

**URBAN DYNAMICS WITHIN OLTENIA SOUTH-WESTERN
DEVELOPMENT REGION**

**DINAMICA URBANĂ ÎN REGIUNEA DE DEZVOLTARE
SUD-VEST OLTENIA**

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Abstract: Following the industrialization, migration of the work force from rural to urban settlements, as well as the considerable natural increase, more towns have passed from one demographic category to another, a fact which influenced the ranking of every towns in the national and regional hierarchy. The analysis of the rank variation on long term indicates that there are four categories of towns: towns having a negative dynamics, oscillatory dynamics, positive or stable one.

Key words: urban hierarchy, population size, rank variation, Oltenia

Cuvinte cheie: ierarhie urbană, mărime demografică, variația rangurilor, Oltenia

At the 2002 census, there were 32 towns within Oltenia South-Western Development Region, which generally coincides with the historical province of Oltenia; the population varied between 2,977 inhabitants at Băile Govora and 302,601 for Craiova, the biggest town in the region. Most of the towns (20) are small, with less than 20,000 inhabitants, gathering only a quarter of Oltenia's urban population. Almost half of the urban population in the region dwells in one of the large towns – Craiova, with more than 300,000 inhabitants, Râmnicu-Vâlcea and Drobeta Turnu-Severin.

1. Population evolution

As in all the regions of the country, the urban population in Oltenia has had a positive trend, with intervals when it increased steadily, especially during the last half of the 20th century, followed by stagnation or light augmentation at the beginning of the 21st century, as a result of the migratory and natural increase. Many larger villages were declared towns, this also adding to the number of the urban population.

Following the industrial development of many towns in the region, agriculture co-operativization that led to the exodus of the rural labour force towards urban settlements, and mainly industrial towns, as well as the considerable natural increase, the number of inhabitants increased, many towns passing from

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one demographic category to another. Such is the case of Craiova, which during the 1956-1966 interval joins the large towns, with more than 100,000 inhabitants, while other three important towns of the region – Târgu-Jiu, Râmnicu-Vâlcea and Caracal exceed 20,000 inhabitants; the latter are considered to be medium-sized towns.

Between 1966 and 1977, the population of Craiova almost doubles, while Drobeta Turnu-Severin and Targu-Jiu have more than 50,000 inhabitants. Slatina, as the county seat of one of the five counties of the region, having also industrial activities of great importance for the national economy, experienced a continuous increase in the population number, entering the category of medium-seized towns.

From 1977 until 1992, Craiova exceed the threshold of 300,000 residents, becoming one of the eight biggest towns of the country, while Ramnicu-Valcea and Drobeta Turnu-Severin join the category of large towns, with more than 100,000 residents. Seven towns (Motru, Balș, Corabia, Băilești, Drăgășani și Calafat) in the region have more than 20,000 residents.

The analysis of the dynamics of town population in Oltenia on long term points out to several categories of towns, such as (Fig. 1): towns with an explosive evolution, the population of which increased more than 5 times (Târgu-Jiu, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Slatina, Rovinari, Craiova); towns with a positive evolution during most of the period, marked by intervals with high and slow increase, followed by a slight reduction of population size after 1992 (most of the towns); towns having a sinuous evolution, where increase intervals alternates with regressive intervals: Segarcea, Țicleni, Ocele Mari etc; some towns have had a negative evolution throughout the entire period, their population shrinking continuously: Vânju Mare, Novaci.

