Administrative, spatial and demographic changes in Székelyland since the Treaty of Trianon to the present day*

Tibor Elekes
University of Miskolc, Hungary
E-mail: ecoeti@uni-miskolc.hu

Ferenc Szilágyi
Partium Christian University, Romania
E-mail: ferenc.szilagyi@partium.ro

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This study analysed the characteristics of the spatial organisation, spatial structure and population processes of Székelyland after the Treaty of Trianon. The purpose of the administrative reorganisation after World War I was unification. Between 1950 and 1968, transformation took place mirroring the political-ideological view of the time, often at the expense of the territorial units and centres created as a result of centuries of spatial development. The most significant change in the spatial structure during the early 20th century was the industrialisation that occurred between 1950 and 1989. In Székelyland, a contradictory socio-economic process in relation to other regions of Romania, began after 1990. The impact was smaller than that of the processes that had taken place under Communism. The population growth characteristic of the 20th century was replaced by a steady decline after 1990–1992.

The natural population decline of the last three decades and the vigorous transformation have resulted in population decline in the millions. The rate of population decline is the strongest among the young and physically active age groups.

Introduction

Under the Trianon Treaty, the Hungarian Kingdom, which became part of Romania, lost 103,093 km² of its total territory (325,411 km²) and one-fourth, that is 5,257,467, of its total citizens (20,886,487) as recorded in 1910 (53.8% Romanian, 31.6% Hungarian, 10.7% German, and 3.9% other nationalities) (1910 Census, Köpeczi 1993, Bereznay 2011).

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It was the first time in Székelyland’s history that its 600 years of ‘near-border, country-edge’ position had ceased to exist; it became the geographical centre of Great Romania in 1920. Despite the political change, the economic ‘semi-peripheral’ position of the region continued to exist.

The characteristics of spatial organisation and public administration in the 20th century

The traditional administrative and military spatial organisational units of Székelyland, that is, the seats (székek), were generally adjusted to landscape borders (mountain ridges, hill watersheds) and water flows and were mainly organised depending upon natural endowments (Elekes 2011, 2016). Apart from Austria’s two short-term attempts to reorganise these, the seats functioned as a ‘spatial framework’ for six-hundred years of social and economic processes until 1876. The spatial organising and identity-forming significance can be observed even nowadays (Elekes 2011, Egyed 2016) (Figure 1).

In 1876, the civil administration eliminated the earlier system of counties (vármegye), seats (szék) and regions (vidék) (Hajdú 2001). New counties of the same names were established in the territory of the historical Udvarhely, Csíkszék and Háromszék. Accordingly, Marosszék became part of Maros-Torda, and
Aranyosszék part of Aranyos-Torda counties (Elekes 2011). The new Transylvanian counties were mainly adjusted to historical borders, that is, to the area units and centres that evolved over several centuries of social and economic development (Szilágyi 2013).

After World War I, the territories of five earlier administrative systems (Romanian, Hungarian, Austrian, Russian and Bulgarian) had to be unified in Romania.

After the Treaty of Trianon, Romanian became the language of administration in Székelyland (Martinovici–Istrati 1921). The territories of Udvarhely, Háromszék, Csík, Maros(-Torda) and Torda(-Aranyos) Counties established in 1876 were only changed for the first time in 1926 (Figure 2).

**Székelyland and its regional composition in 1926**

Between 1940 and 1944, territorial units adjusted to the new state borders operated in the divided Transylvania. The new administrative units were adjusted to the Hungarian counties established in 1876 in Székelyland reannexed to Hungary,
and to the Romanian counties established in 1926 in the Southern Transylvanian territory left in Romania.

After World War II, Northern Transylvania and Székelyland became parts of Romania again.

Between 1950 and 1968, the province-rajon spatial division followed the Soviet model in Romania. In the system, which had been reorganised three times, the Hungarian Autonomous Territoriality (functioning between 1952 and 1960) included the vast majority of the historical Székelyland. Considering the 10 regions of the 13,500 km² large Hungarian Autonomous Territoriality, 565,000 of its 731,000 thousand inhabitants (77%) were of Hungarian nationality (Szabó 2003, Bottoni 2008). Those counties that have been existed since 1968 were basically not elaborated on the basis of historicity; heterogeneous territorial units in Transylvania were delimited in most cases.

