

### **Polycentrism and strategic planning. Case study – Moldova**

Nowadays the concept of polycentrism is not directly under the limelight of European academic and political actors, who are preoccupied of the idea of cohesion on different levels, but it still remains one of the major concerns of the European Union (and the Member States), as it seems to be compatible with both the objective of competitiveness and the one concerning the balanced and sustainable development of the territory.

Although it used to have a great popularity at the beginning of 2000s, it is still an elusive concept (together with its derivate – polycentricity and polycentric development) which has multiple meanings depending on the scale of analysis and on the scientific approach (economy, geography, urban planning etc.).

The fuzziness of the concept has triggered the urge to closely clarify the concept through an inventory and a critical approach of both academic literature and official strategic documents. Accompanied by a good understanding of the European, national and regional framework in which polycentrism can be put into practice the critical inventory offers the context for urban actors to achieve a successful accomplishment by establishing and implementing the most appropriate measures and instruments regarding the polycentric development. The methodological approach of the paper is also designed to clarify the concepts from an analytical perspective by testing the hypothesis posed after identifying the criteria that define a polycentric system; furthermore, it provides for policy makers and stakeholders some specific instruments for a comprehensive territorial diagnosis. Regarding the study area of the paper – Moldavia – there are some cases when the analysis has a simply exploratory character derived from the lack of official statistical data; for instance, the Romanian National Institute of Statistics collects data up to local administrative units (communes) and does not provide information for finer scales, which in some cases represents a coarse level of analysis.

The aim of the paper is to identify whether the spatial planning documents regarding polycentric development (on national and regional level) are based on an empirical approach which can highlight the actual needs of the space taken under analysis, so that the present study could easily be put into practice (and to generate visible, quantifiable advantages); it also follows to what extent the Romanian policies reflect the ideas promoted by the European Union.

The methodological framework included the both aspects of the concept (normative and analytical) by combining different methods (cluster analyses, polycentricity indices, different connectivity measures, spatial interaction models) for the two dimensions of the Moldavian system – morphologic and relational – in order to highlight the territorial structures that coordinate the spatial behaviour of the entire system. Hence, the economic and demographic structures reveal the existence of a core-periphery logic, but a deeper investigation of the relational aspects points out multidirectional linkages between the system's elements which may be the premises for future development of polycentric (sub)systems. The analysis also highlighted the discontinuity between the Eastern and Western part of Moldova – the former is characterised by the presence of monocentric structures, while the latter has more potentialities for developing polycentric regions. The results could serve as an addendum to territorial diagnosis included in the official strategic planning documents, which establish the future orientations of the territory; these documents are based on analyses conducted on levels which do not comprise the specific features and actual needs of the analysed system, so that the measures have a rather normative character without any spatial dimension.