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## Female labour force in the Romanian urban environment: structures, relations, segregation indexes

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### Abstract

The dynamic of women's participation in the labour market had an essential role within the radical socio-demographic transformations that took place in Romania during the last two decades. Our study proposes a multi-scale analysis of the spatial differentiations, generated by women employment reflecting obvious dissimilarities in gender structure of the urban labour force. Based on the indicators of feminine activity rate and adapted gender segregation indexes, the analysis tries to demonstrate that we are facing a modernization process of the urban social structures, in spite of traditional regional disparities' perpetuation.

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*Keywords:* feminine labour force, urban environment, employment segregation index, territorial disparities, social modernisation

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### 1. Introduction

Although *the integration of women on the labour market* was quasi-inexistent in Romania at the beginning of the XX century, by the Second World War and especially during the communist period, the undifferentiated access to education (Barthelemy, 2009) have determined the emergence and the acceleration of this process. One of the great promises of communism was represented by equality (Massino, 2004), a myth of gender equality often illustrated

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through images of the woman working side by side with the man, in the early years of Ceausescu's regime, when women were excited with the more and more numerous opportunities of education and employment, this really seemed to be possible, to a certain extent. However, once the initial optimism disappeared, women started to understand reality, in which work was divided according to sex and women occupied "easier" positions, therefore less paid (Gligman, 1998). In general, Romanians have a supportive attitude towards this double role of the woman. It is a good thing that the woman works, ensuring her independence and contributing to the family's welfare. However, the stereotypes regarding the gender roles persist. The participation on the labour market is tolerated if it represents a complementary choice and not an option of life. Women continue to be represented through their role related to family and children (Zamfir, 2007, Rotariu, 2009).

After 1989, the ample and rapid transformations of the economic structures have led to profound social dislocations. Millions of jobs in the former socialist companies and agricultural production cooperatives were eliminated and even less jobs were created in the newly-set-up capitalist companies. In comparison with the situation before 1989, when the safety of the job was something inherent (the "work people" were "owners, producers and beneficiaries"), after 1990 the active population had to face the shock of losing their job and develop their abilities to search/find a new job. The massive retirements at the beginning of the 90s, the increase of the percentage of youngsters who attend a higher education institution, the massive emigration for work in the west of Europe, here are a few of the factors responsible with reducing the participation on the labour force market.

A special interest for this post-communist period, which we can consider however still in course, is the manner in which women adapted to the requirements of the labour market. In the urban environment, women accept less and less the dependency and domination of men, although the social inertia and the constraint determined by the economic and mentality factors are still felt in some regions and especially in the small towns. The urban environment offers more opportunities for finding a job, bigger incomes, and better life conditions in comparison with the rural environment. In the urban environment, the jobs comprise a very large range, which determines the growth of the female occupancy rate, even in the regions where the traditional model is still dominant. In the post-communist period, there was a progress of resituating and redefining the feminine identity, which triggered a better participation of women on the labour market. Women have learned to look for a job, have learned to accept new situations and different jobs as sector of activity compared to the previous period, have initiated small businesses, especially in the commerce segment (Urse, 2007).

## **2. Objectives and methodology**

The main objectives of the present paper are understand and highlight the role of women on the labor market in the post-socialist period taking into account its communist roots. Meanwhile we tried to identify the main features and transformations of the urban feminine labour force in the last twenty years; to apply certain gender segregation indexes in order to delineate the inequalities within different sectors and economic activities and to analyze at different territorial and administrative levels the distribution of the labour force' dissimilarities and to find explanations on the causes and the consequences of professional segregation.

It is important for our purpose to evaluate how the actual behaviour of the Romanian participating workers population is linked, by one hand, to the feminisation of the emigration, the reducing female fertility or the increasing divorce rate (causes of the present traditional family crisis) and, by the other hand, by the aging of feminine population correlated to the early retirement and the consequent increasing dependence on the active population.

Using the available statistical database, our study tries to outline the main features of gender working force recent evolution; the classic segregation indicators are applied to the Romanian towns' employed population; the multi-scale analysis identifies urban gender segregation at different levels from local (town's) to county level, from regional to national level (for a deeper understanding of different local and regional context and driven forces which determined the recent evolutions). Applied to all Romanian towns, the final index of gender segregation in occupations (which sums all the gender differences in every occupation in order to determine the total amount of segregation) gives a suggestive picture of the overall distribution of gender occupational dissimilarities in the urban environment.

