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Football and economy before and after communism in Romania

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Abstract. The present study aims at identifying the relations between football and the Romanian economy before and after the communist period (1986 - 2005). This study was based on bibliographic analyzes and analytical interpretations, in time and space, of the information regarding the number of teams in League III and of the relationships they develop with the economic environment. The results reflect the profound mutations that economy and sports has experienced during the passage of the Romanian society from a communist society to a capitalist one. The indissoluble link between football and the economic environment is evident especially for teams in League III.

Keywords: football, football dynamics, League III, sports

Introduction

Since its consolidation as a sport, football has become a global phenomenon that engages a record number of participants and socio-economic activities around it. Football is an inseparable part of society, while its value is being given by the degree and level of involvement of each member (Ilieş et al., 2014a). The introduction of new concepts in sports cultural context (Bale, 2003; Conner, 2014; Dragoş, 2015), supported and argued by various studies (Ilieş et al., 2014b; Kozma,

2014) and generalizations (Szabo-Alexi et al., 2008), give a distinctive character to sport, in general, and to football, in particular.

During the period that we have studied, football activity had two forms of organization: on amateurism principles (before December 1989) and on professionalism principles (after December 1989). In 1992 the Romanian Football Federation¹ was established, respecting all the international provisions and agreements, and in 1993, following the transformation of football into a professional sport, also the Professional Football League was founded². In Romania, before 1989 League I football clubs functioned mostly in big county cities, being financed almost exclusively by the municipality and by some economic agents. Today, the same form of funding is preserved, although the form of social organization has changed.

Before 1989, the clubs in the 2nd league, but especially the ones in the 3rd league functioned in addition to the big communist enterprises. After December 1989 those clubs made their transition to professional ones, which generated extensive disputes and controversies, and most of them disappeared (mostly as a result of the economy transition from communism to capitalism). Series of clubs disappear (some traditional ones, like: Rapid Bucharest, etc.) and new ones appear (Buhaş, 2015a). However, football remains a social phenomenon that engages a huge number of participants, both from the perspective of the athlete or spectator (Socol, 2016). This sport gives the chance for everyone to practice it, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or social status. It strengthens the need for cooperation, stimulates the human capacity to transform and adapt to specific situations (Buhaş, 2015b). The importance of this phenomenon is also evidenced by the emergence of sports publications, especially about football (Gazeta Sporturilor, etc.), as well as of TV channels where football is widely represented (Digi Sport, Eurosport, Sport.ro).

After the events in 1989, football is experiencing in Romania a wide process of reorganization. This fact is conditioned by the profound socio - economic changes that took place in the Romanian society. The stability from the Communist period (with all its deficiencies) disappears, leaving space for instability and uncertainty. There are very pronounced fluctuations in what regards the organization and conduct of competitions in all three leagues. The economic factor has a great impact in this regard. Football needs funding, and society, through its economic component, can not provide it. This instability has led to the disappearance of some great Romanian traditional football teams (Universitatea Craiova, Petrolul Ploieşti, F.C. Maramureş Baia Mare). The reorganization of the economic development poles has led, on the other hand, to the emergence of some new teams that culminated with outstanding sport results (FC Vaslui, Unirea Urziceni, etc.).

The most obvious changes can be seen in the 3rd league. If in League 1 and partly in League II the funding comes mostly from local administrations (the teams perform in big cities - county residence), in the 3rd League the transitions and mutations were profound and dramatic. The stability of the teams that performed in addition to big enterprises was shattered by the socio-political transformations after 1989. The transition from communism to capitalism (a phenomenon that is still going on) generated the disappearance of a large number of enterprises, and of a multitude of teams that were funded by them. The transformations and changes that took place

during the transition period have changed the poles of economic power and, implicitly, the football activity.

Using specific research methods, our study approaches from the above mentioned perspectives, the causality and the link between the socio - political - economic transformations and the stability and dynamism of football teams in League III.

