

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL TOWNS. BIHOREAN SMALL TOWNS SEARCHING FOR THEIR IDENTITY

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Abstract

This paper analyze the status-quo of bihorean small towns toward a sustainable development. Bihor County in the settlements network has nine small towns well localized contributing to a polarisation of rural areas. Emerged in different period each city has own history and due to the past heritage they must built a strong identity for getting this role of leader in territory.

Key words: small towns, identity, polarisation, emergence.

INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly important to have a clear picture of the various economic links between small rural towns and their surrounding hinterlands. Within a general trend to 'urbanise', there are large differences in the scale, speed and spatial distribution of urban change and the factors that drive or influence it, and this implies very different future trajectories for the small towns.

Small towns are sometimes portrayed as being the drivers, or potential drivers, of the rural economy (Farthing, 2009).

Early views of the role of small urban centres in regional and rural development fell within the general paradigms of modernisation and dependency theories (Roberts, 2001; Martin and Sunley, 2006).

In the first, small urban centres are seen as centres from which innovation and modernisation would trickle down to the rural population (Tacoli, 1998). Hence, the most effective and rational spatial strategy for promoting rural development is to develop a well-articulated, integrated and balanced urban hierarchy. This network of small is described as '...locationally efficient – it allows clusters of services, facilities and infrastructure that cannot be economically located in small villages and hamlets to serve a widely dispersed population from an accessible central place' (Rondinelli, 1985).

The pessimistic view echoes the 'urban bias' debate (Tacoli, 1998), and originally argued that small urban centres contribute to rural impoverishment and are the 'vanguards of exploitation' of the rural poor and of extraction of natural resources by external forces which, according to the case, may be multinational enterprises, central governments, local

administrators and élites (Tacoli, 2004). Such exploitation can only be avoided where there is an egalitarian class structure and free access to land, and ‘...where the stimulus to urban growth results in activity primarily by the people and for the people themselves’ (Southall, 1988). Establishing the degree to which a settlement is integrated into its locality is important in highlighting its contemporary functions and potential role in rural development (Courtney and Errington, 2000).

The commonly stated spatial aims of regional planning policies assume that small urban centres contribute to regional and rural development in four main ways:

- By acting as centres of demand/markets for agricultural produce from their surrounding rural region, either for local consumers or as links to national and export markets.

Access to markets is a prerequisite to increasing rural agricultural incomes, and the proximity of local small and intermediate centres to production areas is assumed to be a key factor in their potential role.

- By acting as centres for the production and distribution of goods and services to their rural region. Such concentration is assumed to reduce costs and improve access to a variety of services, both public and private and for both rural households and enterprises. Hence, services include agricultural extension, health and education (and access to other government services), as well as banking, post, services of professionals such as lawyers and accountants and lower-order services such as bars and cafés, and wholesale and retail sales of manufactured goods from within and outside the region.

- By becoming centres for the growth and consolidation of non-farm activities and employment through the development of small and medium-size enterprises or through the relocation of branches of large private or parastatal enterprises.

- By attracting rural migrants from the surrounding region through demand for non-farm labour (Tacoli, 2004).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In preparation of this material have been harmoniously combined classical geographic research methods (observation, description, field analysis) and specific methods of spatial analysis (GIS, statistical data interpretation). As background maps was used the topographic maps Marghita section at 1:25,000 (DTM, 1977) processed, for the emergence part was used the typical archive research methods.

RESULTS AND DISSCUSIONS

Small Bihorean towns have been hit during post-communist transformations by massive loss of human and economic resources (Hatos, 2010) by dissolving industrial economies that they depended (Stănculescu and Berevoescu, 2004), others just have developed from the stage of rural settlement into seat of commune ultimately reaching as towns.

At this moment there are ten cities, Oradea the County Seat which play an important role in the emergence and development of the other urban settlements. All of other cities fall into the category of small towns exception being Salonta who in the last years experienced a demographic and economic development among the cities going up as an intermediary city (slightly above the limit of 20,000 inhabitants considered the upper limit of small towns). The other eight cities representing the pillars of development of rural areas and the “fine” components of the mechanism of regional development (figure 1).

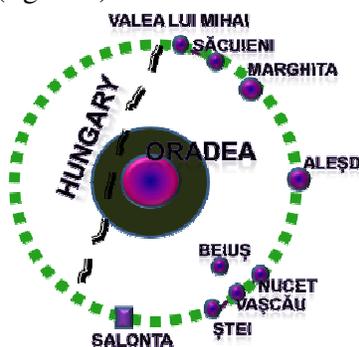


Fig. 1 Chorematic representation of the urban settlements in Bihor County

Emergence stages of small towns. Among small cities Beius has the longest tradition in this privileged position of city. As an important milestone is the year 1404, when is reminded the fortress Beius, its castellans and voivodes.

