

# DECISION MAKING PATTERNS IN TERRITORIAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE CASE OF ROMANIA

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**Abstract.** One of the main mechanisms fuelling the process of territorial development both on local and regional levels is cooperation. It is distinguished as one fundamental priority for the European Union in terms of operational aspirations. Local initiative and decision making patterns are contributing processes for the regional and sub-regional level, as they target the ‘integrated’ feature of sustainable territorial development policies. In an attempt to address the role of these mechanisms in relation to their contribution towards delineating a new regional development model, existing theories on planned behaviour, new regionalism and decision-making in public administration are investigated. Following a set of innovative but rather less complex studies portraying the factors influencing the municipalities to associate, we hypothesize that there may be other elements accounting for these intentions expressed by the local authorities. These can be furthermore aggregated within a territorial intention model. The study aims to thoroughly define a set of secondary factors influencing the association intentions in local administrative units while subsequently underlining the potential of this dimension to define an alternative regional development model.

**Key words:** intercommunal cooperation; planned behaviour; policy cycle; decision making; local initiative.

## 1. Introduction

Within the European Union, territorial development is coordinated through a set of policies aiming to narrow down the gaps between member states. From the very beginning, the European Spatial Development Perspective (European Commission, 1999) advocated on broad territorial partnerships ranging from supranational to inter and intra-regional levels. According to this document, the cooperation guidelines have been established in order to encourage (1) common strategies for economic diversification aimed at the development of urban partnerships and networks, (2) sustainable urban planning concepts

targeting transportation systems, (3) urban and rural partnerships to implement sustainable innovative spatial development strategies for the cities and their surrounding countryside and (4) action programmes for the protection and conservation of urban heritage. These specific measures, however, have been illustrated differently during operationalization and are embedded as visible processes within EU’s Common Agricultural Policy and, partly, into the Cohesion Policy (European Commission, 2013).

Partnerships define the intermunicipal cooperation (IMC) system and when

transposed into a spatial context, these organisms structure a 'new' territorial level. Frère notes that even though local cooperation is seen as a solution to inefficiencies, there are still few consistent studies on the subject (Frère *et al.*, 2013). From the existing literature we can distinguish two main perspectives.

Firstly, by conceptualising the importance of cooperation processes (Priests, 1999; Frey and Eichenberger, 1999) in relation to (1) functional, overlapping and competing jurisdictions for the provisioning of different public services in relation to governmental cost reductions and (2) 'functional' cooperation with an organisational and spatial design, IMC is perceived as a heuristic for fast societal and economic development. Moreover, this literature is supporting the idea that cooperation between local authorities contributes to regional economic development considering that economic actors and other stakeholders are interested in a couple of location factors within a region that usually exceed local authority borders (Blume and Blume, 2007). Some studies investigate the impact of such actions in rural regions, pointing towards their efficiency as tools for rural sustenance (Albu and Chițu, 2014).

Secondly, not surprisingly, alternative arguments brought by a different set of empiric studies demonstrate the partial inefficiency of associations and territorial partnerships (Frère *et al.*, 2013; Ermini and Santolini, 2010). Here, the main findings point towards the idea that cooperation does not contribute to reducing the municipal spending through sharing local responsibilities, as public expenditure is equal to what it would be outside an IMC structure. The most prominent studies in this direction tend to focus extensively on

a perspective targeting the fiscal outcomes of IMC, thus failing to capture a broader spectrum of potential effects.

In this regard, EU placed a lot of effort on empowering the local communities in an attempt to obtain the prerequisites for a sustainable development. Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), part of the Cohesion Policy, and the sectorial support for targeted Local Action Groups (LAG) initiated within the LEADER approach, are both facilitating a strong participation of the communities in decision making. CLLD represents a specific tool for the sub-regional level and it is complementary to other local development support (European Commission, 2014a), while the LAG are the mainstay of the implementation of LEADER program, part of the Common Agricultural Policy mechanisms.