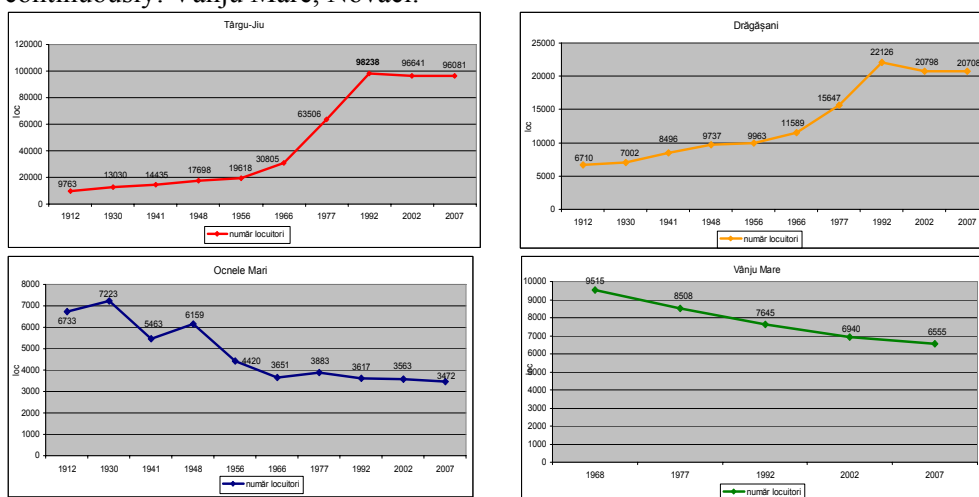


Fig. 1 Dynamics of the towns' population on long term

2. Town hierarchy according to the size follows the rank method

The *size follows the rank* method implies the existence of a direct relationship between the population of a town and its rank in the national or regional hierarchy. Since urban systems have sometimes a discontinuous evolution,

with many inflections, and are subject to the direct intervention of the state, especially in a centralized political and economic regime as it was the case in Romania for almost 50 years, the hierarchical structure of the urban system changes. In the case of Romania, the administrative and territorial reorganization upset the long time established hierarchies, leading to new hierarchies, changing central places at regional level (Ianoş, I. 2004, p. 144). Besides the administrative reorganization of Romania's territory, factors such as the industrialization, rural exodus and emergence of new towns have also left their mark on the urban hierarchy.

From all the towns in Oltenia, Craiova has had the most stable position, although it experienced a continuous and rapid increase of the number of inhabitants, asserting itself as the polarizing center of the region for centuries.

During the 1956-1966 period, the biggest towns in the region gained places in the national hierarchy, the greatest leap having Slatina – 10 places, in 1966 coming on the 66th place. The other towns fell down some places in the national urban hierarchy; the greatest descend characterizes the towns within Vâlcea county, where despite the fact that their population increased, the demographic dynamics was much slower compared to other towns. Thus, Băile Olăneşti loses 16 places, coming on the 175th position, Drăgăşani 14 places and Băile Govora 13 places.

Beginning with 1966, Craiova is constantly on the 8th position in the national hierarchy, with a remarkable stability for almost four decades, not only due to its administrative functions (county seat and former region seat), but most of all as a result of the fact that, just like other medieval towns, 'they were the capitals or main centers of some Romanian historical provinces, a fact which ensured them a privileged place in time' (Neguţ, S. 1997, p. 107).

Drobeta Turnu-Severin is another center with quite a linear dynamics, gaining only few places in the urban hierarchy, unlike Târgu-Jiu, Râmnicu-Vâlcea and Slatina, which following the territorial and administrative reorganization in 1968, when they gained administrative functions, have experienced leaps in the hierarchy. Thus, between 1966 and 1977, Râmnicu-Vâlcea comes on the 24th places (compared to the 50th in 1966), and Slatina on the 38th (going up 28 places). The three above-mentioned county seats have taken great advantage from the government policy, having the role of the central place within the county, with major investments from the state, well above the county inner resources of labour force, which favoured the migration of population from the countryside (Ianoş, I. 2004, p. 153). 'Consequently, they developed rapidly and excessively compared to other towns, among which some of them were even more important for the regional urban sub-systems' (Ianoş, I. 2004, p. 149). Caracal is the typical example; it was a former county seat between the two world wars, but it did not keep its administrative functions beginning with 1968, although it was the biggest town in the Olt county, falling from the 53rd place in the national hierarchy in 1966 to the 59th place in 1977. The competition between Caracal and Slatina was manifested in the influence areas, being controlled by the state to a certain extent until 1990 (Ianoş, I., Tălângă, C. 1994).

