

REMARKS ON IDENTITY BUILDING OF RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES IN THE BUCHAREST METROPOLITAN AREA

Ioan IANOȘ

University of Bucharest – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Researches on Territorial Dynamics (CICADIT),
4-12, Regina Elisabeta, 030018, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: ianos50@yahoo.com

Andreea-Loreta CERCLEUX

University of Bucharest – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Researches on Territorial Dynamics (CICADIT),
4-12, Regina Elisabeta, 030018, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: loretaepoiu@yahoo.com

Radu-Daniel PINTILII

University of Bucharest – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Researches on Territorial Dynamics (CICADIT),
4-12, Regina Elisabeta, 030018, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: pinty_ro@yahoo.com

Abstract: The dynamics of rural and urban communities belonging to Bucharest Metropolitan Area, during the last half of the 20th century, could be structured in three distinctive parts: a) the communist period, characterized by an explosive increase of industrial activities in the first communities belt and a strong decline of the rural communities from the rest of the belts, by massive migration to Bucharest; b) the transition evolution period, between 1990 and 2000: a chaotic and contradictory dynamics, with an apparent revitalization of the rural areas by a demographic increase, especially around Bucharest; c) the present-day evolution, defined by a systematic approach of the identity building of each rural and urban community. Crossing these periods, sometimes by dramatic processes, the building of own identities of each spatial community is an important challenge. The construction of identity is based on natural, social, and economic processes, on the one hand, and on administrative measures, taken at the national level, on the other hand. After a very strong deindustrialization, this belt knows an important tertiary development. The present-day tendencies in the spatial development of the communities reflect the importance of the new and major physical infrastructure, of the attractive areas for the residential complexes, and for upper tertiary development, IT activities included. Looking at the second issue, it is very relevant the status change of 7 rural communities belonging to the first belt of Bucharest city, in the last five years. Nevertheless, there are many changes in the rural and urban areas; the majority of communities preserve the primary functions. This fact confirms the destructive force of the communist development of Bucharest on the whole surrounding areas. Searching for new identities, rural and urban communities must invest more intelligence and more resources.

Key words: identity building, rural and urban communities, metropolitan area, Bucharest, Romania

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GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In their natural evolution – from a degradation and chaotic state to a period of stability and development – the local communities in Romania have undergone dramatic changes: from a utopian-based identity they evolved to one characterized by total freedom in choosing the integration way of the past values in the present. The awareness of a sense of belonging to a certain

place is a historical process, meaning a certain affection of the psychical space by a physical one. At the same time, the centralized rural-urban relations were replaced by market-economy-based relations when the towns and rural communities started adapting to the new economic conditions and to democracy. The integration in the European Unions speeded the process, and new interfaces appeared at the contact between the big cities and the communities around them.

In comparison with other European metropolises, Bucharest introduced underdevelopment in its hinterland following its behavior as a genuine predator for the surrounding settlements. The introduction today of genuine cooperation logic between Bucharest and the communities in the metropolitan area is rather difficult owing to the recent history of this space. That is why the rural communities oppose so strongly to the open cooperation intention of Bucharest.

A very important aspect of that approach is the use of concepts having unanimously accepted meanings; of them, identity and identification are crucial. Identity refers to the whole of feelings and representations built at the level of the inhabitants in a community. The sense of belonging to a space is the simplest way to express identity as a phenomenon. Under such circumstances, it is obvious that identity is generated by a more complex process, meaning identification (Guy di Méo, 1977). According to Dematteis (1994, p. 430), "all cities can be identified precisely, but not all of them have a precise identity". It is true that there many communities which during the last decades lack their personality, or there are in an advanced identity crisis. This situation it is explained by their spectacular dynamics registered in the last years.

Or, in other words, identity represents a permanent and collective construction, expressed by individuals who formulate it and spread it over the territory. It is also essential for each individual to realize that he/she belongs to one or more coherent territorial ensembles. Therefore, the conclusion could be drawn that identity is characterized by a community of values and cultural features, social goals, history and belonging to a certain territory. At the same time we could appreciate that a community with a clear personality has an indisputable identity (Brunet and Ferras, 1992)

Building identity as an adaptive process is characterized by a change of forces: a new social-economic, cultural, and political environment, but also positive or negative dysfunctions in the relations going on between rural and urban localities. The mentality change can make more difficult the identity adaptation and re-adaptation processes since the conservative forces (stable ethnic and social structures) play an important role in the degree of their completion. Likewise, economic specialization is an essential element in the identity course.

