

Towards a Romanian Silicon Valley?

Local Development in Post-Socialist Europe

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1. Auflage 2007. Taschenbuch. 194 S. Paperback
ISBN 978 3 593 38126 8
Format (B x L): 14 x 21,3 cm
Gewicht: 289 g

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Leseprobe

The Romanian transformation process gradually uncovered phenomena of spatial and social polarisation within the country. These consisted primarily of historically constituted regional disparities, which gained in significance as a consequence of the country's reorientation within the international economic and political context. Migration phenomena, linking together strategies of social mobility and spatial relocation, further contributed to this picture.

Growing spatial and social disparities have represented a continuous challenge to Romanian governments. The decentralisation of the administration and the dismantling of the central redistribution apparatus became unavoidable under growing external and internal pressure. At the same time, there were fears that a precipitous or all-encompassing decentralisation would only reinforce existing disparities and would lead to a destabilisation of state power (Paradis 1998). Administrative reform was therefore implemented incrementally. It consisted of the creation of elected local government bodies (1991-1992), assignment of independent financial means to them (1998), and continuous extension of their competences vis-à-vis the state administration structures (1991-2001).

These measures did not cause the regulatory capacity of the central state to implode, as some may have feared, but they did result in the dismantling of the former authoritarian administrative structures. Thus new spaces for public action emerged in which local and central, state-based, and civic actors could freely interact. Different actors used these spaces in different ways. In some cases, one could witness the establishment of patron-client systems on the local level; in others, the emergence of new, more citizen-oriented policy patterns. However, a clear distinction between these two patterns of policy-making is only possible on the analytical level. Political thinking and action must be viewed as being contextualised. Contextualisations, in their turn, are determined not only by objective, so-called "hard" constraints, but they are also influenced by subjective, or "soft", factors. External conditions, like the specific pattern of integration into global exchange relations or the national transformation regime, are equally important as identity discourses and ways in which the actors perceive and interpret external conditions. Against this background, my thesis investigates the extent to which the actors and institutions emerging on the local level during the transformation process are able to trigger and sustain processes of local development. Explanatory approaches result from the analysis of the interplay between two groups of multidimensional factors. The first group consists of the socialist and pre-socialist structural legacy, taking into account the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. The second group of factors refers to the new political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics triggered by post-socialist integration into both European and global political and economic networks. My analysis considers two levels of this interplay. The major level of analysis remains the national transformation regime. On the one hand, it sets the general legal and institutional, but also the economic and social, frameworks for developments on subordinate levels. On the other hand, it also provides the cognitive framework for the understanding, description, and analysis of local and regional politics and society. Subsequently, the analysis focuses on the interplay between the specific legacy of a particular locality and the - centrally mediated - impact of global tendencies on it. At this point, my analysis refers to Eisenstadt's assumption that specific features of the local

structural legacy influence the patterns of its integration into larger political and economic contexts (Eisenstadt 1998). However, one should not forget that throughout this whole process the central state maintains its key