### 3. The post-communist Romania. The labour force market. Unbalance, structures, relations

#### 3.1. The structure of the active population

In the last two decades, the active population continuously decreased, and the rate of activity of the population of the age proper for work (15-64 years old) diminished with 20%; the participation of 15-24 years old youngsters was and remains extremely low (30.5% compared to 44.3% in the EU countries), which proves the necessity of focused policies taking into account the age structure. The occupied population was also reduced. If in 1990, out of 100 persons apt for working, 82 were occupied, today the occupancy rate is of about 60%, a level both in comparison with other European countries, and with the Lisbon target, established at 70%. In 2012, the occupancy rate was of 59.6% at the level of the entire population of 15-64 years old, with 60.7% for men and only 58.4% for women. In comparison, at the level of the EU countries-27, the appropriate values were of 65.4%, with 72.5% for men, respectively 58.3% for women.

The entrance on the labour market is however not synonymous with the financial independence. Almost three quarters of the family unremunerated workers are women, while the percentage of freelancer women is under 30%. Moreover, within the owners, the number of women is almost 4 times smaller than the number of men and within the superior managers and public administration officers and the economical-social units, the number of women is 2.5 times smaller than the number of men. In exchange, women predominate within the population occupied in social services (education, health, administration) - activities much more stable the industry or private services (*fig. 1*). This is a favorable feature in itself, but the issue of reduced access of women to the leading functions and the smaller earnings of women compared to men remain current.

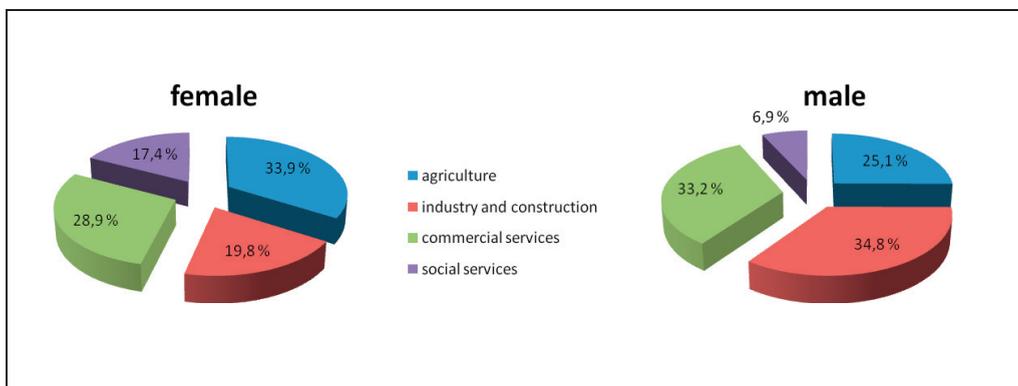


Fig. 1. Share of population employed in various sectors (December 31, 2012)  
(Source :National Institute of Statistics in Romania, Workforce balance at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013)

#### 3.2. Female unemployment

At the beginning of the 90s, the unemployment registered an explosion as a result of the drastic reduction of the economic activity, especially of the industrial branches. Another significant increase took place in 1999 because of the acceleration of the restructuring of certain sectors of activity (mining), and of the new legislation regarding the compensation payments. An improvement of the situation was noticed after 2000, the unemployment rate constantly decreasing, however the year 2009, through the effects of the world crisis, brings back to the fore the problem of unemployment.

If the women dominated the mass of unemployed people in the first years after the revolution (*fig. 2*) (the old units of the textile industry, unprofitable were closed) , starting with 1997, as a result of the collective dismissals from constructions, mining and metallurgy, the percentage of male unemployed people exceeded that of women. If we analyze female unemployment per groups of age, we notice that the most affected category is the one comprised

between 15 and 24 years old, expressing the insufficiency of attractive jobs for the young women, taking into account that both the education degree, and the expectations have increased. We can say that the most affected by unemployment are the young women and those with a low education level.

