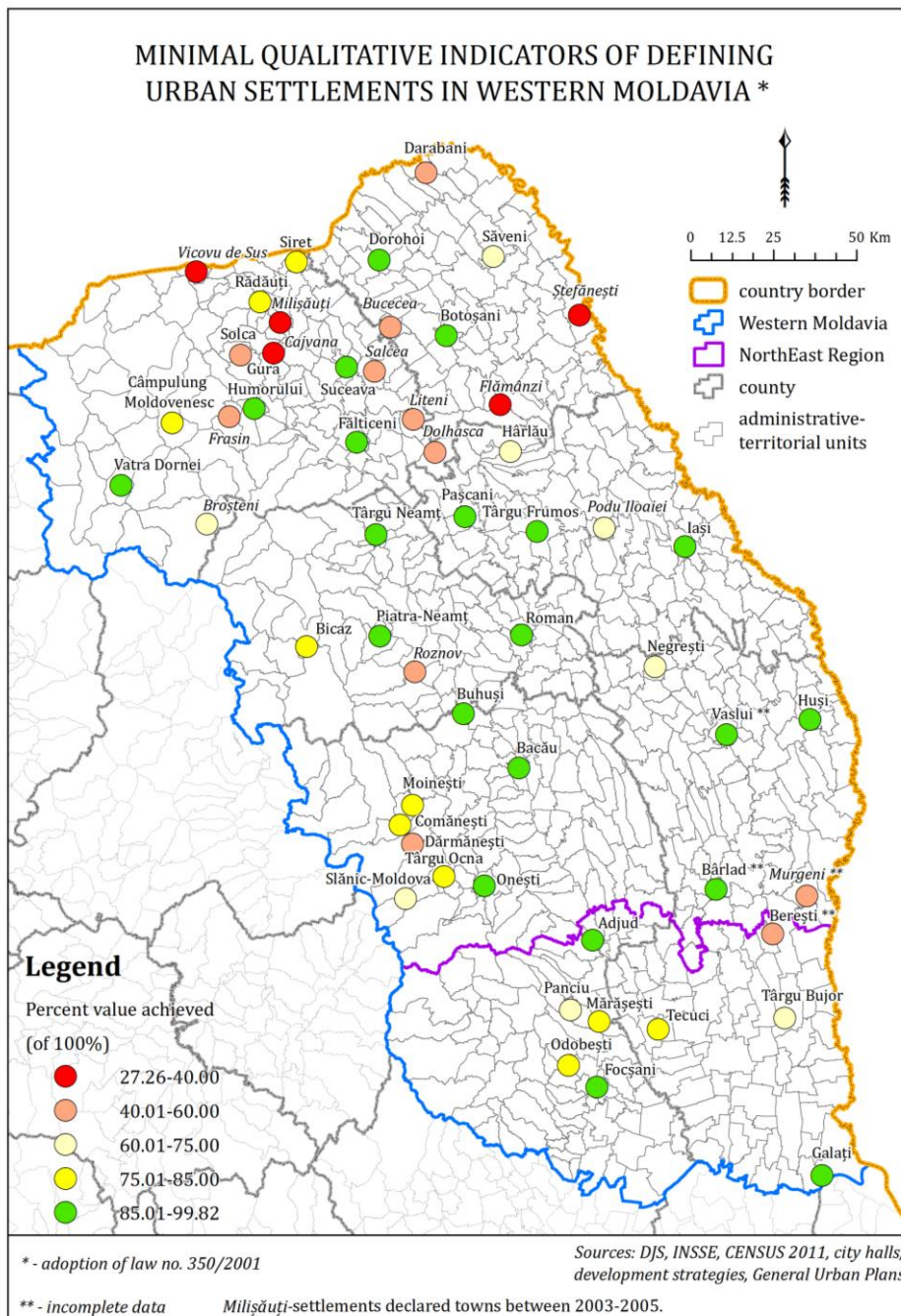


Figure 2. Moldavian urban space - minimal quantitative indicators

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These urban settlements do not have the basic living conditions, being deprived or severely deficient in public utilities and sanitary facilities. In contrast, the most favoured localities from the perspective of achieving the minimal number of quantitative and qualitative indicators are “traditional” cities with a strong history and urban footprint. The cities of Iași, Galați and Botoșani succeed in achieving 14 indicators out of 16.

