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**NON-GUVERNAMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AT**  
**„DUNAREA DE JOS”**

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**Abstract**

After the revolution in 1989, the Romanian society was met with a new phenomenon, that of building new associations and foundations, institutions that were meant to come to the local communities' aid by offering services that the authorities could not. Although marked by ethnic and religious diversity, the Dunărea de Jos region is known throughout history as a well-established and coherent community, that managed in time to create new mechanisms for solving collective needs. If during the period between the two world wars, the association phenomenon had a significant spread and grandeur, after the communist regime was instilled, this phenomenon stopped even though the law that regulated the start-up of associations and foundations was not abolished. The following article is proposing the realisation of an x-ray of the construction of nongovernmental associations in the „Dunărea de Jos” region in the post-decembrist period, keeping in mind the subsequent objectives: the identity of the organisations constructed in the studied region (after the revolution in December 1989), the breakdown of the active NGO profiles of the „Dunărea de Jos” region, and the analysis of the phenomenon based on some statistical indicators.

**Keywords:** non-governmental organisations; associations; foundations; Dunărea de Jos region;

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Dunărea de Jos region is a geographical socio-cultural space which has a name closely related to the „European Danube Community”, an international organism which has been functioning between 1856-1938, in the lower side of the Danube, and whose objective has been the maintenance of free circulation on the Danube and the facile access of The Great Powers to the Black Sea. Although nowadays there is no politically administrative unit that carries this name, through tradition, the Dunărea de Jos region designates the counties transversed by the Danube, in its' inferior descent: Brăila, Galați and Tulcea. From the socio-cultural stand-point, the Dunărea de Jos region is characterised by:

- ❖ cultural and religious diversity (Rotilă, 2015): there have been living here amongst the Romanians throughout time communities of Jews, Turks, Greeks, Tatars, Armenians, Russians, Lipovenian Russians, Roma, every and each one of them practicing their own personal choice



of religion (orthodox christianity of new or old rite, romano-catholic christianity, protestant or neoprotestant, islamism, mozaism)

- ❖ heterogeneity of mindset and interests (Rotilă, 2015): caused by the overtime manifestation of different socio-political currents and cultures caused by the constant change of historical and political context in this region: cultural and economical influences coming from the Big Empires (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Tsarist), alongside the borders of which the Dunarea de Jos region has always existed thus creating the modern romanian state with the marketing of western cultural values; the strong process of industrialization and urbanization of the communist era; the structural changes of the population caused by migration of the population from the countryside to the cities due to industrialization or the migration towards the West of the unhappy population caused by the bad living conditions, phenomenon amplified by the integration of Romania in the European Union and the globalization phenomenon, which was in itself amplified by the challenges of the digital and communication eras brought along.

This pluralistic context, with various interests, has long been the perfect framework for the development of an effervescent and active society. The intense economic life allowed the establishment of professional organizations and associations, syndicates, organizations of ethnic and religious communities, committees and foundations, which campaigned either for their own interests or for charitable, cultural, sports or general health advertisement. For example, documents from the 19th century attest to the existence, in Galați, of an association of Greek shipowners, which aimed to maintain control over trade on the Danube (Ardeleanu, 2010). Also at that time, in Brăila there were two sports associations that belonged to the Jewish community in Brăila: The Dacia Unirea Brăila Sports Association (established following the merger of two football clubs) and The First Gymnastics Society Maccabi (Constantin, 2020). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the organization of workers on professional guilds is attested and recognized by the law given in October 1938, which recognized the guild of workers, private officials and craftsmen (Scurtu I., Stănescu-Stanciu T., Scurtu G. M., 2002).

## **2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

Legal dispositions that stand at the basis of the construction of non-profit and nongovernmental organisations and are the 40th article in the Romanian Constitution (Romanian Constitution, Official Gazette no. 767 of October 31, 2003) that guarantees the rights of every citizen to associate freely with the state principles, Law 21/1924, the so-called Mârzescu Law, which has been offering legal support for the building of non-governmental organisations until year 2000, when Ordinance no. 26 regarding associations and foundations which regulates the condition of starting a non-governmental organisation nowadays. Unabrogation of the 21/1924 law, in the communist era, did not mean it was applicable, it being removed from the university study program, thus eliminating the possibility of knowing and applying it in the society (FDSC Romania, 2017).