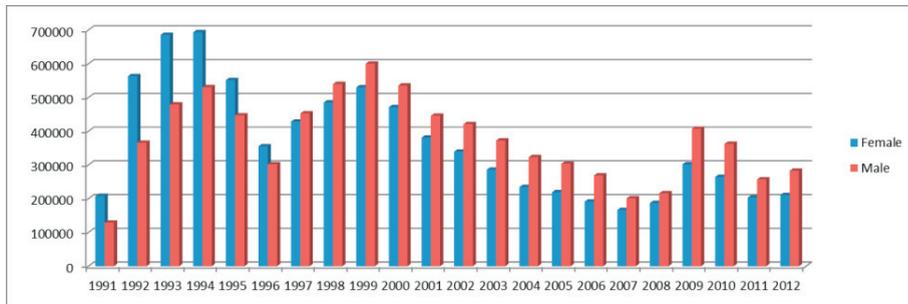


Fig. 2. Evolution of the number of unemployed in Romania, by sex, 1991 – 2012  
(Source : National Institute of Statistics in Romania, Workforce balance at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013)

We must take into account the forms of masking unemployment i.e. the anticipated retiring as a result of the process of economic restructuring, many retired women who accomplished the condition of work experience, but not that of age. The number of retired women ends up being strangely high: the subsistence activity from agriculture disguised many unemployed people in farmers. Meanwhile, in the 90s, together with the massive number of employees made redundant from the industry, many persons returned to their native villages. Especially in 2000s, the degree of occupancy in agriculture significantly increased. Another means of masking unemployment was the consistent external migration, which also involved many women. In conclusion, due to the limited occupancy possibilities, a part of the feminine labour force left the labour market, another part focused on agriculture, and another on being housewives.

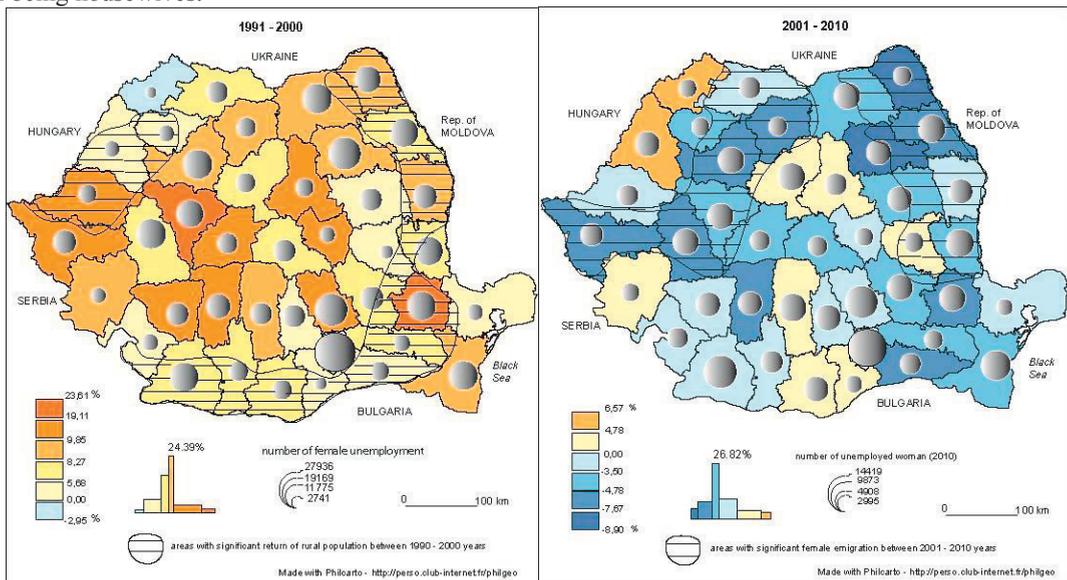


Fig. 3: The dynamics of female unemployment between 1991 – 2000 (a) and 2001 – 2010 (b)  
(Data source: National Institute of Statistics in Romania)

Reaching both the industrialized areas from the last years of communism, and the classical industrial areas, the feminine unemployment clearly emphasizes the fragility of Romanian industrialization. The first decade, 1991-2000, the number of unemployed people increased every year, the women being more numerous than men (fig. 3).