Since the early 2010s, numerous spatial transformation concepts have been suggested in the technical literature and political scene in Romania. In addition to the draft of ‘artificial’ regions comprising 3–4 counties recognised today there have been several proposals adjusting to historical areas, the needs of citizens and realising decentralisation more efficiently (e.g. Székelyland, or regions of counties in Székelyland, Bukovina, Dobrogea); however, no arrangement proposal has been realised for any region to date.

Socio-economic factors affecting the spatial structure and population processes

The settlement and transport network as well as the spatial structure built on it was established as a result of a process over several centuries (Gyenizse et al. 2011, Egri–Kőszegi 2018, Egri–Tánczos 2018). In Székelyland, the moderated industrialisation and rise of the middle class continued in the early 20th century and between the two World Wars (Egyed 2016).

After World War II, a new and large-scale social and economic transformation began in Romania, similar to that in the Communist states of the region. The spatial structure developed within strict political limits; the intensity and texture of links within the country started to increase. The policy implementing the new ideological trend played an increasingly greater role, which affected the economy and society. This trend included the nationalisation of the production instruments, economic facilities and raw material deposits, as well as the establishment of the new social structure, the ‘elimination of social classes inhibiting development and exploiting others’, and so on. The planned economy, which was elaborated and controlled by the political government, primarily aimed at the overall and rapid improvement of the country and the reduction of inherited economic and regional inequalities (Benedek–Kurkó 2010, Benedek et al. 2018). The most efficient tool for
development was industrialisation, a factor giving rise to the greatest spatial structural, social and environmental transformation in the history of the region. New factories were constructed mainly on the basis of central decisions and not as a result of the local development in towns and cities after several centuries of development and in the industrial-urban regions established during the decades of Communism. The raw materials and the necessary labour force were often transported to and settled in the new facilities from outside the region. Controlled by the state, the intra-national as well as intra- and inter-regional migration between villages and cities provided the requisite labour force and settled into the newly built housing estates for the new economic facilities. Settlements located near republic-level large corporations received considerable funds and excellent opportunities for institutional development (Elekes 2008).

In Székelyland, the key target point of industrialisation was Targu Mures (Marosvásárhely). The two county seats, Sfântu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy) and Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) as well as Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely) were less industrialised; the necessary labour force was primarily ensured by their agglomerations (Páthy 2017). Communism implied slighter changes in towns with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants and in settlements that received town rank due to their industrial, mining or tourism functions.

The county and city system of South-eastern Transylvania in 2011
On the whole, Székelyland was industrialised and transformed to lesser extent than the Romanian average, which was also due to its geographical position within the country. The proportion of the inhabitants living in villages was still above the national mean value; one-third of the inhabitants residing in cities and towns lived in towns with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants (Figure 3)(see Atkinson 2019).

The 1980s were characterised by strengthening decentralisation, which primarily aimed at ‘reaching social homogenisation’ and ‘becoming economically and energetically independent’. The national debt was repaid at the expense of the population, who were severely deprived. The state’s prestige investments, the failed developments and the technical backwardness had resulted in an economy that was continuously becoming obsolete.

During that period, the power mechanism entirely served and protected the beneficiaries of the dictatorship. In terms of the country, the highest national security risk had become the Communist dictatorship, which was protected and served by the state by the late 1980s.

The country was progressing towards the realisation of a totally controlled Orwellian Society. The state attempted to place talented citizens in the service of its interest using incentives, intimidation and blackmailing. Each day, increasing numbers of those not agreeing with the prevailing ideology or rejecting the expectations of those in power were intimidated, isolated, expelled or ‘neutralised’. During this period, society lost thousands or tens of thousands of ‘innovative’ people. The activity of persons and communities representing cultural or ideological alternatives was reduced to the minimum. Contrary to the more open former Communist countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland), the increasing isolation resulted in tremendous information poverty in Romania. Market economy and Western societies were unknown to the population. After the fall of the dictatorship, it took nearly ten years to reduce the gaps and train specialists who were able to realise the transition to the market economy.