After the fall of the communist era, Romania was in fully reconstruction mode of the associative sector which was suppressed during the prior period. In parallel, at the European Union level the process of defining a governmental organisation was underway. Thus, The Recommendation of the European Union Council CM/REC (2007)<sup>14</sup> regarding the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe, encompasses ten representative characteristics for the associative sector (Recommendation CM / Rec, 2007): 1. they are founded to pursue the non-profit objectives of their founders and members and not of political parties; 2. they can be established by individuals or juridical parties, as well as groups of people; 3. it has to have juridical personality; 4. they can be established at national as well as international level; 5. they can enjoy free speech and other universal rights and liberties; 6. they don't have to be subject to the public authorities ordinance; 7. they need to be objective of administrative, civil and penal obligations as well as general sanctions applicable to all juridical persons; 8. they function in a juridical and fiscal framework which encourages their actions; 9. they do not distribute any profit to its' members or founders, but they can use said profits to fulfill their objectives; 10. the juridical framework in which it functions has to allow them to attack or contest the authorities' decisions regarding themselves.

Currently, in Romania, three types of entities are recognized as typical organizations of the nongovernmental sector: associations, foundations and federations. While the first two types result from the voluntary union of individuals, in order to serve a common or general interest, the latter results from the association of several foundations or associations. Federations can also be called unions or coalitions, but are regulated by law as federations (FDSC Romania, 2017)

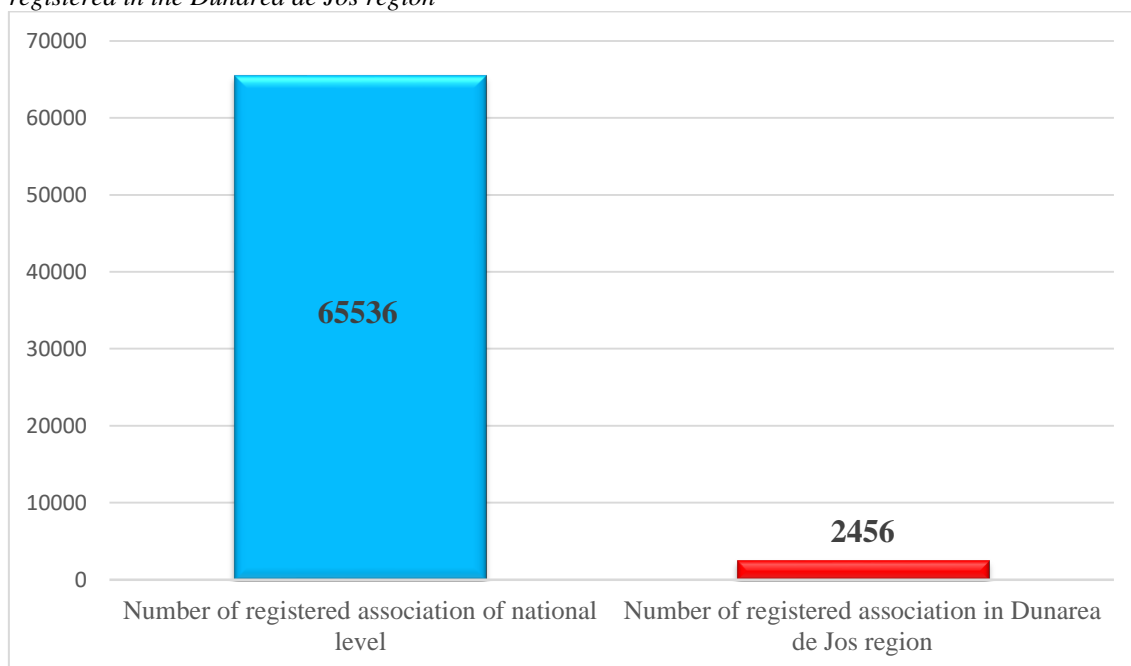
The main areas in which non-governmental organizations operate are: 1. Culture, art, sport, recognition; 2. Learning, education, research; 3. Health; 4. Social services; 5. Protection of the environment; 6. Economic and social development; 7. Defence of rights and promotion of citizens interests; 8. Women's rights and gender equality; 9. Philantropia and voluntariat; 10. International cooperation; 11. Representation of business and professional interests; 12. Religion; 13. Others.