Methodology

Although the two aspects, "football" and "economy", seem unrelated, between them there are close interconditionality relations, which result both from the way in which this sports activity is funded, but also from the way football represents and promotes a community of people and, implicitly, its activities. Before and after December 1989, sports, in general and football, in particular, needed funding to exist and function. We will see that between the two mentioned periods there are fundamental differences in what regards both financing and organization.

The present study reflects the results of bibliographic research and analytical interpretations, in time and space, of the information regarding the number of teams and the relationships they develop with the economic environment before and after December 1989. Using the cartographic method, intensively used in geography as well as in other fields of study, based on ArcGis 9.3, a series of specific analyzes were carried out regarding the spatial and temporal distribution of football teams in League III taking into consideration Romanian districts and historical regions (Grama et al., 2016; Herman et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Herman et al., 2017; Ilie et al., 2017; Ilieș et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d; Loghin et al., 2017).

Therefore, having an overview of previous analyzes, we have come to identify some relations between football from League III and economy. In this sense, we considered as case studies 3rd league football teams from Bihor county, namely from the city of Oradea and Ștei area (which, during the communist period, was known as Dr. Petru Groza city). By extrapolating the results obtained for the two case studies at the county, historical and state level, and based on spatio-temporal models related to the number of teams, we will highlight a synthetic and general picture of the relationship between Romanian football and economy before and after December 1989.

Results and discussion

The spatio-temporal analysis of the number of football teams in League III

The temporal analysis implied the observation of comparative evolutions of both the number of League I, II and III teams at national level and historical regions, and of the number of League III teams at the level of Romanian historical regions (fig. 1-5).

The situation of the 3rd League Romanian football before and after December 1989 is highlighted from the spatio-temporal analysis of the number of teams that performed in the 3rd League during the period 1986-2005. It reveals a number of quantitative (the number of teams, their share) and qualitative (functional causal relationships) aspects.

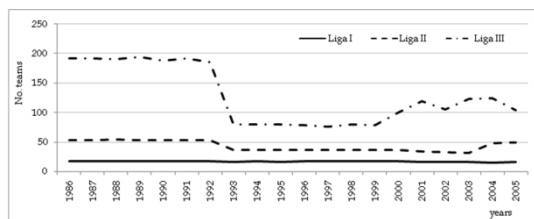


Figure 1. The comparative evolution of the number of League I, II and III teams, in Romania

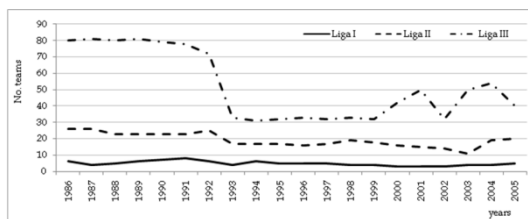


Figure 2. The comparative evolution of the number of League I, II and III teams, in Transylvania

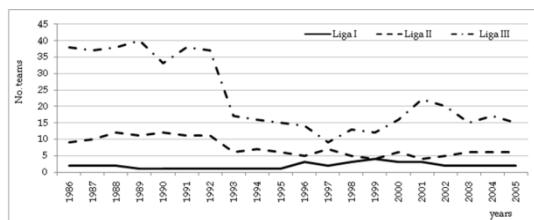


Figure 3. The comparative evolution of the number of League I, II and III teams, in Moldova

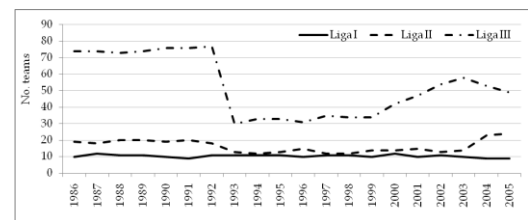


Figure 4. The comparative evolution of the number of League I, II and III teams, in Wallachia