Given the intensive financial support provided for these constructs, the array of responsibilities include the development of local strategies, the establishment of connections between stakeholders and the evaluation of individual projects followed by approval (European Commission, 2014b). Yet, beside these features, both constructs bring the decision making process closer to population. Having a financial mechanism supporting development, the local communities are encouraged to react on a larger scale both because, as recent studies point out, they have only so few mechanisms to engage and attract private investors (Bel and Xavier, 2006; Warner and Hefetz, 2003) and to gather the necessary resources required in provisioning the wide range of public services for the population.

The IMC concept is approached differently within the existing literature

(Săgeată, 2012; Bulat, 2012). Due to linguistic nuances, cooperation between local administrative entities has been referred to as inter-community, inter-communal and intermunicipal cooperation. In the present study, the core meaning of the concept mostly aligns with what the French inter-communality represents: structures covering several communes (municipalities) (Cadiou, 2013), proposing a collaboration between two or more neighbouring administrative units for the achievement of common development goals (Bulat, 2012).

Additionally, approaching the conceptual delimitations proposed by Sandu, it is possible to understand the associative formations as the first step towards minimising the gaps between what is generically referred to as rural and urban environment (Sandu, 1992). In this direction, the idea of common goals and associative actions to support a better background for local development is the very visible expression of a contemporary lifestyle.

Although conceptual work is well developed, to the best of our knowledge, the existing literature does not provide substantial contributions in analysing the factors driving the municipalities to associate, and consequently, we propose an alternative investigation focused on the intermediate pseudo-administrative level.

The article begins with a conceptual delimitation followed by a brief overview of the main research perspective. The second chapter presents key notes on investigating the determinants of decision making in administration while the third presents the methodology and main concepts in use. This chapter

emphasizes on delineating the intention model - based on preliminary decision patterns - and the supporting conceptual framework, using the available data from the communes in the Center Region, Romania. In the fourth chapter the main results are presented following the data analysis. The next part proposes a discussion regarding the research findings. Here, the role of IMC organisms in shaping the regional development is outlined, followed by a presentation of the characteristics pertained by the Romanian IMC level. This chapter also includes several observations concerning the designed intention model and its potential applications. After noting potential future approaches on the subject, the article ends with a set of concluding remarks.

## 2. Key notes on decision making in local administration

The hierarchic organisation of the territorial public administration within the EU and ascension states is standardised through the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) and LAU (Local Administrative Units), territorial reference systems. NUTS 0, 1, 2 and 3 units correspond to the national, macro-regional, regional and sub-regional dimension of the administrated territory. The lower LAU level (LAU 2) reunites municipalities or similar divisions and it represents the structural unit of the upper LAU dimension (LAU 1) (Eurostat, 2010). In practice, the standardised territorial classification systems do not fully overlap over the public administration levels as in some countries they are either not established or only have an operational purpose.

In the absence of an administrative component of the LAU 1 level, the

voluntary polarisation of local communities into territorial associations partly supplies for it. Bringing forth the examples from the Eastern and Northern European countries, the polarisation of local communities into territorial associations partly supplies for the absence of an administrative LAU 1 level and offers a broadened operational framework. As some authors point out, this aspect underlines once more the delicate relationship between the territorial associations' development goals and the individual contribution of its members (Teilmann, 2011).

Within the LEADER approach, LAGs are aggregated on a sub-regional level, partially matching the LAU 1 dimension and, during the 2014-2020 programming period, they represent the basis for further implementation of the CLLD. This approach on local development is area-based, bottom-up, public-private, integrated, co-operative and provides a networking environment for stakeholders. However, by studying the origin of intentions on a territorial level, the top-down and bottom-up measures stand out as main taxonomical components. A display of the first direction is clearly seen in territorial reform, whereas the second corresponds to the associative phenomenon. Broadly, here the reforms entail the reorganisation of administrative boundaries and territorial levels in an attempt to increase the governance efficiency (Skaburskis, 2004).