In 1989–1990, numerous events and processes hindered the social and economic development: the lack of accountability and explanation regarding the role of the former political and economic elite, the victims of the events taking place in Romania in December 1989 and the events occurring in Targu Mures (Marosvásárhely) in March 1990 regarding the Bucharest Mineriad. The economic collapse, the loss of markets and the delayed privatisation resulted in drastically growing unemployment and inflation as well as enhanced insecurity and hopelessness. The first half of the 1990s was accompanied by ideological and political disappointment, impoverishment and bread-and-butter worries for millions of people.

By the beginning of the millennium, Romania’s economy, including that of Székelyland, had stabilised. Joining NATO (1 May 2004) and the EU (1 January 2007) resulted in consolidation and new opportunities for Romania. After the
economic and financial crisis that arose in the late 2000's, Romania achieved considerable economic growth. Today, the unemployment rate is approximately 3%; one of the key issues in the country is the increasing labour shortage.

**Demographic processes**

In today's territory of Romania, the population grew continuously over the 20th century until 1990, except for the periods of the two World Wars. For four decades, Romania’s population increased by 46%; as a result of the migration realising industrialisation and controlled by the state, the urban population rose by 240% (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population of Romania</th>
<th>Urban population</th>
<th>Rural population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>15,872,624</td>
<td>3,713,139</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>17,489,540</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>19,103,163</td>
<td>7,305,714</td>
<td>11,797,449</td>
</tr>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>21,559,910</td>
<td>9,395,729</td>
<td>12,164,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>22,553,074</td>
<td>11,054,179</td>
<td>11,498,895</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>23,206,720</td>
<td>12,608,844</td>
<td>10,597,876</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>22,810,035</td>
<td>12,391,819</td>
<td>10,418,216</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>21,698,181</td>
<td>11,436,736</td>
<td>10,261,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>20,121,641</td>
<td>10,054,000</td>
<td>8,989,000</td>
</tr>
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*Preliminary data of the 2011 Census.*

In 1990, the former population policy acts supervised by the state were repealed. In 1992, the earlier natural population increase started to decrease at an accelerating pace, reaching an annual value of 50–75,000 at the national level in recent years (Insse.ro).

Since 1990, open borders have allowed employment in foreign countries. Due to the unemployment, bread-and-butter issues, ideological and political disappointment and poor living conditions, millions of young Romanians found work in the EU or in other countries throughout the world. The balance of emigration and immigration has witnessed a decrease of 40–75 thousand people per year at the national level. In 2018, the natural decrease of 67,000 and the migration loss of 58,000 resulted in a population loss of 125,000 people (Kincses–Bálint 2016). According to the data of the National Institute of Statistics in Romania, the
population of the country fell from 23.2 million to 19.4 million between 1990 and 2019. Nearly 20% of the active population works abroad. The ageing of the population is continuing; the dependency ratio was 51.1% in 2018 and 51.9% in 2019 (Insse.ro) (Kulcsár−Brown 2017).

Similar demographic processes can be observed in numerous countries in Eastern-Central and Eastern Europe (Siskáné Szilasi−Halász 2018, Bartke 2020, Köszegfalvi 2020); however, one of the strongest processes takes place in Romania.

The demographic processes of the past 100 years were more remarkable in towns and cities. In Székelyland, the increase until 1990 and the decrease after 1990 was close to the national and the broader regional average but to a lesser extent (Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
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<td>21</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Data of the Hungarian census in 1910 and the National Statistical Institute in Romania.*

The estimated population of the historical Székelyland was 40–42,000 in the 1330s, and 120,000 in 1567 (Egyed 2016). In 1910, the population number of Székely counties, Udvarhely, Csík, Háromszék and Maros-Torda totalled 567,000, of which the Hungarian population of the historical Székelyland was nearly 420,000. Similar to other regions of Romania, the largest population of Székelyland was registered in 1990–1992. This figure was followed by a decline; in 2002 and 2011 the number of inhabitants was 812,000 and 762,000, respectively. Until 1990, the processes taking place in the historical Székelyland, primarily in large cities, resulted
in an increase in the proportion of people of Romanian nationality. At the 2002 census, the share of Hungarians in Székelyland was 78.2%. In 2011, this figure was 76.3%, or 78.3%, excluding the 3.5% of citizens not declaring their nationality. The official results of the last two censuses reveal a slight spreading of Roma population (3.6% in 2011) and the stabilisation of the proportion of the Hungarian-Romanian ethnic population in Székelyland.