In the Lower Danube region, during the years 1990-2020 there was a process of reactivation of the associative phenomenon, a process that took place around the 2000s due to the conditions imposed by the European Union in order to integrate and support national and international funding entities. After Romania's integration into the EU, this process experienced a decline due to the closure of many international funding lines but also because of unfavorable legislative measures towards the non-governmental sector.

### 3. THE PRESENCE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DUNAREA DE JOS REGION ASSOCIATIONS

During the years 1990-2020, 65536 associations were registered at national level, of which 2456 represent the number of associations established in the Dunarea de Jos Region. As shown in *Figure no. 1*, Associative phenomenon per region is a low one compared to the national one.

*Figure no. 1. Number of associations registered at national level compared to the number of associations registered in the Dunarea de Jos region*



*Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author*

The low level of association, compared to the national level, is explained by the direct ratio of the level of association with that of GDP, the general trend being to increase the number of government organizations in more developed regions and with high economic and financial indicators (FDSC, Sustainability Index of Civil Society Organizations 2019). From the table below, it can be seen that the

GDP at the level of the three studied counties is low, compared to the national GDP, which also explains the weaker associative phenomenon in the region.

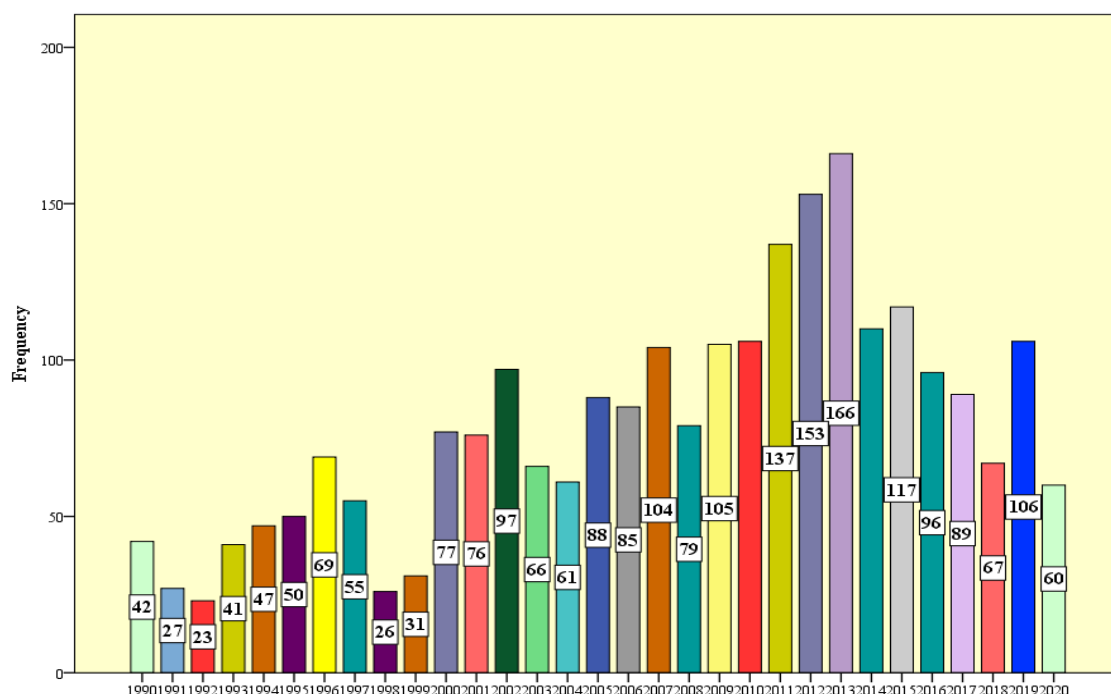
Table no. 1. Gross Domestic Product, by macro-regions, in 2017.