Existing literature provides sufficient evidence to declare this process artificial, and in regards to cooperative actions, it renders as an opposing concept. For example, although the LAU 1 level indeed presents a territorial dimension that aggregates municipalities according

to a couple of affinities, on the long run it often fails to underline functional communities.

Common problems identified throughout the EU countries possessing a LAU 1 administrative level are represented by the acute segregation of communities belonging to same historical areas and the usage of different boundaries when referring to administrative, cultural or ethnographic territories (Săgeată, 2012).

On a European level, a lot of emphasis is put on encouraging the bottom-up perspective on territorial development. In turn, this incentivises communities to associate in an attempt to obtain mutual benefits regarding human, financial and territorial resources. Due to the sense of empowerment experienced by the municipalities, this development direction has a better chance of defining local identity and territorial functionality. In this focus, according to Săgeată, IMC is a form of 'contractual association' allowing municipalities to access the financial support in order to sustain their development goals (Săgeată, 2012). In addition, the broad range of funding mechanisms covered by the Common Strategic Framework, the European Structural and Investment Funds (the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund) provide the necessary tools for operationalization (European Commission, 2013).

A major downside of this bottom-up approach is that, often, development strategies lack an integrated perspective, being limited by the existing administrative framework, and most importantly the size of the LAU unit.

According to existing empirical evidence (Warner and Hefetz, 2002; Bel and Miralles, 2003), large municipalities can easily exploit scale economies for different public services, whereas smaller ones may experience higher contracting costs (Bel and Miralles, 2003). These municipalities are more prone to cooperate, as they may attain an optimum scale of production for the provisioned services and take advantage of scale economies with low transaction costs (Bel *et al.*, 2013).

IMC is increasingly asserted as a pre-requirement for development due to its capacity to create a network fuelled by local initiatives, while proposing, in theory, a better community representation. The process enforces four main areas linked to local development: (1) regulation, (2) services and community facilities, (3) infrastructure for public utilities and (4) management of local growth potential (European Commission, 2010). The phenomenon is more prominent in countries with a high degree of administrative fragmentation, low regional authority and regional infancy (Săgeată, 2012). According to Ickes this process encourages the refocus of development towards endogenous origins, leaving a significant role for policy making (Ickes, 1996).

Existing studies in the field target the intricate relationship characterising the decision making mechanisms in public administration and address it from an operational, conceptual and structural point of view (Petruşel, 2013; Kerraghan, 1993; Nutt, 2005). Bel and colleagues develop a study on association factors, a work that is significantly relevant to the perspective underlined in the present paper. This study provides four core determinants shaping the municipal

association process: (1) municipality size (population number), (2) territorial dispersion, (3) financial burden (as the quotient between interest plus amortisation and revenue and (4) the mayor's political orientation (Bel *et al.*, 2013). Although innovative, we argue that the above-mentioned study does not fully capture the societal dimension, the development level of local communities or the importance of proximity relationships.

Săgeată on the other hand points out that IMC structures depend on the local communities' perception on participatory practices (Săgeată, 2012) and that such a factor not only lays out the prerequisites for cooperation, but also ensures a successful implementation of the proposed mechanism.

On the same topic, Celata and Colleti note that cooperative actions are driven by the sense of territorial identity, a fact defining the links between contiguous territories with a common historical and cultural heritage (Celata and Colleti, 2014). On a broader scale, as this aspect is independent from the administrative boundaries, it shapes trans-regional communities. We consider that another important factor weighing towards the decision to associate is the overall development level, influenced by the urban or rural character of the municipalities. Consequently, a different set of contextual limits emerge as a result of territorial appropriation.

In addition to this understanding, a closer look on complex networks provides a background for shaping the networkability concept further used within this study. There is a significant amount of literature on the topic of complex networks and graph theory, the

first body of work being published by Euler in 1736 under the name 'Seven Bridges of Königsberg'. Since then, many applications of this concept have been conducted in the field of urban planning and territorial development (Volchenkov, 2008; Svenson, 2006).