Identity strengthens during its building; its loss or change is caused by a series of critical points appearing along the territorial evolution. The identity projections of a territory are functional, perceptive, morphological, and also physiognomic. Might identity have a multifunctional spatial projection? Yes and no. Yes, because, partially at least, identity can be directly reflected in the territory by identification of certain symbols. No, because identity sometimes means more, including: hidden image (Racine, 1994), local solidarity, a common interest dominant for certain localities, satisfaction of belonging to a community, etc.

Dynamics of social-economic phenomena and its effects on the identities of localities

The localities change, namely their identities undergo the dynamics of social-economic phenomena and territorial mobility. Therefore, at the locality level a succession of identity states gradually takes shape. The localities close to a big city, as Bucharest, are permanent subject to aggression and are in danger of losing their identity and of rebuilding it on different bases.

The case of the localities within the Bucharest metropolitan area is able to explain the great complexity of the identity building process. Despite the protection forces of the initial identity, many of the urban and rural localities within this space will be strongly changed under the Capital external pressure. An analysis of the above relations from the viewpoint of the identity changes reveals three main periods:

a) the *communist period*, characterized by forced industrialization in the first belt of localities around Bucharest and by excessive ruralization of the localities placed outside that belt. Those communities represented the main source for the massive migrations of the young people to

Bucharest, thus decreasing the demographic potential of the localities (Tălângă, 1984). The demographic pressure on the Capital, by migrations and high natural increase due to the young population, determined the building between 1950 and 1989 of large residential areas in the suburbs, beyond the pericentral industrial area. The new districts, with more than one million inhabitants, were built on agricultural land, on land having other destinations or on the land obtained after the old rural settlements had been demolished and included in the new city perimeter.

The process of the Capital spatial extension was accompanied by a process of re-arrangement of the metropolitan network of settlements, by interventions at the level of some of them implicitly. The well-known systematization process of the villages resulted, in the metropolitan area, in the disappearance of such villages as Ghermănești or Vlădiceasca, the inhabitants of which were forced to move within the residence of the Otopeni commune. Some other villages disappeared when the Argeș River was developed to be used for navigation (village Buda belonging to Mihăilești commune that became a town in 1989). Obviously, under such circumstances, the inhabitants' identity problem was real since they lost their direct connection with the space they were born in, lived in, and nourished their values in.

b) the *transition period*, between 1990 and 2000, witnessed a contradictory and chaotic dynamics and an apparent revitalization of the rural areas by demographic growth, mainly in the area around Bucharest (Nicolae, 2002). Regaining free identity supposes a certain temporal course, an interval in which all the actions entailed by the transition to a market economy and by a European-looking policy were felt differently even within the metropolitan area. Therefore, the evolution of the rural localities was slower in several localities unlike those neighboring Bucharest, where the impact of the changes in the economic and social life was more obvious.

The identity of the settlements in the Bucharest close proximity was strongly turned upside down whereas that of the localities lying farther had an outward more stable evolution. In fact, the latter category underwent changes at the level of certain spatial nanostructures, generated by the return to the native villages of the people who had emigrated to Bucharest several decades before or even of new inhabitants nostalgic for their native places situated at much longer distances. The new-comers' identity integration effort is very great and sometimes, despite their diffuse character, those new-comers influence the social, economic, cultural, and political lives of the rural settlements (Zamfir and Căndea, 1998).

c) the *present period* (after 2000) might be defined by an identity loss tendency in the case of several localities in the metropolitan area, as a result of Bucharest multiplying its force to structure the space around it.

Such a force is the consequence of the Bucharest economic boom, which failed to manage correctly the effects on the relations with the localities in the neighboring metropolitan space. For better understanding such a spectacular dynamics we should remind here that in 2000–2007, the GNP/inhabitant increased five times and the ratio of the foreign investments in Bucharest represented 56.5 % of the total at a national level. Despite all this, the general characteristics of the physical infrastructure have remained the same, with the only exception of the Otopeni and Băneasa airports that were modernized and enlarged. A comparative analysis of the number of passengers' evolution within a five-year span (2002–2007) is relevant for showing indirectly the dynamism of the Bucharest economy (table 1).

Table 1. Dynamics of the passengers traffic by Bucharest's airports
(Source: Romanian Civil Aeronautic Authority)

Year	Baneasa Airopport	Otopeni Airopport
2002	30,000	1,100,000
2003	170,000	1,900,000
2004	210,000	2,600,000
2005	385,000	3,000,000
2006	700,000	3,500,000
2007	1,000,000	5,000,000

PRESENT-DAY BASIC ECONOMIC PROCESSES

The main processes involved in the high pressure on the localities within the Bucharest metropolitan area are the following: deindustrialization; explosive development of the tertiary sector in the suburbs and in the first crown of localities within the metropolitan area; residential pressure.