Region	GDP
Braila	9631,4
Galati	14672,8
Tulcea	6794
Total	31098,2
<b>National GDP</b>	<b>857895,7</b>

Source: National Institute of Statistics, <http://statistici.insse.ro> (20.11.2020).

During 1990-2020, 2456 associations were registered in the Dunarea de Jos Region. As can be seen from the figure below, the associative phenomenon in this region registered a constant increase until 2013, when the maximum point is reached, after which there is a decrease in the association process.

Figure no. 2. The evolution of the associative phenomenon in the Dunarea de Jos Region, in the period 1990-2020



Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

The decrease in the number of registrations in recent years is explained by the procedural and legislative changes that have taken place during this period. This is due to the registration process for nongovernmental organizations, which is long, complicated and involves additional financial and time costs, related to the declaration of the real beneficiaries and the reporting of any changes among them. This is a mandatory procedure, which attracts after itself sanctions from fines to the dissolution of the organization in case of noncompliance.

Although fiscal policies are favorable to non-governmental organizations (increasing the percentage of income that can be directed to civil society entities to 3.5% in the case of social service

providers), their effects are not yet visible and the procedure for registering sponsors was late announced. Also, compliance with data protection rules and anti-money laundering legislation requires seeking professional legal advice for non-governmental organizations, which is difficult for many of these entities to achieve (FDSC, Sustainability Index of Civil Society Organizations, 2019).

Presently, out of the 2456 associations registered in the Dunarea de Jos region, 2300 are active, whereas 156 of them have ceased their activity (see *Table no. 2*)

*Table No. 2. Status of associations in the Lower Danube Region.*

	Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Active	2300	93,6	93,6	93,6
	Inactive	156	6,4	6,4	100,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2456</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

The 2456 associations established in the Dunarea de Jos region follow the subsequent distribution: 710 associations in Tulcea County, 796 in Brăila County and 950 in Galați County. *Table no. 3* and *Figure no. 3* are relevant regarding the distribution of associations in the Lower Danube Region, on the aforementioned three counties.

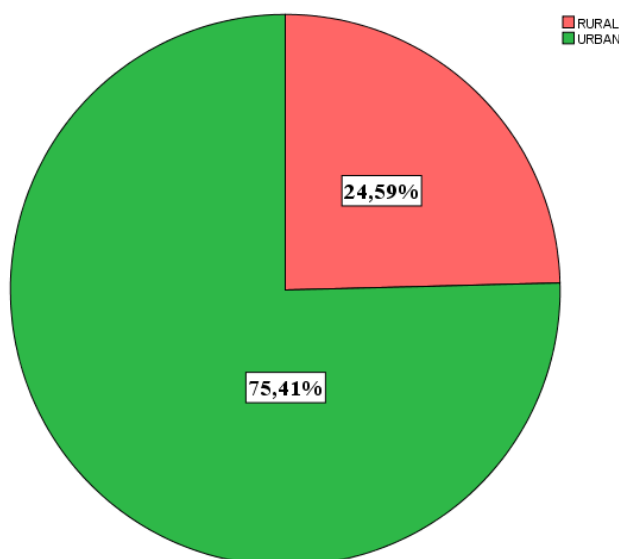
*Table no. 3. Distribution of associations from the Lower Danube Region, by counties.*

	Counties	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BRAILA	796	32,4	32,4	32,4
	GALATI	950	38,7	38,7	71,1
	TULCEA	710	28,9	28,9	100,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2456</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

Regarding the distribution of associations by areas, we can see a much higher share of associations operating in urban areas (75, 41%) compared to those operating in rural areas (24.59%). *Figure no. 4* is relevant in this regard:

*Figure no. 3. Distribution of Associations from Dunarea de Jos region, by rural and urban areas*



Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author  
 Instead, a large coverage can be observed in the rural localities of the 3 counties. Of the 2456 associations, 783 operate in rural communities, being present in most communes in the counties of Brăila, Galați and Tulcea (see Figures no. 5, 6, and 7).