The idea of a complex network is also fitted for an environment that brings together topology (here a connected graph), dynamics (the set of operators) and the embedding space (the sum of measures and weights assigned to the edges of the graph). In other words, from what it entails on a territorial level, complex networks provide a different insight on human behaviour, allowing forecasting operations concerning movement of components within a given area (Karimi, 2012). Another strand of studies develop on this topic, constructing the theory of space syntax, which qualitatively analyses space from what it represents in terms of appropriation and navigation easiness (Hillier and Hanson, 1984; Li and Hsieh, 2014; Ratti, 2004).

This particular approach has been stretched to predict different expected results from the fields of ecology, urban planning, urban and human geography and information technology, to name a few. Additionally, the use of complex network analysis techniques in territorial aspects brings forward a set of local characteristics with an increased implementation value. In other words, it presents valuable information about current conditions and development potential while acting as a very early policy tool, helping the interested parts to better shape their interventions.

### **3. Methodological framework**

Prior to unfolding the methodological framework, a couple of terminological

clarifications are proposed in an attempt to establish the concepts in use.

The associative structures represent the sum of partnerships, agreements and legal entities that target territorial development of a sub-regional area, engaging local authorities, as well as the private and the public sector. Identifying the taxonomic components and the distribution of the associative structures shapes the decision making patterns.

The intermunicipal dimension represents the sum of associative structures within the national administrative boundaries and, according to the existing territorial levels, is defined by a set of characteristics: (1) territorial distribution, (2) administrative status, (3) typological diversity of included entities, (4) organisational characteristics, (5) decisional autonomy, (6) functionality and representation features. Territorial units often display an 'associative behaviour', that can be initially identified by looking at how connected with their neighbours are these municipalities in terms of common projects.

A decision represents the result of a multi-choice analysis, excluding the set of unreliable expectations given a current set of operational tools. Within the present study, decisions are reflected in the number of common actions undertaken by authorities after their aggregation within territorial associations.

We emphasize on the role of intentions as a predictor of planned behaviour and the key to understanding the phenomena behind the bottom-up associative processes. The intention to associate represents the outcome of cumulated

local initiatives and it can be schematically visualised in the territorial intention model.

As concerning the major research goals, the paper aims to clarify (1) the mechanisms behind the association processes in an attempt to reveal their broader importance within a regional context and additionally to (2) shed some light on the interwoven determinant factors of territorial cooperation. In doing so, it is possible to shape a new conceptual framework toiling with the subject.

Following a critical investigation of conducted researches, we propose a complementary perspective on the subject that will make use of Ajzen’s approach on intentions as defined within the TPB (Ajzen, 1987). This is also justified by the fact that a set of conceptual studies point out towards the importance of another set of factors accounting for the municipal intention to associate. The connection between intention and decision making is a driving force for basically all cognitive processes, and in our perspective, it can help decode some territorial processes. The causality of decision making is conceptualised in Figure 1. In Ajzen’s (1987) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) intentions are seen as a linear function of three types of processes: attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control.



Fig. 1. Conceptual approach on the causality of the decision making process

We assert that when referring to the territorial and administrative dimension

of CLLD, these cognitions have their homologues in (1) characteristics defining municipal networking capabilities, (2) public participation and (3) legislative measures. This adaptation is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Structural components of the theory of planned behaviour

<i>Original use in cognition phenomenology</i>	<i>Adaptation for a territorial dimension: Defining the territorial intention model</i>
(1) Attitudes	(1') Structural components of the networkability factor
(2) Subjective norms	(2') Public participation and community involvement in local governance
(3) Perceived control	(3') Legal context

The work hypothesis states that (1) networkability elements significantly influence the intention to associate, alongside the set of core determinants underlined by previous studies and that (2) societal drivers have a rather diffuse role in setting the span and diversity of the networking capabilities.