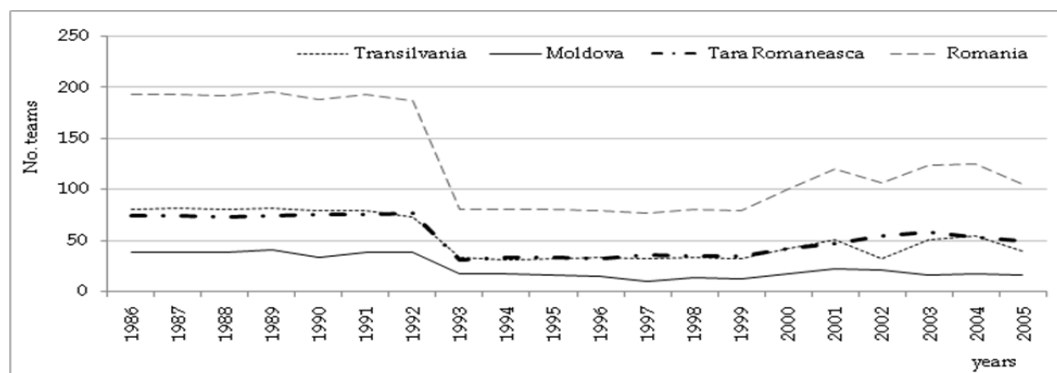


Figure 5. The comparative evolution of the number of League III teams, at national and historical level

The comparative evolution of the number of League I, II and III teams in Romania and its historical regions during the period 1986-2005 reveals the existence of major differences in what regards the interval (at league level) within the limits of which the number of Romanian football teams have oscillated in the mentioned time frame. Thus, the biggest differences were recorded at the level of the 3rd league, while the lowest oscillations were registered at the level of League I (fig. 1-4). The explanation of these oscillations comes from the way in which the competitions are organized (the regulation) and from the specific economic situation, especially for the teams in the 3rd league.

From the comparative analysis of the number of the 3rd League teams at national and historical regions level (fig. 5), one can differentiate three distinct time

intervals: 1986-1992; 1993-1999; 2000-2005. The first two time intervals were defined by the existence of a relative stability, characterized by small fluctuations in the number of football teams performing in League III. The difference between the two above-mentioned time intervals was quantitative, so the first time interval (1986-1992) was characterized by the existence of a large number of teams in the 3rd League (186-192 teams), while, in the second time interval (1993-1999) their number decreased, ranging from 76 to 80 teams. Although the number of football teams in the 3rd League has increased, after the year 2000 their number remains unstable, ranging from 100 to 124 teams (fig. 1). This is also due to the fact that the organizational and competitive system is characterized by a constant fluctuation, both because of clubs' financial instability and economic fluctuation.

Regarding the comparative evolution of the number of League I, II and III teams at historical regions level (Transylvania, Moldova and Wallachia), the situation is relatively similar to the one existing at national level (fig. 2-4). The socio-economic conditions are relatively uniform throughout Romania until the mid-1990s. After this period, with the transition of the economy to capitalism, but also with the accession to the European Union and implicitly to European funds, at the level of Romanian historical regions an economic development difference appears. Implicitly, football activity has to suffer from the financial perspective.

The spatial analysis involved some quantitative analyzes based on the total number of teams qualified in League I between 1986 and 2005, at county and historical region level. A cartogram was made at county level representing the spatio-temporal evolution of the number of teams qualified in League III in the above-mentioned time intervals, by using different coloured columns (each column represents one year: 1985/1986, 1989/1990, 1994/1995, 1999/2000, 2004/2005). At the same time, by using the Quantities Graduated Colors method (5 value classes, 23-50 teams, 51-80 teams, 81-100 teams, 101-120 teams, over 121 teams), the spatial evolution of the total number of teams at county level for the period 1986-2005 is also highlighted. In order to perform a comparative analysis, the total number of qualified teams during the interval 1986-2005 at county level is represented in a graph (fig. 6).

From the spatial distribution at the county level of the total number of qualified teams in the 3rd League for the period 1986-2005, one can notice the predominance of intensively industrialized areas: Bucharest (137 teams), Hunedoara (114 teams), Gorj (103 teams) Bacău (102 teams) and Prahova (101 teams), while at the opposite side we notice areas where the industry was still developing: Botoșani (29 teams), Bistrița-Năsăud (30 teams), Giurgiu (34 teams), Mehedinți (36 teams) etc. The longitudinal analysis at county level regarding the number of qualified teams in the 3rd League revealed a relatively similar situation to the one recorded at historical region and national level, defined by the existence of three time intervals (1986-1992, 1993-1999, 2000-2005) with their specific characteristics in what regards both the number of teams qualified in the 3rd League and the economic situation based on which they can be supported (fig. 1-6).