Deindustrialization is a natural phenomenon, the inverse consequence of the Capital excessive industrialization during communism. The process took place by liquidation of numerous companies that could not keep pace with the market economy; by decentralization and relocation of some industrial activities. Industry, mainly the polluting one, gradually leaves the city following the inhabitants' increased exigency for a cleaner urban environment.

The deindustrialization process started from the following premises:

- adequate legislation able to allow the process systematic and coherent development with no major perturbations;
- making the public opinion aware of the benefits the community could have by using locally both the space and the dismissed employees;
- the existence beforehand of concrete possibilities for the working force re-conversion and for attracting it to the tertiary sector or to small and medium-sized companies.

The *tertiary sector* is at present an important link of the economy, pushed forward by the ample globalization process. The industrial platforms – both inside and outside Bucharest – were afflicted by the restructuring process and the free-space stock favored the development of varied service activities (finance-banking, social headquarters for companies, business centers, technological parks, a.o.). Gradually, some decision centers of foreign capital companies moved or settled from the very beginning in the Bucharest periphery or even in the metropolitan area.

The place of the old activities was taken by some new ones that emerged following the increasingly dynamic demand in the Bucharest market. Based on a multitude of advantageous coordinates in the development of the metropolitan area, an integrate development vision should be built, so that more and more projects and investment capitals could ensure a long-lasting economic development. The decisive argument is no longer represented by the quality of the industrial structure, but also by its insertion in a high-quality tertiary, and also by the presence of internationally experienced teams and managers, respectively.

Little by little, the space once occupied by industry has been taken by services and “tertiarization” outruns industrialization – a phenomenon characteristic of all the great metropolises. From this viewpoint, the Capital of Romania was atypical since, before 1990, industrial activities dominated the economic structure.

On the other hand, in the structure of services in the metropolitan area, the commercial activities prevail; they are followed by the services offered to the companies in the production sphere and by logistics. In point of size and structure, the services meet the expectations of the inhabitants, but also of the small and medium-sized companies or even those of the big corporations.

The higher and higher pressure on the intra-urban space, appearance and amplification of elements of urban pathology typical of great agglomerations, and increase of the population's incomes have amplified the pressure on the housing fund that was not able to meet the new exigencies: trying on the one hand to find alternative solutions; on the other to speculate on the genuine housing crisis. Therefore, one of the variants chosen for solving the house demands was to buy land in the towns and communes around Bucharest, with a view to develop such residential ensembles as in Chitila, Mogoșoaia, Ștefăneștii de Jos, Tunari, Fundeni, Dobroești, Pantelimon, Popești-Leordeni, Bragadiru, or Chiajna.

After 2004, the residential pressure increased and new residential ensembles were built in open spaces, at a longer distance from those in the first belt of communes (Tărtășești, Corbeanca, Mihăilești, Dragomirești Vale a. o.). Thus, the land management has become a vital issue. It seems more chaotic than ever, and has been frequently dominated by speculative aspects on the real-estate market, i.e. the location of the real-estate projects in the metropolitan area has not considered the advantages of an equilibrated economic development so that a genuine growth of the local economy might be ensured.

The Bucharest metropolitan area, up to the latest developments, is an atypical one because of some characteristic aspects: the population increased in the suburban space not by the shift of the population from the city itself, but following long-distance immigration; intense depopulation of the periurban area by rural-urban migration, also emphasized by the extensive industrial development in the Capital; prevalent farming character of the economy; sudden deindustrialization of the Bucharest industry and the slow development of the “tertiarization” process; excessive administrative fragmentation at the level of the counties and of the development regions; low standard of family life (Berza Victoria and Ianoş, 2004).

Disregard for the succession of the urbanization typical processes – sub-urbanization, periurbanization, and a clear outline of the influence zone – turned the metropolitan area into an atypical one. The Capital metropolitan area is in fact pseudo-urbanized since no real mass migration of the rich population in the city center to the adjacent zone occurred, so that a genuine suburban area could be created. The population increased due to long-distance migrations because Bucharest was a “closed” city in 1970–1989. In comparison with the suburban zone, in the same interval the periurban area was highly depopulated by extensive industrial development.

The Bucharest metropolitan area is mainly agricultural. Although industry, together with services, represents the only alternative solution for the present-day subsistence farming, it was not included in the industrial policies after 1990. Rural development and an efficient farming involve both an increased competitiveness, but also superior quality and diversification. Likewise, since Romania has joined European Union, her economic landscape, including the traditional farming one, has to become competitive. Today, the farming contributes about 30 % of the total of economic activities at the level of the metropolitan area. However, this percent has an obvious decreasing trend once the services develop constantly.

The recent administration changes influenced directly the identities of numerous localities in the Bucharest first belt. If these changes envisaged once the transition of these localities from rural to suburban category and return to the old status of rural localities, in 2000–2005 no less than 7 villages became towns.