The most affected fields were the old industrial areas from the centre and west of the countries, and the women were the first made redundant. The counties with an important percentage of the agricultural sector were situated under the average of the feminine unemployment, the diminished values being due to the “rural return”, which affected a good part of the feminine population made redundant in the first years after the fall of the communist regime. The second decade, 2001-2010, the situation changes significantly, the number of female unemployed persons being in obvious regression, only a few areas in the North –West of the country are still registered with positive values. We notice the role of investments in the jobs for women (units of lohn type which use the abundant female workforce, the salaries usually being very small – the minimum per economy). The significant differences between the two decades analysed reflect very well the passage from one transition economy to a functional market economy, even if, starting with 2008-2009, the female unemployment rate starts to grow under the influence of the world economic crisis which has also reached Romania.

#### 4. Gender segregation indices of the labour force

The occupational segregation consists in the unequal distribution of the various work posts between two groups considered to be different. If we consider gender segregation of the workforce, one should notice that it is a multidimensional process that refers to the fact that men and women work in different occupations, economic sectors and have different contractual terms. In our case is important to mention that, on the one side, women or men dominate certain employment sectors and, on the other side, within the same employment domain women are polarised within the less valued and less paid jobs (Dobre, 2011).

The second part of our demarche comprises a few references to occupational segregation (unequal distribution of the various work posts between two groups considered to be different). The occupational segregation of genders is an issue that consists of at least two different approaches:

1 – Segregation is a consequence of the gender differences, which induce discrimination of the labour market and the domination in certain areas of men or women; it is responsible with the remuneration differences, with the sex division, having an influence at different levels at in different spheres of life.

2 – Segregation is not an issue and the homogeneity of genders on the labour market is not a desired thing. The differences of remuneration can be attenuated if the same work or the work of the same value is remunerated the same.

On the other hand, segregation is not always a matter of choice and is does not always represent a disadvantage, that is why a complementary study of occupational integration is necessary.

We selected three indicators used to emphasize the (non)existence of unbalances according to genders of the workforce in Romania.

##### 4.1. The index of dissimilarity (ID) (Blackburn and al., 1993, quoted by Emerek and al., 2003)

$$ID = \frac{1}{2} \sum_i \left| \frac{M_i}{M} - \frac{F_i}{F} \right|$$

M - the total number of males in employment

$M_i$  – the number of males in occupation  $i$

F – the total number of females in employment

$F_i$  – the numer of females in occupation  $i$

If segregation is the different distribution of women and men per occupational categories, the dissimilarity index only seizes the proportion of employed persons who should theoretically change their job in order to eliminate segregation. We have applied this index in the case of three professional categories. As regards the distribution of *persons with management positions in the urban environment* (fig. 4), the index clearly proves the male preponderance in the regions of the country, enclaves of the female entrepreneurial spirit and of the manifestation of the woman’s leader capacity are only found in the small industrial or partially restructured tertiary cities (Turceni, Sulina, Rovinari, Aninoasa etc.).

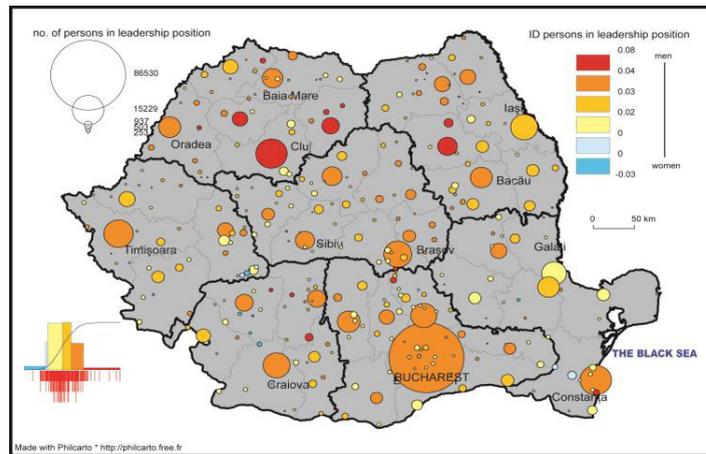


Fig. 4: ID for persons in leadership position (Data source: National Institute of Statistics in Romania)

The *industry* also proves to be a set of activities with male preponderance (fig. 5). The exceptions consist in the cities where the recent investments in the light industry (especially lohn confections which use the well-qualified female labour force and badly remunerated - Saveni, Valea lui Mihai, Ineu, Jimbolia) come on the background of the disappearance of heavy industry where men preponderantly worked (Galati, Hunedoara, Onesti). The large cities are however characterized through moderated indices of industrial segregation.

