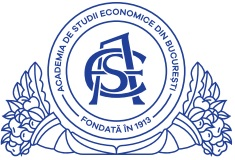
**BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**

Doctoral School of Cybernetics and Economic Statistics

**PhD THESIS**

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Bucharest 2025

**BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**

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**Regional Disparities and Economic Growth in Romania. Characteristics and Trends**

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**Bucharest 2025**

**Abstract**

Regional disparities in Romania remain a central issue for the economy and public policy. The interest in this phenomenon is justified by its impact on social cohesion, balanced development, and economic convergence at the European level. Reducing territorial gaps is an essential condition for social stability, competitiveness, and the effectiveness of public policies.

Romania has recorded sustained economic growth during the period 2000–2023, but the benefits have not been distributed evenly. Bucharest-Ilfov has reached a GDP per capita level of over 140% of the EU average, while the North-East region stands at less than half of that, reflecting profound economic divides between growth poles and lagging areas. These differences are driven by factors such as education and human capital, infrastructure, investment levels, entrepreneurial initiative, as well as varying capacities to adapt to crises such as the 2008 recession or the COVID-19 pandemic.

For a more comprehensive analysis, the study proposes a composite index of social inequalities, built on seven essential dimensions (income, education, health, culture, tourism and sport, justice, and utilities). This index serves as a central tool in econometric investigations. It is approached both as a determinant of long-term sustainable economic growth, through the application of dynamic spatial models, and as a potential catalyst for county-level economic convergence processes. Through this approach, the research highlights how the social dimensions of development influence territorial economic performance and contribute to reducing regional disparities.

The study also includes a section dedicated to the impact of Romania’s EU accession and the COVID-19 pandemic, two critical moments that reshaped the structure and dynamics of disparities. The analysis captures how European integration and exogenous shocks influenced territorial cohesion and the development trajectories of counties.

The research results have direct implications for public policy: the mere allocation of funds is not sufficient without favorable local conditions and efficient administration. Differentiated policies are needed, with a focus on investment in education, infrastructure, and innovation, as well as strengthening administrative capacity at the local level. The originality of the study lies in the development and application of a composite index of social inequalities and its integration into analyses based on dynamic spatial econometrics. Thus, it provides an integrated perspective on regional disparities and formulates solutions for sustainable economic development and stronger territorial cohesion.

Table of Contents

Introduction 7

CHAPTER 1. The Composite Index of Social Inequalities: A Multidimensional Approach 12

1.2 Methodological Foundations of Social Inequality Analysis 16

1.3 Selection of Indicators. Building an Overview of Social Inequalities 21

1.4 Analysis of Individual Indicators 25

1.5 Calculation of the Composite Index of Social Inequalities. Results and Interpretations 57

1.6 Social Inequalities and Economic Growth. Evolution of Inequalities in Relation to GDP 75

1.7 Conclusions 77

CHAPTER 2. Evolution of GDP in Romania between 2000 and 2023. Trends and Determinants 78

2.1 Analysis of Economic Growth in Romania Using Dynamic Spatial Models (2000–2023) 78

2.1.1 Literature and Methodology 78

2.1.2 Variables 92

2.2.3 Results of the Dynamic Spatial Durbin Model and Discussions 94

2.2.4 Conclusions 106

2.2 Regional Disparities, Economic Growth, and Entrepreneurship in Romania 107

2.2.1 The Impact of Entrepreneurial Initiative in Reducing Economic Disparities 112

2.2.2 Entrepreneurship and New Firm Creation in Romania. Dynamics, Determinants, and Resilience 121

2.2.3 Conclusions 132

CHAPTER 3. Regional Disparities and Economic Convergence in Romania between 2000 and 2023.

A Multidimensional Spatial Analysis 135

3.1 Dynamic Spatial Convergence in Romania. Determinants and Regional Implications 135

3.2 Regional Disparities in Romania after EU Accession 153

3.3 The Evolution of Disparities during the COVID-19 Pandemic 162

3.4 Conclusions 176

CHAPTER 4. Final Conclusions and Policy Recommendations 177

Bibliography 186

Annexes 197

List of Tables 206

List of Figures 207