In defining the networkability factor we investigate three main elements that indicate the capacity of LAU to relate and establish connections with the neighbouring territories: (1) city twinning operations, (2) agreements established between neighbouring units and (3) projects implemented in a consortium, all prioritising territorial development. As concerning the representation of societal drivers, we propose an initial selection of the Local Human Development Index (LHDI) measuring local social development accounted from the perspective of

educational resources, birth expectancy and the average age of adult population (Sandu *et al.*, 2009). The data used in this study was aggregated from the information obtained via telephonic interviews and surveys targeting every municipality in the Center Region in Romania and from available open data sources. Data was gathered between 2001 - the year when the Law 215/2001 (Romanian Senate, 2001) went into effect and 2011, presenting the most recent available information.

For each LAU 2 unit an investigation of shared projects (Com\_PROJ), town twinning (Town\_TWAIN) and other agreements (Oth\_AGREE) is conducted. Special emphasis is placed on differentiating between the projects implemented prior and after the communities engage in territorial associations; this offers the premise for investigation of potential causal links between the networkability factor and intentions. Table 2 presents the usage of data according to the decision pattern shaped according to the TPB with an emphasis on project development (presented in Figure 1).

**Table 2.** Components of a decision pattern based on the analysis of initiatives, intentions and decision concerning local development projects

Initiatives (actions prior to association)	Association intention (number of associations)	Decisions (common projects implemented after association)
Com_PROJ		
Town_TWAIN	Asoc_TOTAL	Project_FIN
Oth_AGREE		

#### 4. Results

An overview regarding descriptive statistics is presented in Table 3 and it is followed by a correlation analysis of the main variables, as seen in Table 4.

Given the values of the  $r^2$  coefficients and aiming for a moderate complexity reduction in the upcoming model, the elements that define the openness degree of municipalities towards establishing connections with the neighbouring territorial units are artificially aggregated in the networkability factor (Netw\_FACT).

The next step proposes the aggregation of a regression model where the networkability factor and LHDI are explanatory variables in relation to the number of municipal associations. After running the model, the results indicate that the proposed construct significantly explains almost a third of the variation in the dependent variable, a fact explained by the value of  $r^2$  being  $r^2 = 0.297$ .

Moreover, the goodness of fit statistics show a  $p$  value of  $p = 0.02$  at the 95% confidence level, supporting once more the validity of the assumption. After checking the resulted  $p$ -values of the explanatory variables, LHDI turned out to be not significant, leaving only the networkability factor as a valid candidate for explaining part of the variation in the implied relationship. However, considering the correlation analysis, LHDI is a secondary determinant of this relationship, accounting for almost 25% of the variability in the networkability factor, as seen in Table 5. Furthermore, the correlation between the networkability factor in relation to the number of municipal associations is considered statistically significant as  $r^2$  is 0.298 and the two-tailed value of  $p$  is significantly smaller than 0.0001 (in this case, the  $p$ -value at a 95% confidence level with the corresponding  $\alpha$  value of  $\alpha = 0.05$  indicates strong evidence against the

null hypothesis that implies the inaccuracy of the analysed relationship).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Variable	cnt	m	M	$\mu$	$\sigma$
Com_PROJ	368	0	7	3.75	2.65
Town_TWIN	368	0	3	0.41	0.79
Oth_AGREE	368	0	2	0.35	0.64
LHDI	368	43.26	98.66	59.85	12.95
Asoc_TYPE	368	0	3	1.62	0.70
Asoc_TOTAL	368	2	8	3.97	1.29
New_PROJ	368	0	5	2.33	1.20

We can infer that according to existing data, the relationship between municipal networking capabilities and the intention to associate is visible and significant.

Figure 2 describes an intention model complementing the existing perspectives regarding the factors that influence municipalities to associate. Based on the existing data regarding joint projects, municipal agreements and contracts in the Center Region in Romania, we are also able to map the outputs of associations in terms of the total number of projects with a territorial dimension. Data shows that after association, only about 65% of the entities successfully implement projects that reach the monitoring stage.