Mention should be made that before 2000, there was officially a single town near Bucharest – Buftea – despite many communes having had more than 10 000 inhabitants. To better show the urban desertification effect created by Bucharest, we want to remind here that before 1968, the nearest towns were situated at about 60 km far from the Capital city. The new localities declared towns after 2000 (Otopeni, Voluntari, Pantelimon, Chitila, Popeşti-Leordeni, Măgurele, and Bragadiru) undergo an intensive process of urban agglomeration, but also a segregation tendency. Their identity tends to double, to split between the local population (with a traditional suburban way of life) and the new-comers having an arrogant and defiant behavior towards the local values.

The new residential spaces which “accommodate” this new population need communication roads, but also specific utilities: water, gas, and electricity – in enough amounts and values. The pseudo-legal taxes the developers of such residential spaces resorted to – sometimes they even ensured part of the urban facilities – introduced new critical elements in the demand-offer relation on the real-estate market. Many of the new residential districts are not included in the general urban plans, and their building permits are illegal. The new general urban plans will probably turn these spaces legal, meaning also certain obligations the municipalities should assume.

BUILDING A NEW IDENTITY

Social segregation and functional specialization increase the parceling-out within the metropolitan area, thus strengthening exclusions and social fractures in the metropolis, but also the risk of social tensions and conflicts. More often than not, these fragments of the metropolitan area make up local communities which, acting as small towns, offer a new identity to the localities. Sometimes, these localities have a dynamic and active role in the modernization process at a

metropolitan level. Thus, the new locations of productive and tertiary activities in rural or urban settlements having direct access to the main network of communication roads contribute to an identity shaping or even rebuilding of such settlements.

The settlements having IT-located activities – concentrated in industrial, logistic, and scientific parks – represent a special category. In such cases, the initial identity is not properly changed but an infusion takes place of population having the required training to work in the new locations. For the time being, such a phenomenon has not appeared yet at the level of the metropolitan area, maybe with the exception of some signs, even before 1990, in the case of Măgurele. Theoretically, such activities may lead to increase of economic competitiveness of the metropolitan area and of Bucharest alike, at a national level.

Perhaps the most important element in the identity rebuilding of certain urban and rural localities is represented by the effects of the new residential areas within the metropolitan space. Such effects are due to complete lack of communication between the old and the new communities, to different behaviors determined by different social and cultural status. On the one hand, an old autochthonous population involved in farming activities, with small and average incomes, and a low level of education; on the other, a young allochthonous population, well educated, with high and very high incomes. The two new communities have different targets: one tries to maintain its local values, identity included, whereas the other one to build its own identity under the conditions of a confusion of individual experiences in a period of adaptation to the restrictions of the new environment.

For a general image of the residential pressure at the level of the metropolitan area, the dynamics of the new buildings in the time span 1991-2005 (figure 1) has been analyzed in each administrative unit. The number of the new buildings versus the whole built area increased, mainly in the northern half of the metropolitan area and at the level of the first belt of localities around Bucharest. In those areas, the growth was higher than 10 % – and even 20 % in the case of localities Voluntari, Mogoșoaia, or Corbeanca, with an intense residential development.