Figure no. 4. The distribution of associations in the counties of Galați

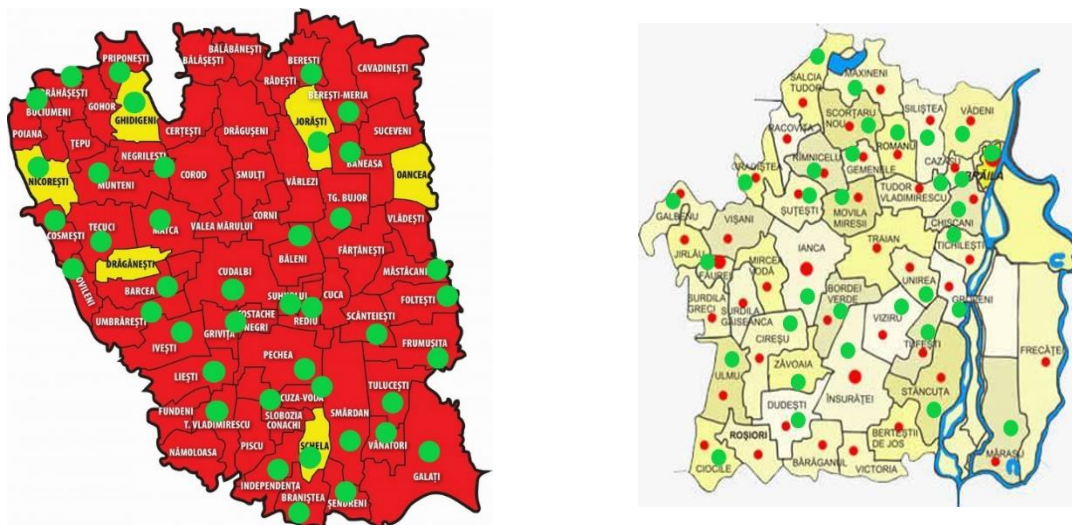


Figure no. 5. The distribution of associations in the counties of Braila

Figure no. 6. Distribution of associations in the counties of Tulcea

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author



### Foundations

The foundations established during the studied period, at in the Dunarea de Jos Region are in number of 267, out of a total of, registered at the level of the entire country. Most foundations (132) operate in Galați County, followed by Brăila County (84) and Tulcea (with 51 foundations). The table below reflects the described situation.

Table no. 4. Number of Foundations registers in the Lower Danube Region, in the periode 1990-2020, by counties

	Counties	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BRAILA	84	31,5	31,5	31,5
	GALATI	132	49,4	49,4	80,9
	TULCEA	51	19,1	19,1	100,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

Out of the 267 foundations constructed in the studied period, only 8 have ceased their activity, the rest of 259 still remain active.

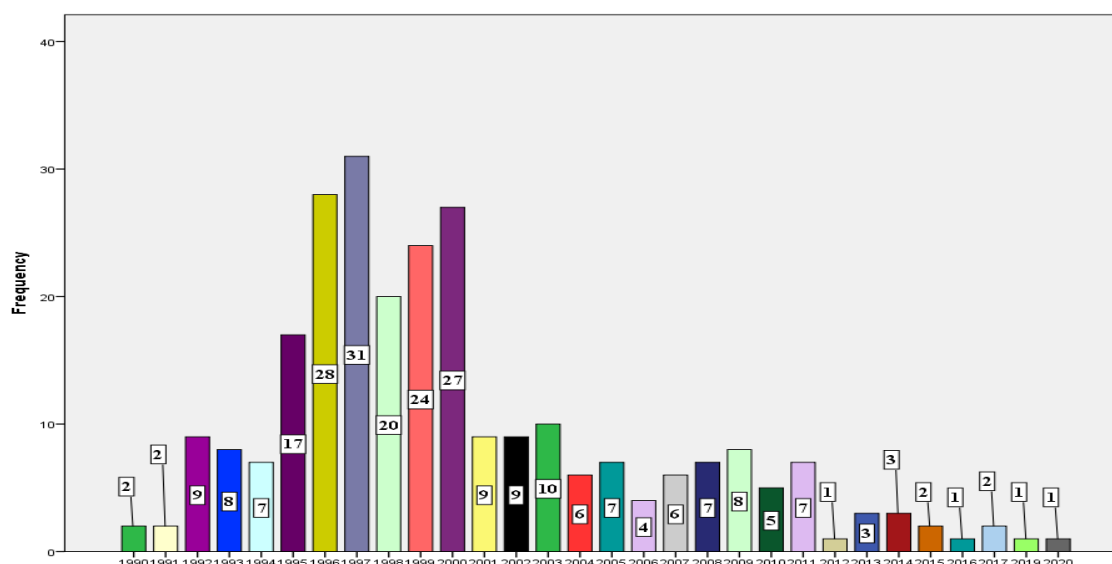
Table no. 5. Status of foundations established in the Lower Danube Region in the period 1990-2020

	Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Active	259	97,0	97,0	97,0
	Inactive	8	3,0	3,0	100,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

In the case of foundations, their establishing experienced a higher increase during the years 1995-2000, after which a massive and constant decrease of the start-up process and a maintenance to a minimum in the last 5 years (when only 1-2 foundations per year were built). This is explained by the difficulties of financial and human resource management that foundations most often face. Given that the government sector cannot provide high security for work and wages, it is difficult for foundations to maintain their paid staff. Also, the culture of volunteering is not very developed, a fact maintained by most employers who do not feature volunteering as work experience (FDSC, Sustainability Index of Civil Society Organizations, 2019).

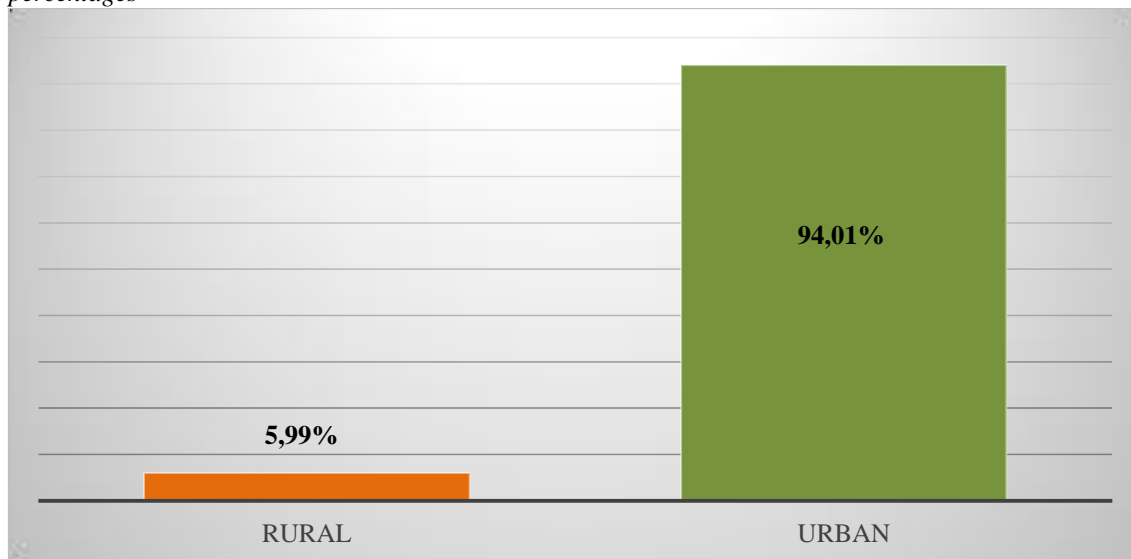
Figure no. 7. Foundation registered between 1990-2020, in the Dunarea de Jos region



Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

The share of foundations by area is in favor of the urban environment (94.01%), in rural areas being active only 5.9% of them.

Figure no. 8. Distribution of Foundations of the Lower Danube Region, by medium: rural/urban, in percentages



Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

Regarding the spread in counties of active foundations, it can be seen that only 23 localities in the region benefit from the presence of one or more foundations, most being concentrated at the level of municipalities and communes, as shown in the table below.