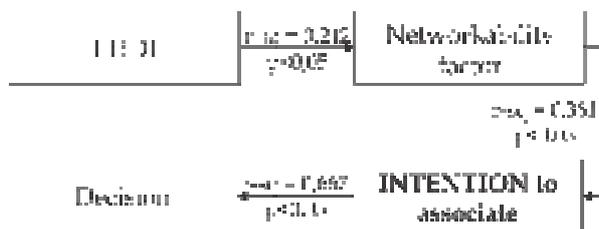


Fig. 2. The schematics of the resulting territorial intention model (TIM)

Given the sectoral approach and considering the highly unpredictable characteristic of the studied elements, it is normal that the  $r^2$  value is relatively small throughout the analysis. Following the main research goal, special attention is paid to understand the connections

between components. Supplementary, rather than making a prediction based on the coefficient of determination, an interpretation of the p-values underlines the real relationship between the significant predictors and the response variable.

However, given the somewhat diffuse and variable relationship between the investigated factors and aiming to provide an integrative perspective on this research field, Figure 3 presents a schematic representation of the proposed conceptual framework where the local conditions to associate are part of a broader context shaped by legislative environment and the features of territorial public administration. The core determinants for the associative intention are positioned in a system where networking features and societal drivers for change have a diffuse influence over the variation in decision making.

### 5. Discussion

In this chapter we will discuss three elements of importance for the present paper. Firstly we will debate the role of IMC organisms in shaping the regional development pathway where three dimensions concur: (1) the operational perspective targeting the integrated development policy, (2) the emergence of a cross-regional network including municipalities that are not necessary from the same country or region and (3) the interwoven mechanisms incentivising social connections and local societal development. Secondly, we proceed by explaining the characteristics pertained by the Romanian IMC level and thirdly we present a series of observations targeting the designed intention model and its potential applications.

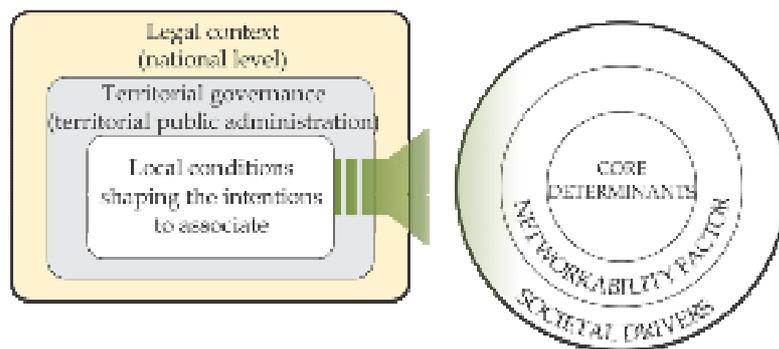


Fig. 3. The extended conceptual framework

Table 4. Correlation matrix presenting the values of the coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) for the initial variables. Numbers in bold are statistically significant with  $p < 0.05$  at a 95% confidence level

Variable	Com_PROJ	Town_TWIN	Oth_AGREE	LHDI	Asoc_TYPE	Asoc_TOTAL	Com_PROJ
Com_PROJ	-	-0.164	-0.118	<b>0.223</b>	-0.173	<b>0.324</b>	0.053
Town_TWIN		-	-0.043	0.155	0.071	<b>0.287</b>	-0.031
Oth_AGREE			-	0.046	0.012	<b>0.474</b>	0.075
LHDI				-	<b>0.324</b>	-0.020	-0.045
Asoc_TYPE					-	-0.195	-0.066
Asoc_TOTAL						-	<b>0.667</b>
New_PROJ							-

### 5.1. Intermunicipal cooperation and regional development

Numerous scholars fuel the controversy on how territorial approaches should be regarded in contrast to the relational dimension of cooperation and connectivity and its contribution to sustainable regional development.

