

BOOK REVIEW

**Daniela Antonescu, *Regional Development. Theory and Practice*,
LUMEN Publishing, Bucharest, 2019**

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The book entitled *Regional Development. Theory and Practice*, published by the end of 2019, is the most recent book by Daniela Antonescu, 2nd rank scientific researcher with the Institute of National Economy of the Romanian Academy and member of Romanian Regional Science Association (RRSA). Based on over 20 years of experience in academic research, the author pursues the trajectory of regional development in Romania and the European Union thereby delivering a whole, relevant and objective view on the objectives, institutions and tools that support this process from the perspective of the territorial dimension.

The book analyses minutely the aspects characterising the relationships between regions and within them, changes and transformations that occurred due to the evolution and modernisation of regional science. The changes at regional level were accompanied by a series of persistent phenomena, sometimes with exacerbation trends: inequalities, mentalities, traditions, global crises, political implications, external interests, territorial reforms, etc. The modernisation of the process in itself was closely linked to the development of institutions and with the integration, accession and adjustment decisions to new requirements and conditions that attempted to support the new paradigm, which led ultimately to the emergence of the New Economic Geography and to emphasising endogenous factors at territorial level.

Regarded as ongoing and sustainable process, regional development has as basis three interdependent elements of legislative and institutional nature for establishing new types of relationships between the various sectors and fields of activity, between central, local institutions and communities with the purpose of increasing the living standard and ensuring the welfare of the inhabitants. At European level, the interaction between countries triggered the emergence and development of a new community room under the form of the European Union. Despite all obstacles

encountered over more than 50 years of existence, the European Union is today at the brink of a new change process: Great Britain's exit from the Community, economic recession, the creation of a "Banking Union", extreme and abrupt climate changes, increased pollution, a new security policy, managing migrant flows, terrorist attacks, etc. In these circumstances, economic and social gaps existing between various countries and regions are maintained and sometimes become more marked under the impact of various factors. The European Union, based on its cohesion and regional development policy, pursues to diminish these gaps by promoting balanced and sustainable development at regional level.

In Romania, regional development emerged as a necessity on one hand for improving already existing territorial discrepancies, and on the other hand for adjusting to the requirements resulting from the EU accession. Furthermore, the diminishing of economic, social, technological and environmental territorial inequalities represents one of the important policy goals both for the Old and the New Member-States integrated into the European Union. Based on regional development policy is pursued, at the same time, to stimulate and diversify economic activities, investment processes contributing to unemployment reduction and increased quality of life.

Considering the complexity of the analysed phenomena, the book provides for a global image about the regional development in general and over the way territorial inequalities and the economic convergence process evolved, under the impact of the current cohesion policy, and of the Europe 2020 Strategy, in the context of the in-depth changes at Community and global levels.

In supporting the scientific approach, which is the basis its elaboration, the book advances two types of approaches. The first approach aims theoretic-methodological aspects by pursuing to analyse the entire spectrum of more or less recent theories of regional sciences, techniques and analysis methods of the impact of territorial policies, conceptual approaches and critical analyses, opinions and contributions of some experts influencing the evolution in the field. The second approach is a practical one, applied to the current realities pertaining to achieving territorial cohesion, reducing economic and social disparities at regional level, etc.

The specific proposed and analysed goals are in accordance with the trajectory of the approach logic, as follows:

- presentation of the main evolving regional economy theories and of the most important influence factors;
- analysis of the regional inequalities in Romania and in the European Union;
- analysis of the cohesion and regional development policy in Romania, and in the EU;
- identifying the main administrative-territorial reforms as of 1918 and up to date;

- presentation of some specific elements of the sustainable development at regional level (protected areas, mountain areas);
- identifying the main directions and evolutions of the regional policy after 2020 by taking account of the actions and measures proposed for the future programming period 2021-2027 and in the context of the *UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development*.

The interest shown for the issues of regional development is relatively high, fact that warrants to this topic real, theoretic and practical importance. The book provides for documented and scientifically substantiated answers to the following questions:

- Which are the recent trends in the evolution of regional theories?
- Which are the most suitable spatial analysis models and techniques that might be applied in the field of regional science?
- How did regional science theory influence the practice and strategies implementation of territorial policies?
- Which are the main coordinates of regional policy within the European Union?
- How high are the regional disparities within the European Union (EU-28) and in Romania for the period 2007-2017?
- How important is territorial cohesion at the level of the member-states, and which are the main tools for supporting it?
- Which are the perspectives of the territorial cohesion policy after the year 2020 and at the time-horizon 2030?
- Which are the regional development perspectives in Romania after the year 2020?

Over the 11 chapters (and an additional chapter for conclusions), the book proposes to the reader based on an adequate conceptual-methodological framework a balanced analysis of the regional convergence process within the European Union, and of the territorial development in Romania.

In the first section – theoretical and methodological approach – the special literature is reviewed regarding the integration, cohesion, convergence, and the main theories attempting to provide answers to a general and persistent question: why some regions develop more rapidly than the others do? To these questions, the answers were provided mainly by the regional economic science, which was supported over its entire evolution by other sciences such as mathematics, statistics, geography, sociology, etc. Based on the performed analyses, it was found that the regional theories and policies underwent significant changes over the last period in their attempt to mitigate the challenges triggered by globalisation, financial crisis, by resilience, and by structural changes, etc. Recently, new concepts and approaches emerged which “unseated” the old regional theories and

which are more complex and sophisticated by resorting to innovative elements, complex econometric analysis techniques and methods, etc. From this perspective, the trends of regional policy after 1990 focused on regions of knowledge, regional networks (clusters), research and innovation but without losing from view the specificity and the development and potential discrepancies of each region.

In the second section, the practical aspects of regional policy are approached, and territorial inequalities are analysed based on some specific indicators, on some statistical and econometric evaluation techniques and methods. Moreover, the historical context is presented in which the administrative-territorial reforms unfolded in Romania in the 100 years as of the Great Union. Over this period, Romania was led by 38 governments following one another that attempted to ensure institutional structures and mechanisms corresponding to the modernity, unity and stability requirements of the modern unitary national Romanian state. Correlated and integrated with the economic and social changes, the administrative reforms pursued to create territorial structures that contribute to rendering efficient the implementation of some measures and actions aimed to diminish certain imbalances between various regions, but also to ensure better control over the latter.

The third section of the book presents aspects and characteristics of sustainable development at regional level, as certain areas with important natural specifics are aimed that play a strategic role in the good preservation of a clean and natural habitat.

By the end of the book, a possible regional development strategy is proposed for the programming period 2021-2027 which takes account of current conditions and developments, but also of the challenges triggered by globalisation, sustainable development and extreme climate changes, social inclusion, migration, etc.

The methodology used in this book is supported mainly by econometric/statistic evaluations (indicators of concentration/diversification, variation indicators, and of the central trend, structures' analysis, etc.) applied for the NUTS-2 regions in EU-28 and Romania. These scientific research and analysis methods are used frequently at national and international level and take into account that, identifying the evolution of regional inequalities, might be achieved mainly based on the convergence indicators (total GDP and per capita GDP). The data and information presented in this book are related to the average, maximum and minimum levels of the analysed indicators. By using the information existing in the Eurostat databank, but also in the national statistics, the analyses present trends and evolutions that occurred at regional level, in certain fields of activity, in different periods.

By entwining recent theoretical elements and analysis models/techniques of spatial analysis with statistic, legislative and institutional data and information, the book may contribute to better understanding the positive and negative aspects that influenced the evolution of regional development in Romania, as well as to formulating the directions and actions for the next programming period.