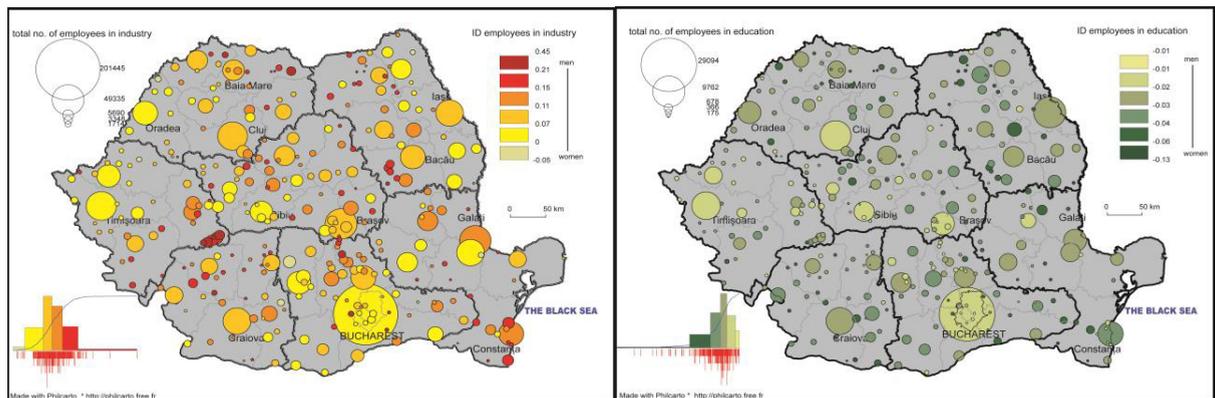


Fig. 5. ID for employees in (a) industry and (b) education (Data source: National Institute of Statistics in Romania)

*Education*, a stable but generally badly remunerated activity, also experiences a strong feminization, the segregation acting here in the favour of female population, fact which is manifested more pregnantly especially in the small traditional cities from the north and south of the country (Cajvana, Salistea de Sus, Stefanesti, Baneasa-Constanta, Dabuleni, Insuraţei) (fig.5).

4.2. The standardised or Karmel-McLachlan segregation index (IP) (Emerek and al., 2003)

$$IP = \frac{1}{N} \sum_i \left| \left( 1 - \frac{M}{N} \right) * Mi - \frac{M}{N} * Fi \right|$$

$M$  – the total number of males in employment,  $M_i$  – the number of males in occupation  $i$ ,  $F$  – the total number of females in employment,  $F_i$  – the number of females in occupation  $i$ ,  $N$  – the total number in employment,  $N_i$  – the total number in occupation  $i$ .

The standardized index seems to be, among the classical segregation indicators, the most aggressive, taking into account both the proportion of men and that of women in the respective activity. The index emphasizes very clearly the increase of the percentage of one of the genders in the analysed activity. As regards the population with management function (fig.6), a male dominant is delimited in the cities from the north counties (Salaj, Cluj, Bistrita Nasaud, Neamt) and a favourable segregation to the female workforce in the former fallen industrial cities (for eg. the cities from Petrosani Depression).

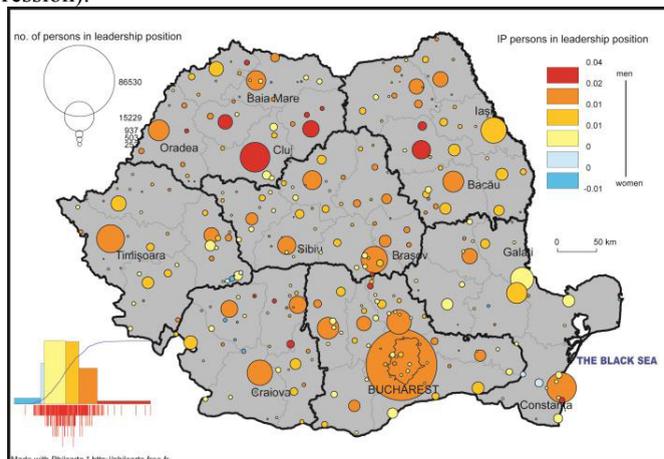


Fig.6. IP for persons in leadership position  
(Data source: National Institute of Statistics in Romania)

IP emphasizes very well the traditional industrial sectors focused on the cities promoted during communism with activities of the mining type, machine constructions or ferrous metallurgy. In these cases, a certain male preponderance of the industrial population is maintained, even on the background of the subsequent completion of the urban functional profile with activities specific to the light industry (Galati city, Trotuş Valley urban areas, the towns from Petrosani Depression, but also from Prahova Valley). (fig. 7a).