Table 5. Correlation matrix with the aggregated variables ( $r^2$  values). Numbers in bold are statistically significant with  $p < 0.05$  at a 95% confidence level

	Netw_FACT	LHDI	Asoc_TOTAL
Netw_FACT	-	<b>0.242</b>	<b>0.361</b>
LHDI		-	-0.020
Asoc_TOTAL			-

Advocated by Bristow (2010) and Faludi (2012), regions should take advantage of the cooperative mechanisms and transform into internally and externally connected entities in an attempt to deal

with a set of global and transnational challenges. Current practices show that such a challenge is hard to materialise in policy priorities. In the light of what territorial association represents in recent strategies, the intermunicipal level is often criticised because, although it structures a sub-regional relational dimensionality of development, it can easily fail to accomplish the envisaged goals and transform into a financially burdensome, inert mechanism.

The contextual factors contributing to this effect are a loose institutional context and lack of technical capacities (Barbera, 2011). In this relation, although perceived as empowering by the local communities, decentralisation and local autonomy tend to reflect an increased sense of 'localism' that confines the development priorities within the LAUs' administrative borders (Cellata and

Coletti, 2014). In contrast, the perspective provided by the 'new regionalism' advocates for territorial links based on pre-existing determinants and complementarities (Massey, 2004).

Siding with a couple of more recent studies warning about the too-easy dismissal of the regional dimension (Harrison, 2013; MacLeod and Jones, 2007), we stress on the importance of a strong sense of contextual adequacy that would minimise the challenges faced by the local associations. Special attention must be given to ensure that the IMC level does not transform into a sole administrator of local resources and services.

As previously mentioned, in terms of systemic relations the IMC level structures a mixed network including different forms of territorial associations. We assert that, given the initial systemic orientation of LEADER approach and the corresponding ensuing actions, an associative level shaped on a LAU1 dimension provides a more 'natural' – community appropriated alternative for regional development while encouraging inter and intra-regional connections. However, the intermunicipal dimension should not be regarded outside the regional policy prescriptions, rather be included as a structural mechanism in future actions defining the national and sub-national development strategies.

So how does local territorial cooperation contribute to regional development, in fact? According to other authors (Maleki, 1997) development is seen as a process that entails deep transformations and structural changes on all societal and economic levels, usually sparked by a technological niche change. What cooperative mechanisms do is they

provide an integrated prerequisite base for further development, and according to how well actions are structured and operationalised, they make use of the financial resources available to create an initial framework to boost the wellbeing of local communities. From current practices, roughly two types of priorities of the IMC entities are distinguished: (a) infrastructure development and (b) elaboration of strategic plans for the designated areas that include addressing the main challenges faced by local communities in terms of labour, services and business environment.

So, as we see it, this mechanism represents only a first shy step in structuring a regional development model by being a 'tool' with good operational qualities.

### *5.2. The characteristics of the IMC level in Romania*

For Romania, emerging structures blueprinted the pre-ascension PHARE phase (and after) tend to implement a set of measures for local development in an attempt to benefit from different financial mechanisms provided by the EU. LAGs, Intermunicipal Development Associations and the Metropolitan Areas are, to the day, non-administrative private entities of public utility, focused on project implementation and more rarely joint municipal development.

Within the Romanian context, all IMC entities are regulated by law as associations, abiding the 26/2000 governmental ordonnance regarding foundations and public organizations (Romanian Senate, 2000) and 51/2006 (Romanian Senate, 2006a), being empowered to conduct their projects in consideration to 215/2001 law regarding public administration authority

delegation (Romanian Senate, 2001) and having competencies according to the 195/2006 decentralisation law (Romanian Senate, 2006b). However, these legislative acts do not fully differentiate between the three identified IMC mechanisms and loosely refer to the status they have, varying from public institutions to public authorities. Such incongruences determine a fuzzy context, minimising the potential of this sketched sub-regional development network.

Association mechanisms targeting the territorial level are differently involved in local development and, according to their type, they propose: (1) an integrated perspective over local development - represented by LAG and Metropolitan Areas (MA) as they have the ability to propose and implement coherent development strategies, (2) a sectoral perspective on project making - implying the configuration of a consortium between Intermunicipal Development Associations (IDA) and stakeholders (e.g. public institutions, organisations, business representatives) and (3) a project oriented approach - specific to small size IDA entities.