Table no. 6. Distribution of Foundations of the Dunarea de Jos region, by localities

	Locality	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BABADAG	2	,7	,7	,7
	BRAILA	76	28,5	28,5	29,2
	CHISCANI	1	,4	,4	29,6
	CORNI	2	,7	,7	30,3
	COSMESTI	1	,4	,4	30,7
	CUZA VODA	1	,4	,4	31,1
	GALATI	115	43,1	43,1	74,2
	GEMENELE	1	,4	,4	74,5
	HORIA	1	,4	,4	74,9
	IANCA	4	1,5	1,5	76,4
	JURILOVCA	1	,4	,4	76,8
	NICORESTI	1	,4	,4	77,2
	NUFARU	1	,4	,4	77,5
	SARICHIOI	2	,7	,7	78,3
	SFANTU GHEORGHE	2	,7	,7	79,0
	SMARDAN	1	,4	,4	79,4
	SOMOVA	1	,4	,4	79,8



	SULINA	2	,7	,7	80,5
	TECUCI	11	4,1	4,1	84,6
	TEPU	1	,4	,4	85,0
	TULCEA	39	14,6	14,6	99,6
	VADENI	1	,4	,4	100,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

### Federations

Regarding the situation of the federations in the analyzed region, it can be seen from the table below that 17 federations with various fields of activity are operating here. Most of them (6) fight for the protection of rights and the promotion of citizens' interests (most being federations with a trade union profile), 3 of them aim to represent business and professional interests (*Federation of Privatized Farmers, Federation of Cattle Breeders, Goats, Equines and Sheep Dobrogea, Federation of fishermen's organizations "Danube Delta", Federation of fish producers' organizations in the Danube Delta*), and the others work in areas such as: economic and social development (*Federation of Small and Medium Enterprises SE Galati Region*), respect for women's rights and gender equality (*Women's Federation of Galati County*), environmental protection (*Federation for the Protection of Animals and the Environment*), culture, art, sports, recreation (*Romanian Football-Tennis Federation-Galati branch*), education, (*Research education unions "Spiru Haret"*) and health (*National Federation of romanian medical and pharmaceutical employers*).

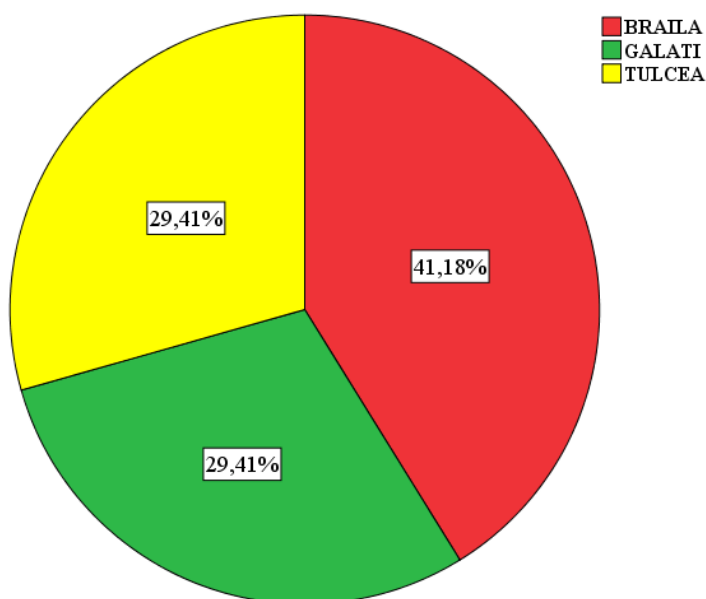
Table no. 7. Distribution of federations in the Dunarea de Jos region according to activity domain.

Domenii de activitate		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The protection of rights and the promotion of citizens' interests	6	35,3	35,3	35,3
	Culture, art, sports, recreation	1	5,9	5,9	41,2
	Economic and social development	2	11,8	11,8	52,9
	Women's rights and gender equality	1	5,9	5,9	58,8
	Education	2	11,8	11,8	70,6
	Environmental protection	1	5,9	5,9	76,5
	Business and professional interests	3	17,6	17,6	94,1
	Health	1	5,9	5,9	100,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

At the level of the three counties of the Region, a higher share of the federations established in Brăila county can be observed (41.18%), compared to Galati and Tulcea counties (29.41% of the federal entities each).