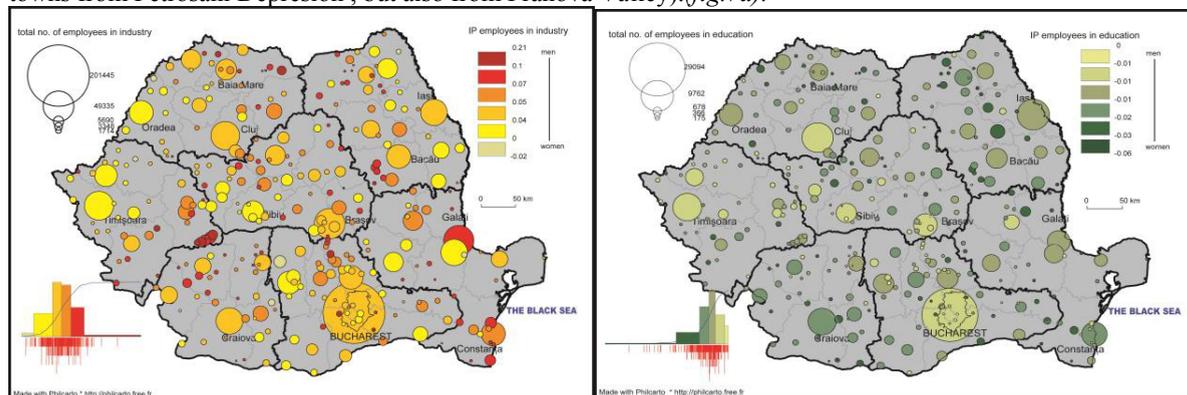


Fig. 7. IP for employees in (a) industry and (b) education  
(Data source: National Institute of Statistics in Romania)

For the population employed in the education sector (fig. 7b), the index does not essentially modify the hierarchy as regards the gender segregation, the female dominant of the workforce in this field being equally captured by both indicators.

4.3. Index of employment gender segregation (Emerek and al., 2003)

$$E04 = \sum_n^i \left( \frac{P_{emi} - P_{efi}}{P_{ei}} \right)$$

E04 – index of gender segregation in occupations, n – the number occupations considered (27),  $P_{emi}$  – male populations in occupation  $i$ ,  $P_{efi}$  – female population in occupation  $i$ ,  $P_{ei}$  – total population in occupation  $i$

Frequently applied in the countries of the European Union, the segregation index in occupations quantitatively expresses the differences of female-male occupation within the occupations from the official name record.