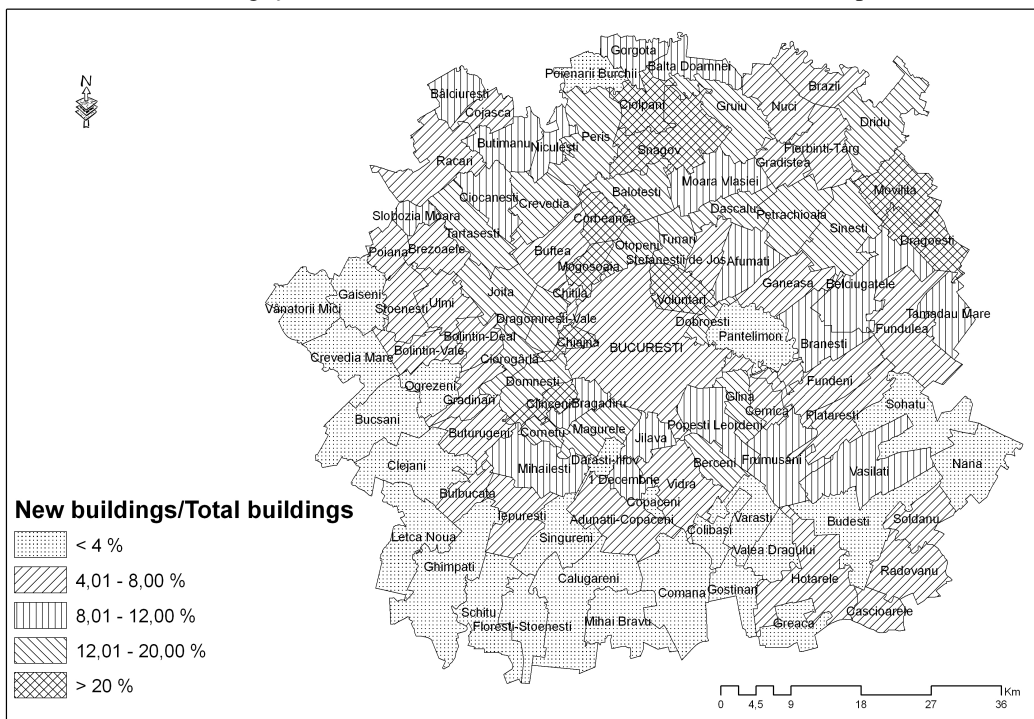


Figure 1. The Proportion of New Buildings in Total (1991-2005)

The localities in the Bucharest metropolitan area have built their identity mainly starting from a certain economic profile. At the level of the whole metropolitan area, the farming localities are predominant even if their number has decreased a lot lately. In the case of some localities with farming-food orientation, the dissociation between the farming and industrial activities is difficult to make. At the same time, the conventional separation border between industry and services gets blurred since the present production system keeps changing its relations with the tertiary sector. Part of the research, engineering, marketing-advertising, and maintenance functions used to belong to industrial activities. At present, they are mainly achieved outside the industrial units because of technical and financial reasons. Industry started to lose jobs to the benefit of such services – a characteristic of the metropolization phenomenon itself.

A more detailed analysis of the functional changes of the localities in the metropolitan area considered the dynamics of the active population structure in the latest two population censuses (1992 and 2002). This indicator was calculated in the three economic sectors: primary, secondary, and tertiary. According to the economic specializations of the active population, several categories of the administrative-territorial units have been identified based on the changes in the economic profile in 1992-2002. The analysis showed that the primary sector stood out (31 administrative territorial units, meaning about 30 % of the whole) in the communes in the south of Bucharest (Adunații-Copăcenii, Dărăști-Ilfov, and Vidra), Mihăilești town included, but also in communes within variable distances from the Capital. The communes in neither category experienced the influence of a defining restructuring in their economic evolution. The farming profile at the beginning of the 1990s has been kept up to now and therefore they have fewer chances of standing out at the regional level in comparison with other administrative territorial units in the same space. It is only 7.76 % of all the towns and cities in the metropolitan area that have kept their population employed in the secondary sector. It is however interesting that in 1992 none of the settlements in the metropolitan area was characterized by a dominance of the tertiary sector (Tălângă, 1999).