The towns where industrial activities developed also gained places in the national hierarchy, since they draw a lot of persons. This is the case of Balș which mounts 27 places, Orșova (16 places), Drăgășani. On the contrary, eight towns experienced real falls in the national hierarchy: Ocnele Mari (53 places), coming on the 230th place in 1977, Băile Govora (53 places), Băile Olănești (37 places) and Călimănești (34 places), more than half of the towns that fell down in the national and regional hierarchy being located in the Valcea county.

From the new towns declared in 1968, only Motru entered the top 100 towns in the country (being the 85th in 1977, staying there until 1992). Other five new towns (Brezoi, Novaci, Horezu, Baia de Aramă și Țicleni) remained among the smallest towns in the country, with an insignificant demographic evolution, mainly as a result of their economic profile, with primary sector activities, drawing little population from the surrounding area.

It is worth noticing that until 1977, eight of the twenty-nine towns in Oltenia were below the average slope line. More than half of them were new towns, declared after 1968, while the rest were older balneo-climateric spas.

Between 1977 and 1992, from the five county seats, only Slatina gains some places in the urban hierarchy, coming on the 31st place in 1992, the other having the same rank as in 1977 (Drobeta Turnu-Severin 22, Râmnicu-Vâlcea 24, Târgu-Jiu 26). However, other towns had the highest leaps: Balș (14 places), Drăgășani (10 places) (Fig. 2, 3). Filiași and Drăgănești-Olt are the only settlements with urban status since 1968 that did not gain any place in the national hierarchy.

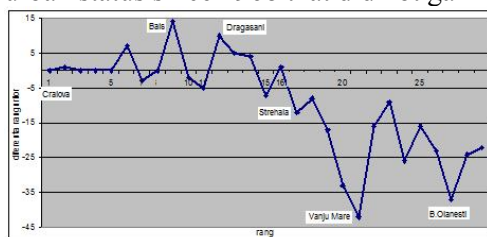


Fig. 2 Town rank variation in Oltenia during 1977-1992

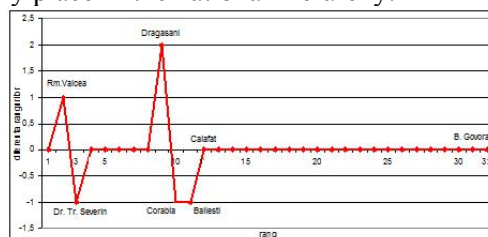


Fig. 3 Town rank variation in Oltenia during 1992-2002

The small towns within Valcea county continue their fall in the urban hierarchy, although slower than during the previous period, the new towns having the greatest falls: 44 places for Vânu-Mare (coming on the 222nd place in 1992) and 33 places for Segarcea (on the 212th place).

After 1992, following the considerable diminishing natural and migratory increase, the number of inhabitants increases very slow or even decreases in most cases, the national and regional hierarchy also witnessed greater or lesser changes. During the 1992-2002 period, Oltenia sets apart from the other Romanian region by an almost perfect stability within the median and lower sector (Ianoș, I. 2004, p. 167) (Fig. 3). From the 32 towns in the region, only two have gone up in the national hierarchy: Râmnicu-Vâlcea, which surpasses Drobeta Turnu-Severin,

going up one place, and Drăgășani 2 places. Corabia and Băilești, having a bit over 20,000 inhabitants, go down one place.