The IMC level is characterised by a tendency to over-concentrate on singular projects, yet, good practice examples exist. Notable integrated development actions are identified in the central-western part of Romania (for example the Bârsa Country and Hațeg Country).

These structures manage to provide an environment that reunites public administration, civil society, business representatives and individuals, setting up a great example in terms of operational outcomes.

Cooperation has a slightly higher operational potential in Romania compared to other countries given the administrative fragmentation degree, regionalism infancy and prominent rural character of the regions.

### *5.3. The role of the intention model*

Considering that the investigation of the factors explaining the decision to cooperate is still incipient, we hope the presented model of territorial intention will further be improved, as the aim of the paper was to provide a different, somewhat sectoral and complementary perspective on the subject. Furthermore, the model should provide a starting point in discussing the possibilities to influence and adjust the policy making mechanisms in a functional way by targeting the factors that lead to the decision to associate. Moreover, the proposed framework aims to righteously integrate the recent advancements in the field by providing a unified image on territorial cooperation and the driving forces.

### *5.4. Why networks matter in a territorial context*

Following the lead of initial research in the field of complex networks, an approach on territorial development brings forward a set of policy tools that can be further integrated into planning schematics or localised strategies. Moreover, in this context, cities, municipalities (overlapping the LAU 2 level), parishes or districts (overlapping the LAU 1 dimension) counties and regions can all be analysed by following how a complex their internal networks really are and, to add to this context, how well they present performances in certain activity and functional sectors.

The idea of networked communities (extended by Arias and Ferrer-i-Cancho, 2014) is also of significance in this context, allowing further assessment of how functional the certain 'clustered' municipalities are. This perspective adds to the initial understanding on the intention to associate: higher functionality and internal degree of consistency in a local network is more prone to lead towards a higher degree of 'think-alike' actions (to associate and to further start implementing different projects). This is also one element that can be regarded as a constant throughout the intention model, additionally, accounting for how open and collaborative are the evaluated areas. Considering territorial entities within a region as part of a complex network brings several investigation advantages. Not only has it presented intention as a consequence of similar development objectives, but also points out towards the likeliness of these entities to further collaborate and implement projects.

Conjunctively, networks matter as they present both investigation advantages and are a good interpretation perspective, perhaps sparking further development of literature within the topic of territorial local networks.

### 6. Concluding remarks

The article suggests an approach on territorial partnerships given the duality of the intermunicipal level. Recent studies in the field go further and investigate the set of factors that play a leading role in determining the municipalities to associate, but only manage to provide a narrow perspective on the subject. By analysing available data concerning the 'networkability' features and the local development level

of the municipalities in Center Region of Romania, an intention model is defined, making use of an adapted theory of planned behaviour.

The article focuses on unveiling a part of the mechanisms that contribute to the aggregation of a functional intermunicipal level while signalling the need for a more consistent conceptual framework. Different theoretical contributions involving the science of complex networks and behavioural psychology are valuable for this specific endeavour as they offer on one hand a conceptual basis and on the other an extrapolation option for planning and policy tools.

Additionally, by cross-referencing the implications of the IMC level with existing theories on 'new regionalism' and territorial development it is possible to assert that it represents a shy first step in shaping a broader regional model. A deeper understanding of the concept, working mechanisms and specific uses helps accurately direct the policy measures not towards a better educated expected outcome, but towards the driving forces, fuelling the process.

In short, this paper contributes to the existing literature by proposing the concept of territorial decisional models, identified as a structural mechanism of IMC. Plus, by regarding decision making in a territorial context, we were able to determine another set of factors that contribute to the associative behaviour of municipalities.

### 7. Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the project "Excellence academic routes in the doctoral and postdoctoral research - READ" co-funded from the European

Social Fund through the Development of Human Resources Operational Programme 2007-2013, contract no. POSDRU/159/1.5/S/137926.

The author would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.

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**Received:** 3 July 2015 • **Revised:** 27 July 2015 • **Accepted:** 7 August 2015

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