Furthermore, these results were mapped again from the perspective of the qualitative indicators, this time as a percentage. The hierarchy does not change much, just the result, which is more delicate and approachable. From Suceava County, Milișăuți, Vicovu de Sus, Cajvana, Solca and Liteni towns and the two former rural settlements within the neighbouring county of Botoșani, the towns of Ștefănești and Flămânzi hold the lowest urban quality standard (Figure 3).

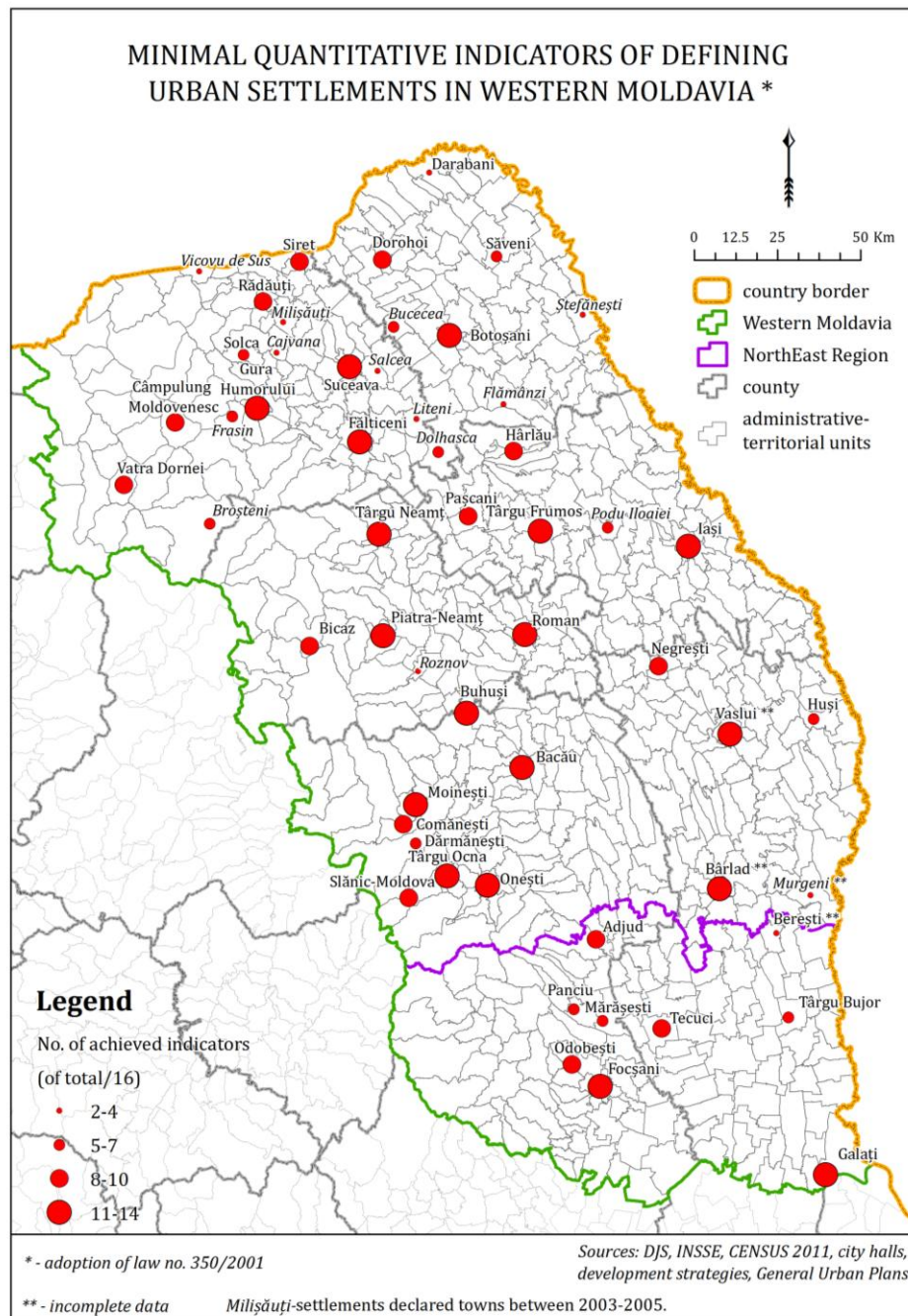
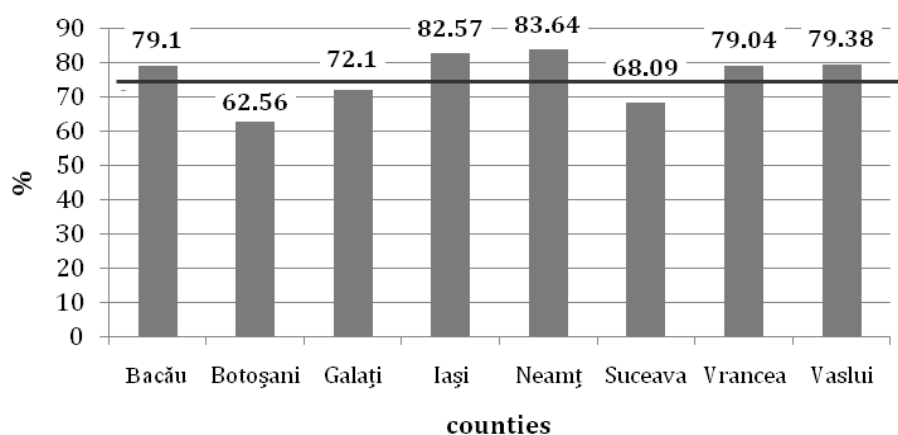