3. Conclusions

The analysis of the variation of town ranks in the national hierarchy on long term indicates that there are four categories of towns (Fig. 4): *towns having a negative dynamics*, which have continuously lost places in the national hierarchy (they are the most numerous – 17 out of 32), such as the small towns from Vâlcea and Mehedinti counties; *towns having an oscillatory dynamics*, which initially went up some places, but later went down (Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Filiași, Scornicești, Drăgășani etc.); *towns with a positive dynamics* – all the county seats and other two new industrial towns – Motru and Rovinari. A single town – Tg-Carbunesti has managed to keep almost the same rank throughout the entire analysed period.

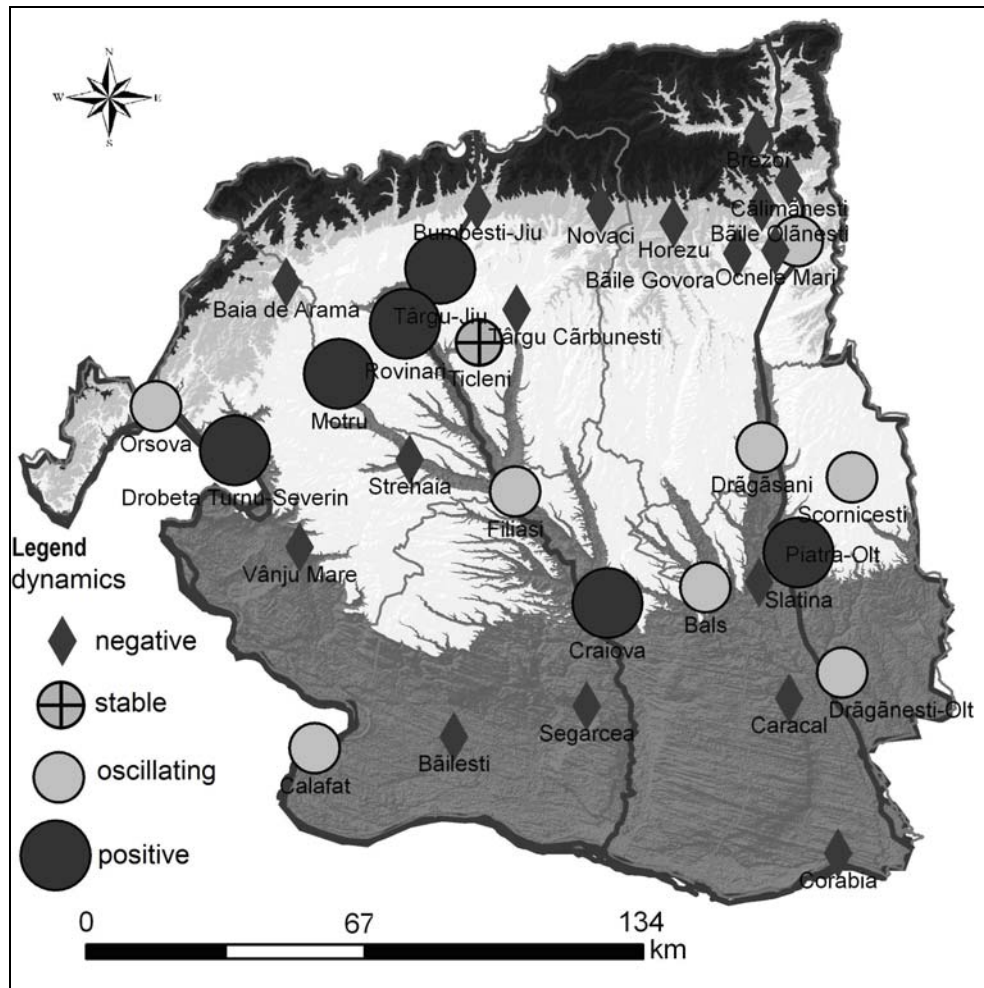


Fig. 4 Rank variation of the towns within Oltenia

The predominance of towns with a negative dynamics and the relatively small number of towns that experienced leaps forward in the national hierarchy points out to the urgent need for viable strategies and policies for restructuring the economic activities and revitalization of towns, in order to diminish the discrepancies within the regional and national hierarchy.

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