At historical region level, the share of the number of qualified football teams in the 3rd League during 1985/1986, 1989/1990, 1994/1995, 1999/2000, 2004/2005,

and respectively 1986 -2005 was analyzed (fig. 7). The results of these analyzes come in addition to those obtained at the county level, strengthening the image highlighted based on spatial analyzes. Thus, it can be noticed that the share of the qualified teams at historical regions level, in different time periods and for the whole time interval, remained relatively constant, with small changes, although the number of teams over the mentioned time intervals has been subjected to profound mutations (fig. 5 and 7).

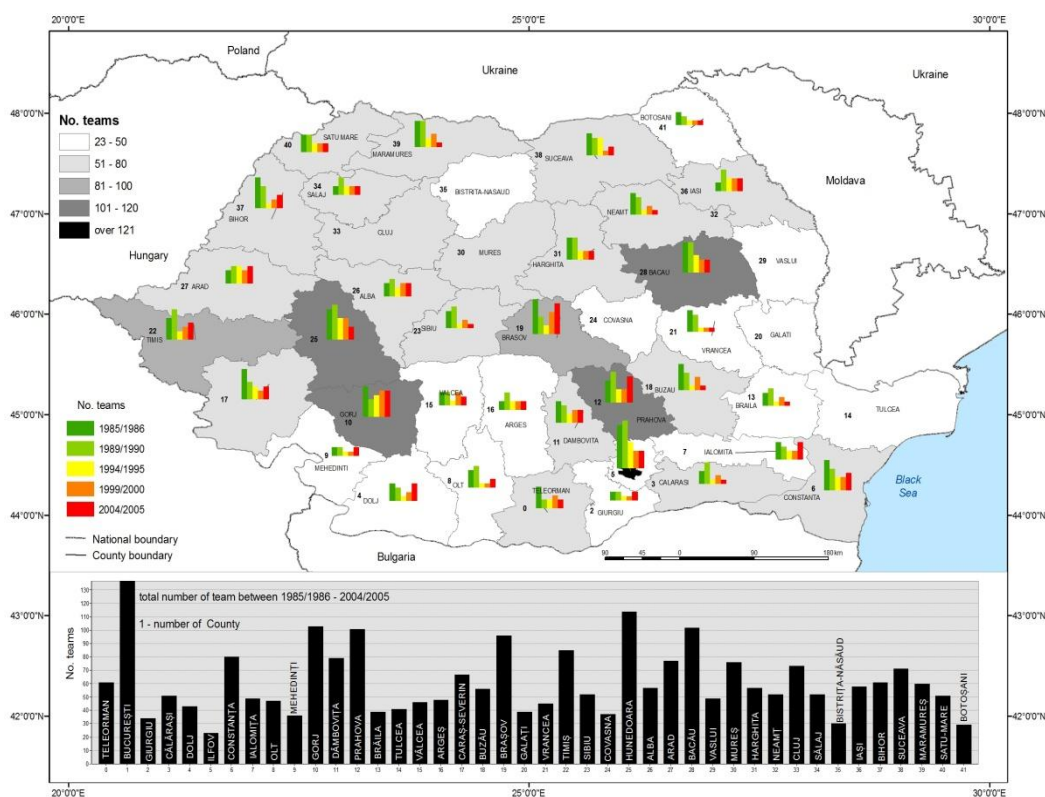


Figure 6. The distribution and dynamics of teams in League III at county level between 1986 – 2005

Links between 3rd League football and Romanian economy

In our analysis we start from the comparative situation of the total number of teams from all three leagues on certain time intervals. Thus, according to figure 1, we notice that the number of teams in League 1 is mostly constant during 1986-2005. The explanation for this situation is the fact that these teams are located in big cities which are county residences. This aspect had a positive influence due to the fact that funds were provided from the municipality budget, with small adjustments coming from economic agents. Another factor that ensured the constancy of their number, is related to football regulation. This was correlated with the European regulation, where the number of teams in the first League varies between 16 and 20.