The results of the last three censuses suggest considerable changes in the number and proportion of the nationalities living in Romania (Table 3, Figure 4). According to the data of the 1977 and 1992 censuses, the proportion of Romanians increased by 7.4% and reached 20.4 million, while that of Roma rose by 76.3%. At the same time, the proportion of Hungarians decreased by 5.2% and that of Germans by 66.7%. Between 1992 and 2002, the German, Hungarian and Romanian communities tended to decline, contrary to the increasing number and proportion of Roma. Between 2002 and 2011, the processes of the previous ten years continued. However, the proportionate decrease in the number of Romanians approximated that of Hungarians that time, which means that the rates of decrease of the two nationalities are also nearly the same at the national level. The number of Romanians fell by 3.6 million people over twenty years, to 16.8 million in 2011. The number of Hungarians decreased from 1.7 million (1977) to 1.2 million (2011). The German population totalled half a million between the two World Wars, 339,000 in 1977 and 36,000 in 2011. On the contrary, the number of the Roma tripled (Pénzes et al. 2018) to 621,000 between 1977 and 2011.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>Hungarian</th>
<th>Roma</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977–1992</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>–5.2</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>–66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–2002</td>
<td>–4.9</td>
<td>–11.9</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>–50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: erdélystat.ro.*
Results

The administrative geographical synthesis shown in Figure 1 demonstrates that the Székely seats (szék) were adjusted to the landscape borders and established as a result of organic development used to ensure the spatial framework for the social and economic processes for six centuries.

None of the regionalisation concepts elaborated after 2010 have been realised until today.

The national demographic processes of the past one hundred years took place in Székelyland (Tables 1 and 2).

During the Communist dictatorship, the society lost tens of thousands of ‘innovative’ people due to their ideological perspectives. The information poverty and shortage of specialists that arose due to the isolation before 1990 could only be eliminated in the last decade of the millennium, through considerable economic and social sacrifices. All this resulted in a competitive disadvantage in the economy, considerable labour exodus and a significant population decrease. Nowadays, the rate of decrease is similar in terms of the Romanian and Hungarian nationalities (Table 3, Figure 4).

The significance of specialists and communities integrated into the society and performing economic activities is being increasingly appreciated.
Conclusions

Over the past century, Székelyland and its broader region have been the scene of remarkable political, administrative, social, economic, ideological and spatial structural changes. The system evoking the greatest social and economic changes was operated by the Communist dictatorship. Even after three decades, its influence can still be felt in the spatial organisational, demographic and economic processes. One of the key national issues of today and for the following decades is keeping the young and qualified labour force at home and luring back those citizens currently working abroad. It is essential that the highest wages possible be granted. Reducing corruption and bureaucracy as well as consolidating constitutionality all strengthen social efficiency and effectiveness. The declining number of the active population may result in a decrease of levies and state revenues despite the technological development and the economic and social opportunities in the 21st century. The decreasing sources may lead to the quantitative and qualitative deterioration of the fulfilment of state functions. The possibility of providing state pension and the amount that can be allocated to health care, education and culture may decrease. All these processes may become a group of insecurity factors that incite emigration. The sustainable operation of the society necessitates qualified and integrated (domestic or foreign) labour force.

Due to the known demographic and economic processes taking place in Romania, highly qualified specialists are becoming increasingly valuable. In the following decades, the significance of communities integrated into the society and conducting economic activities is expected to be appreciated more in the case that the economy continues to develop.

Adjusting to the demands of the social, ethnic, denominational and regional communities and promoting their continuance and development, spatial, economic and social organisation (Kocsis 2013) strongly integrates the citizens by ‘making them motivated’ in the economic and social processes, facilitates staying at home and reduces the intra- and inter-regional divergences.

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