In 1441 Beius obtain the status of free city „*libera civitas Belynes*” then on October 28, 1451 a document issued by the chancellery of diocese with the name of John Vitez of Zredna bishop, declare Beius as free city – *civitas* - and market town - *oppidium*, taking it out of the jurisdiction of the castellans of Finis (Faur, 1971).

Along with the establishment of the communist regime began and the first timid steps of urbanization, they were felt especially in areas that possessed natural resources, such is the case of the localities Nucet, Stei and Vascau who won the title of city in 1956. Marghita was the next who made the step into the urban environment being declared city in 1967 (Nemes,

2010), one year later Alesd became city. In the next two decades is a period of stagnation, only in 1989 Valea lui Mihai earned the city status, being at that moment the biggest rural settlement. The last one of the city appeared on the urban map of Bihor County was Săcuieni in 2004 (figure 2).

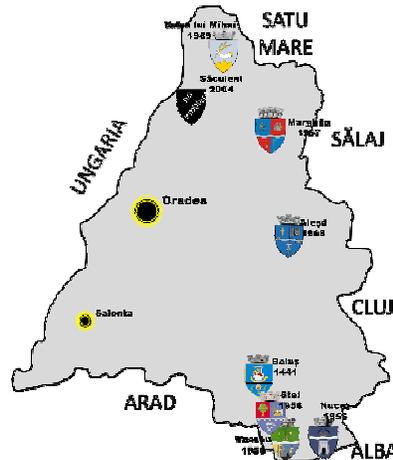


Fig. 2 Emergence stage of small towns in Bihor County

Small towns – An interface between rural and urban structures. Small towns seen from a county capital point of view are analyzed as being part of the rural community; seen from a rural area point of view, small towns include elements of the urban system. The limits or boundaries between rural and urban communities is unclear: several small towns have complex characteristics of both rural and urban settlements (Zamfir et al., 2009), small towns represent something more than simple communes in the hierarchy (Renard, 1997). Beyond this vague limit between rural and urban areas, small towns should be evaluated taking into account the local or regional background (Desmarais, 1984), density and urbanization level (Satterthwaite and Tacoli, 2003).

To better illustrate the interface aspect between rural and urban communities in this paper were analyzed three parameters: the attractiveness index, the development index (Ianoș, 1997) and the rurality index (Ocaña-Riola and Sánchez-Cantalejo, 2005).

The *attractiveness index* was calculated as a ratio between the entire population at the locality level and the population with a permanent residence in that area. If its value exceeds 1 or 100 (if the final result multiplies by this number), the area is attractive; if the value is below this level, then is a source of labor and population for other localities, superior towns namely. In the case of the small towns of Bihor County, all are under the limit of attractively, except the town Vașcău which has an attractive index value one – which means is an attractive city, but on a large scale

does not present a attractiveness in reality only in relation to neighboring villages without economic activities. Other four cities has a potential attractiveness with an index very close to the value which shoes the attractivity Săcuieni, Marghita, Aleșd and Valea lui Mihai (0,99). Beiuș (0,97), Ștei (0,96) and Nucet (0,87) this value confirm the theory that the former industrialized towns are no longer attractive for the surrounding area, because the industrial activities developed in the socialis period have disappeared.



Fig. 3 Attractiveness index in small towns of Bihor County

The method of calculation of the *development index* (Hull score) is the following (Ianoș, 1997; Mocanu, 2008):

$G_i = 50 + 14(I_1 + I_2 + I_3 + \dots + I_n)/n$, taking into account the following indexes: inhabited surface (+), migratory balance (-), doctor/inhabitant, population share of over 65 years old in the total population (-), population occupied with agriculture (-), share of illiterate persons in the population of over 12 years old (-), infant mortality (-), phone subscription (+), these data being standardized for all cases. The Hull score calculated at a national level (Zamfir et al., 2009) for the small towns presents values oscillating between 48,5 and 52,0. Therefore, the output of this interval were grouped into three categories on index development highlighting low, medium or high level of development according to selected criteria mentioned above. Only Nucet and Valea lui Mihai are found in the low level of development according to the development index, Vașcău has a moderate index of development, all other small towns of Bihor County has a high index of development.

Degree of rurality has another calculating method, based on the rural population share in small towns, as well as population occupied in agriculture. The values are standardized and then the weighted average is calculated with the following formula:

$$RP_i = (2 \text{pop. in agric.} + \text{rural pop. share})/3 \text{ (Zamfir et al., 2009)}$$

Beius and Stei has low rurality degree, Valea lui Mihai, Marghita, Aleş and Nucet has a moderate level of rurality only Vaşcău present a high rurality degree according to this calculated parameters.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the central role often ascribed to small urban centres in regional planning, there is little evidence to corroborate or refute their alleged capacity to trigger development. This paper summarises the potential role of small towns, as implicitly assumed by many policies and programmes. Through related indicators calculated this paper aims to prefigure the role of small towns in a equitable regional development and in rural and urban poverty reduction.

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