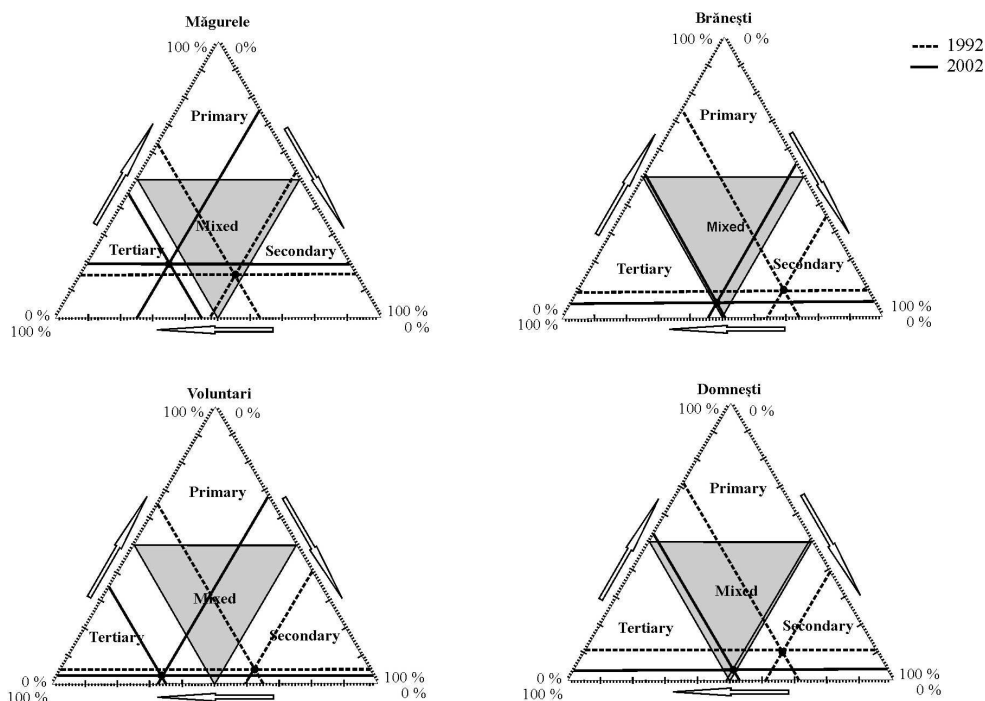


Figure 2. Four examples explaining the economic changes between 1992 and 2002

The industrial destructuring in the Capital had important effects on the settlements in the metropolitan area, i.e. very many of them modified their economic profile. The tertiarization process and location of new enterprises in several of these settlements generated other effects which, if added to the above ones showed that the configuration of the whole settlement network underwent major economic changes. Therefore, more than 56 % of the administrative-territorial units had no longer the same economic profile of the active population employment in 2002 versus 1992.

We have chosen two towns and two communes (figure 2) to illustrate our assertion. Although situated at the periphery of Bucharest, they had distinct evolutions within the ten-year interval. Thus, the town Măgurele shifts from the mixed-function category to the tertiary-function one; communes Brănești and Domnești from the secondary sector to mixed functions; and the town Voluntari from the secondary to the tertiary sector.

As a function of the intensity of the identity change, taking into account the functional and the physiognomic changes, the following typology of the localities within the Bucharest metropolitan area (figure 3) could be achieved: localities that kept their identity in the second half of the century; localities with a strong identity affected during the extensive industrialization; localities with a poorly defined identity due to the chaotic development after 1990; localities with double identity (with physiognomic and functional segregation).

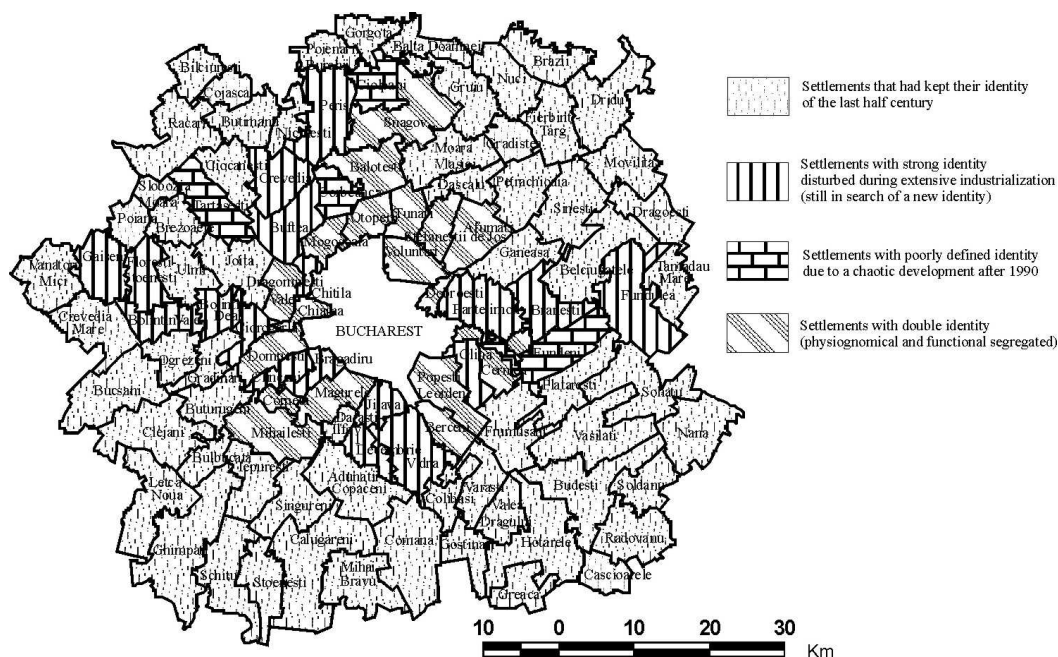


Figure 3. Typology of the Localities within the Bucharest Metropolitan Area

However, it is interesting that the majority of the metropolitan localities have kept the same identity in the latest 60 years – a phenomenon that can be explained by lack of real and varied advantages in their development: rather long distance from the Capital, poor and incomplete infrastructure, lack of economic goals, subsistence farming, etc. Likewise, an important number of localities around Bucharest and in the north of the metropolitan area have double identity: a functional (logistic parks and economic entities) and a physiognomic one (new residential spaces more often than not developed inside luxurious residential zones, sometimes overlapping traditional inhabiting spaces). In the case studies made in the two towns (Voluntari and Măgurele) and two communes (Brănești and Domnești), picked from different zones of the metropolitan area, the functional changes were analyzed alongside the pressures exerted by the Capital on their

territorial development. Based on 1970 and 2005 satellite images the directions were evidenced of residential and economic pressure on the lands with predominant farming destination. The most visible change is in the town Voluntary, in the northern part of Bucharest, where the built-in area doubled – the most attractive destination in the metropolitan area. The pressures were not noticed in the neighborhood of the town old area, but in a relatively new one, only partly built (figure 4).