In what regards League II, we notice a similar situation. The number of teams vary because the teams are located either in the county seat or in the major cities of the country. Funding is provided both by municipality and by some economic agents. Also, the regulation is correlated with the European one, where the number of teams ranges between 16 and 20, organized on 1 - 2 series.

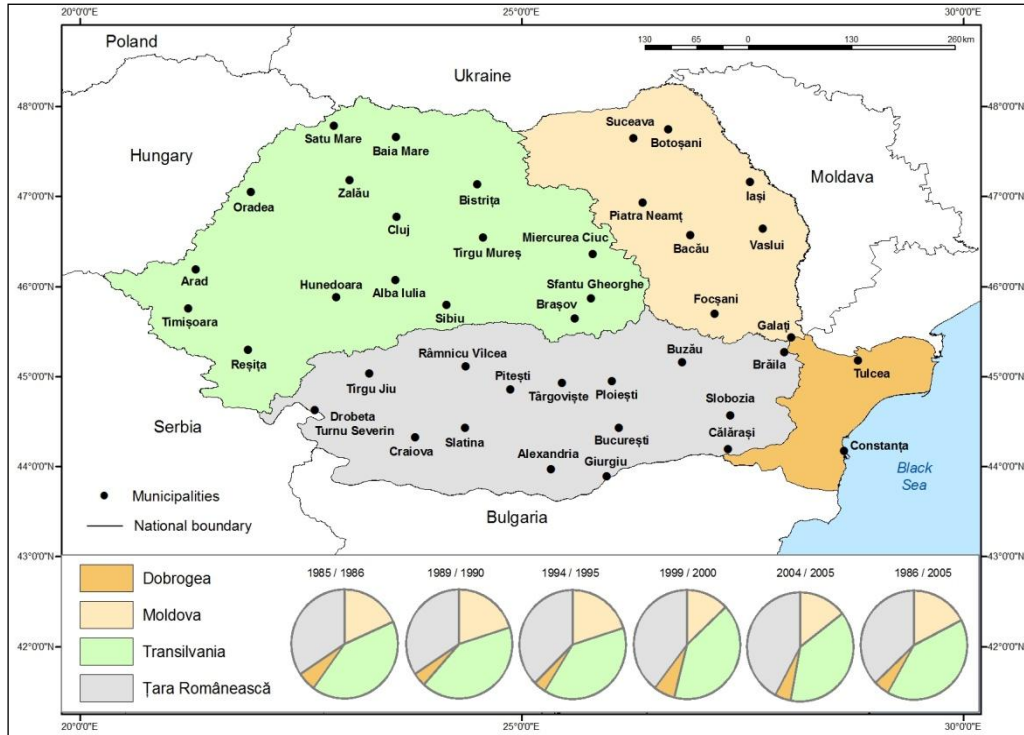


Figure 7. The distribution and dynamics of teams in League III on historical regions between 1985 – 2005

Fundamental differences are highlighted in what regards the 3rd League. One can notice three distinct periods from the graphs presented above: 1985-1992; 1993 - 1999 and 2000-2005. During the first period, which corresponds to the communist period and first years after the revolution when things were still unclear in the Romanian society, the number of teams in the 3rd League is constant. The same constancy is observed in the case of 3rd League teams at historical regions level. Since the events in 1989, Romania's socio - political and economic situation is changing dramatically. Our country makes its transition from the centralized communist system to the decentralized capitalist system. Both, economy and society are not prepared to cope with all the changes. Figure 1 shows a dramatic decrease in the number of teams - more than half. The same situation is highlighted in the old historical regions (fig. 2, 3 and 4). After the transition to capitalism and with a more pronounced stability of the country, starting with the year 2000, we notice a rebound of the 3rd League teams. Their number starts to increase, but it will never reach its "glory" achieved between 1986 and 1993.