Figure 3. Moldavian urban space - minimal qualitative indicators

Opposite, the highest-rated cities are county capitals Botoșani, Iași, Galați, Bacău and Piatra-Neamț. It should be noted that Botoșani succeeds in achieving a slightly better final score than Iași (99.82% versus 99.58%). This minor advantage for Botoșani is a result of a better score in green areas such as parks, public gardens and squares.

An approach at a different scale, the county level, gives us an illustrative overview of the stability and necessity of urban settlements in Moldavia. The average value of all the 55 urban localities analyzed is 75%. Below the average, there are Botoșani with 62.56%, Suceava with 68.09% and Galați with 72.1%. It is noticed that the most stable urban communities are met in the counties of Vaslui (79.38%), Iași (82.57%) and Neamț (83.64%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Overall situation of urban indicators in the historical region of Moldavia



CONCLUSIONS

Although it has been over half a decade of their existence as (new) urban centres, even after this period (superposed on the first phase of absorbing EU funds during the 2007-2013 period), some towns still do not meet the basic conditions for which they were declared. There are towns, and consequently administrative territorial units, lacking the necessary technical utilities (water, sewerage, wastewater treatment plants and transportation infrastructure), exterior fire hydrants, medical units and accommodation for tourists. These difficulties are even harder to overcome because urban settlements cannot access easily and effortlessly European funds for rural areas. This is because the former villages upgraded to the state of urban areas and urban development funds (European Funds for development) cannot be raised due to failure to comply the demographic issues.

Therefore, it appears that the newly created polarisation cores favoured by the legislation and stated by the political desideratum still have rural roots. Consequently, it "overcomes" territorial reality, hindering the development of the urban settlements network and hampering regional development.

In conclusion, the new urban cores do not have the ability to impose "weight and speed" to the Moldavian region and, thus, (partially) to the North-East Development Region.

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