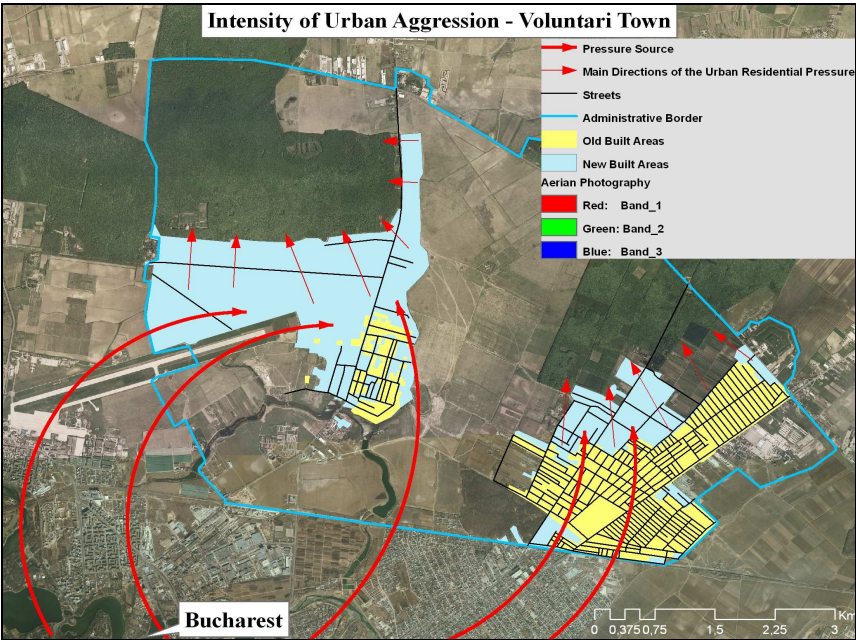


Figure 4. Intensity of Urban Aggression – Voluntari Town

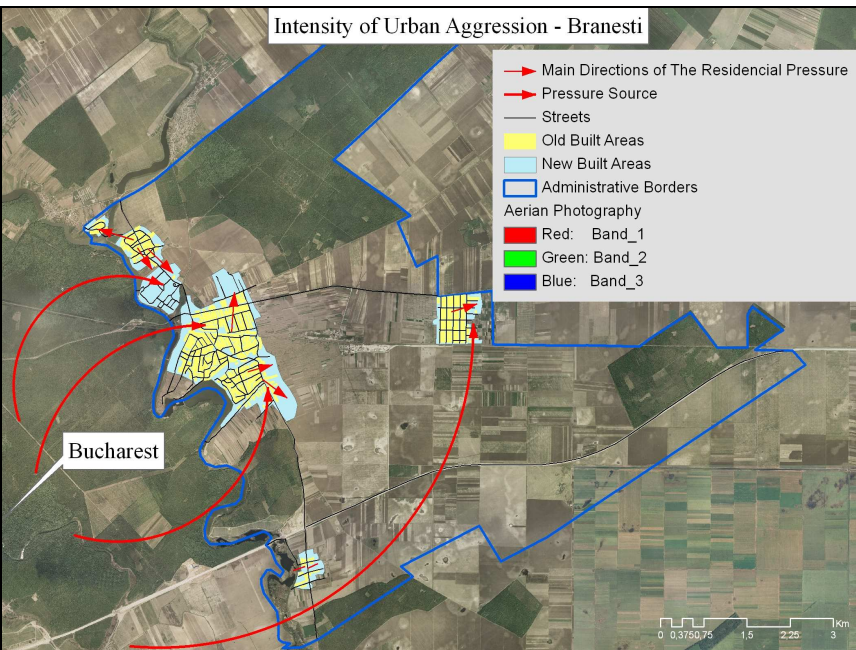


Figure 5. Intensity of Urban Aggression – Brănești

The pressure exerted on the Brănești commune (figure 5) focused on the development of the locality initial suburbs, at the level of the 1970s, and the extension of the new spaces fitted the already built space.

In the case of Domnești and Măgurele, having a linear structure along the communication roads, the pressure of the real estate development was perpendicular to the traditional rural, under the impact of the Capital aggression (figure 6).