According to the literature in the field, a case study conducted in Bihor county showed that things were similar. Between 1985 and 1992, nine teams represented Bihor in the 3rd League (Înfrățirea Oradea, Voința Oradea, Oțelul Ștei, Minerul Ștei, Gloria Beiuș, Minerul Șuncuiuș, Unirea Valea lui Mihai, Recolta Salonta și Bihoreana Marghita)³. These teams were active in addition to specific enterprises that were funding them. During this period, in the 3rd League there were 12 series of 16 teams. Between 1993 and 2000, the companies that financed the teams were restructured, their financial power dropped considerably because they were trying to adjust to the capitalist economy. With the bankruptcy of these enterprises, the football teams financed by them were either abolished (Voința Oradea), or they performed in inferior leagues without claiming a promotion.

At national level the situation was similar. Between 1993 and 2000, the number of teams in the 3rd League decreased dramatically. From a championship with 12 series of 16 teams, there were left only 4 series of 20 teams.

During this period, the Romanian industry collapses in all its sectors. The mining industry (Hunedoara, Gorj, Baia Mare, Târgu Jiu, Bihor, Alba Iulia) closes its doors. The majority of football teams are also in these areas (Hunedoara 114, Gorj 103, etc.). The oil and natural gas industry is facing a pronounced reorganization (Prahova, Buzău). This segment also finances a series of teams (Prahova 101). The light industry is also collapsing (Suceava, Piatra Neamț, Bacău, Botoșani).

Starting with Romania's adherence negotiations to European Union, the economic situation gives signs of stability. The private environment is reorganizing, sustaining the emergence of economically stable companies. Their level of development has allowed investors to enjoy sport pleasures, as well. Thus, the number of teams in the 3rd League began to increase, and the championship enlarged, reaching 8 series of 13 teams. The number of teams has never been constant since, depending on investors' financial possibilities.

In figure 7 we notice that over time, certain areas have developed more than others. The economy started to develop especially in Bucharest area. The same thing happened in Prahova, Craiova, Timișoara, Cluj, situation which attracted investments also in sports, helping some teams from the 3rd League to reach incredible performances (CFR Cluj, Unirea Urziceni, Astra Ploiești). Areas where the economic development is delayed (especially in Moldova and the Center of the country) are not sufficiently represented in what regards sport performance, and also at the level of the 3rd League.

From the information presented before we notice a decisive link between Romania's socio - economic development and the football activity at the level all 3 Leagues, regardless the historical period or social order. If for the first two Leagues the lack of fluctuation is largely generated by the regulation, for the 3rd League the economic factor is decisive, so it has led even to the change of competition rules (by reducing the number of series and teams).

Conclusions

Football, through its spreading, impact, and various relationships developed with the economic sectors, has become a central element for human collectives, that

requires an extensive and in depth research in order to identify the mechanisms that have led to its emergence, dynamism and functionality. Practically, in one way or another, the entire society is passively or actively, directly or indirectly involved in what is a mass sports phenomenon called football.

Hence, the present study aims to uncover the links and relations between football and economy in a difficult transition period between two different economic systems, namely between the communist and the capitalist system. The analyzes regarding the spatio-temporal evolution of the number of football teams in the 3rd Romanian League before and after December 1989 showed, as in the case of the economic mutations, profound changes also in the case of football activities, characterized by: the existence of major differences regarding the interval (at League level) within which the number of Romanian football teams has varied; the existence of three distinct time frames: 1986-1992; 1993-1999; 2000-2005, defined by the number of teams in the 3rd League at national and historical regions level; the predominance of intensively industrialized areas: Bucharest (137 teams), Hunedoara (114 teams), Gorj (103 teams), Bacău (102 teams) and Prahova (101 teams), while at the opposite pole counties with an under-developed industry were situated: Botoșani (29 teams), Bistrița-Năsăud (30 teams), Giurgiu (34 teams), Mehedinți (36 teams), etc.

The spatial distribution of football teams numerically overlaps with areas of economic development, regardless the time period. The sport phenomenon and football, in particular, is indissolubly linked to regional economic development.

The global penetration of the football phenomenon is closely related to the economic development. Football becomes itself a profitable industry.

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