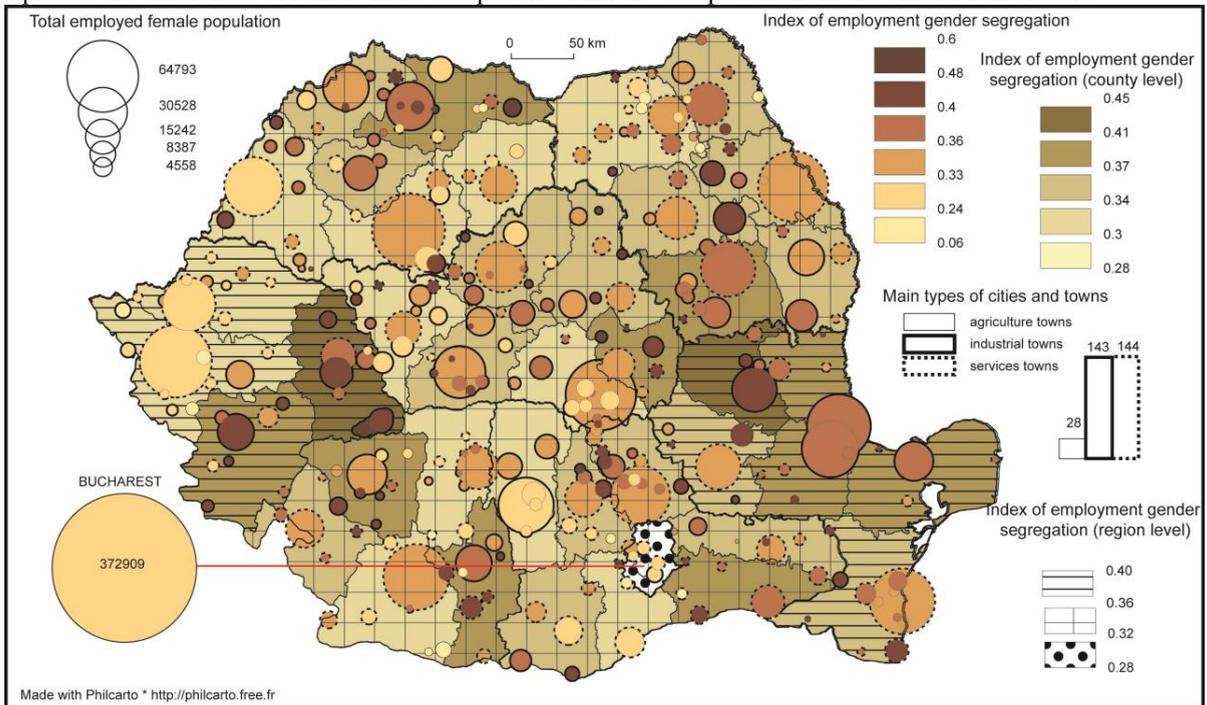


Fig. 8: Index of employment gender segregation (Data source: National Institute of Statistics in Romania)

At the regional level, the most reduced segregation level is in the capital and the metropolitan area, which proves once more that the level of investments and the dynamism of the workforce directly influence the gender degree of segregation (fig. 8). The two regions, South-West and West are maintained at the same level, in which the segregation values are high, within which however the intraregional differences are determined by the presence of some sectors which require masculine workforce (ferrous metallurgy, nonferrous metallurgy, wood industry), the feminine workforce being concentrated in complementary activities (light industry, education, administration, different services). The small cities with agricultural character experience a reduced gender segregation, in this category being emphasized the cities from the poorest and most traditionalist areas of Romania – Oltenia and Moldavia. The average values are especially encountered in the large cities, in the county capital cities, where the complex functional profile induces a more emphasized mixture of fields of activity. The strong segregation is encountered not only in the cities with mining and industrial functions, but also in some tourist cities (Slanic Moldova, Baile Tusnad).

## 5. Conclusions

The gender occupational segregation is not in itself a good or a bad thing, there is a natural distinction in the economic activities which are based on the physiological and psychological characteristics of each gender and which is beneficial to a healthy society. More cosmopolitan and less traditionalist than the rural world, the Romanian city, when it has this quality de facto, presents a multitude of opportunities of female workforce occupancy. With a percentage superior to men as regards the persons with a higher education, the female workforce can recover easier after the shock produced by the transition and deindustrialization, all the more so as it predominates in the public services activities, much more stable (education, health, administration).

The workforce occupancy in the urban environment from Romania in the three sectors of activity offers a general image of the urban gender segregation. Thus, if in the primary sector we notice a slight difference between the percentage of the two sexes (+2,11%), the segregation becomes much more emphasized in the case of the secondary preponderantly male sector (+9,92%) and in the case of the tertiary preponderantly female sector (+11,50).

More diverse and less traditionalist than the rural areas, the Romanian towns show an increasingly rate of employment of female labor force. Recent dynamics seem to reinforce this statement if we take into consideration the annual growth rate of the employed and unemployed population. Women have a superior rate of high education (compared to men) and therefore seem to recover more easily after the shock of transition and industrialization. This status is also deriving from the fact that female are more prevalent in public service activities which are more stable jobs (education, health, administration). The new tertiary city seems to be more and more favorable to the feminization of labor force.

Moreover, many of the small cities (often pseudo-cities or quasi-cities) have high values of the segregation indices, a proof of their resemblance to the rural environment, while the large cities (and on the background of more varied economic activities and of the mass effect) register lower values of the segregation indexes, proof of a more pronounced social gender homogenization.

The results of the present study demonstrate that Romania entered a new demographic paradigm in which the „development engine” role is played by the cities, while the issue of effective utilisation of labour force remains one of the main challenges of the future. The problems of the more reduced access to the management positions and the more reduced incomes for the female employees remain of actuality, but they are, to a certain extent, compensated by advantages from the take-off of the tertiary sector.

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