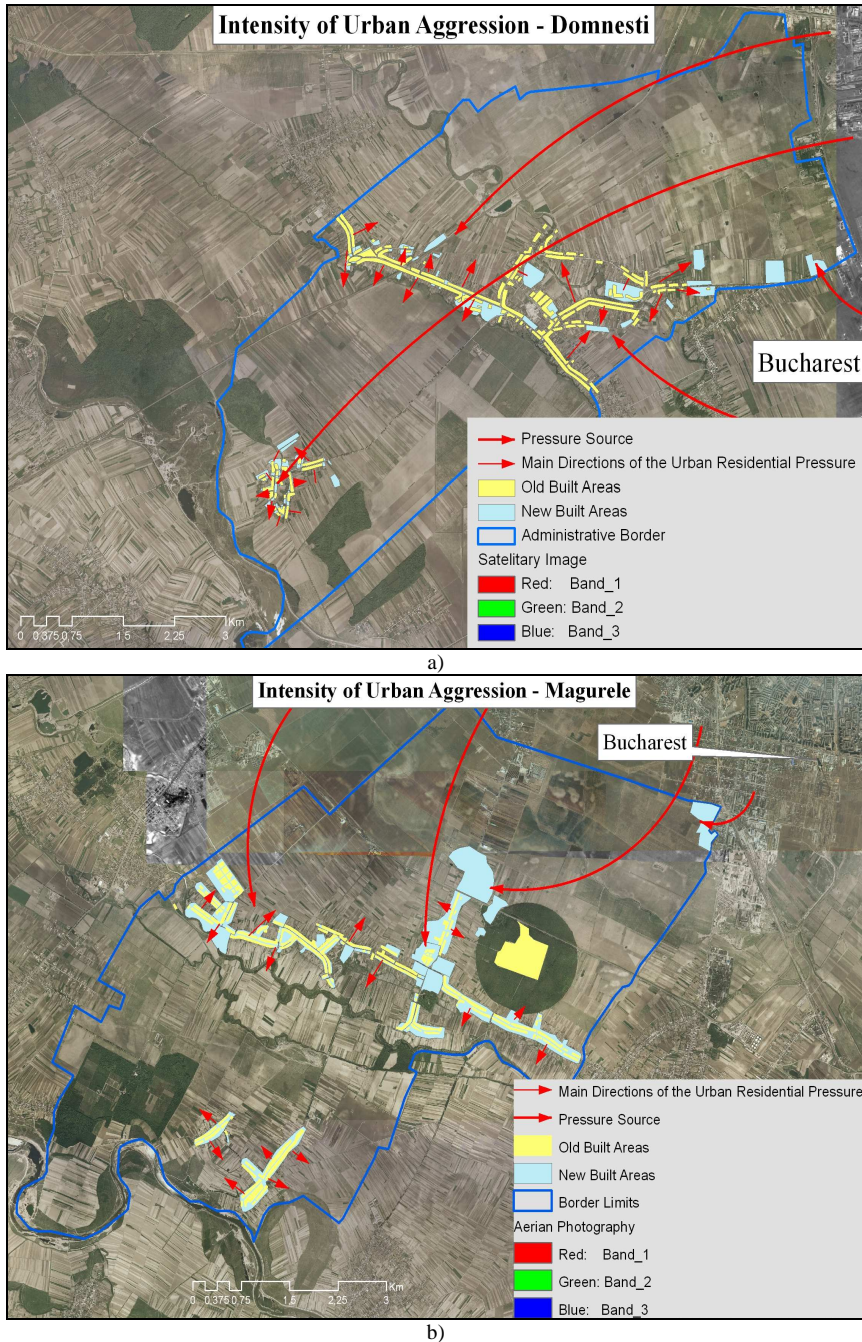


Figure 6. Intensity of Urban Aggression – Domnești (a) and Măgurele (b)

CONCLUSIONS

The changes in the morphology of the settlements are a consequence of some effects generated by the functional dynamics and they can entail psychological transformations at the level of the most basic structures of each locality. The process of identity change in the rural and urban communities of the Bucharest metropolitan area are just at the beginning. If the functional and physiognomic segregation process increases then strong perturbations are sure to appear in the identity process. More detailed observations could even individualize the thresholds where a settlement might lose its identity, but also those where a new identity is likely to appear.

The new challenges in the southern zone of the metropolitan area (the new airport, the shipping route on the Argeş River, 70 km in total, the building of the Bucharest harbor, establishment of a large university campus, etc.) will change the present identity of numerous localities that seem to keep their personality for the time being. Certainly, the traditional landscape in this area, less influenced by the development process mainly focused in the northern part of the Capital, will change a lot. The relative small distance to the Danube and the huge space stock in the south of Bucharest, that could have some other productive destinations, will diminish the Capital asymmetrical development and will complete a Carpathian-Danube development axis, having a trans-border character: Ruse-Bucharest-Ploieşti-Braşov.

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