Figure no. 9. The share of federations built in the Dunarea de Jos region, by counties



Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

### Unions

In the Lower Danube Region, there are 19 unions, of which 3 in Brăila County and 8 in Galați and Tulcea Counties, as shown in the table.

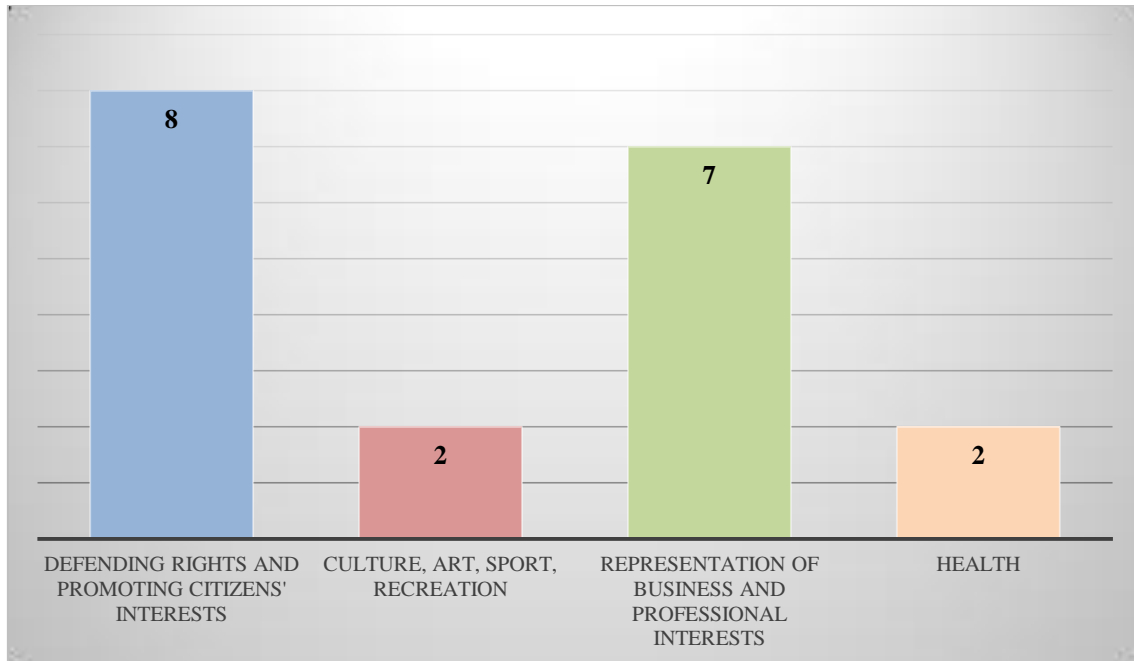
Table no. 8. The situation of unions in the Dunarea de Jos region

	Counties	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BRAILA	3	15,8	15,8	15,8
	GALATI	8	42,1	42,1	57,9
	TULCEA	8	42,1	42,1	100,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

The distribution of the areas of interest of the active unions in the Dunarea de Jos region can be seen in figure, as follows: 8 unions aimed at defending rights and promoting civil rights (*Turkish-Tatar Democratic Union, Roms Democratic Union of Galati County* and 6 trade unions), 2 unions active in the field of culture, art, sports and recreation (*Union of Visual Artists in Romania, based in Tulcea, Union of Amateur Fine Artists, Galați branch*), 7 unions whose objective is to defend business and professional interests (*Employers' Association of Naval Transports and Harbor Operations, Brăila Branch of the National Union of Mediators in Romania, General Union of Industrialists in Romania, The National Union of Real Estate Agencies - Galati Branch, the Professional Union of Jurisconsultants from Galati County, the Union of Professional Journalists from Romania - Galati Branch*) and 2 unions that act in the field of health, more precisely, in the medical-pharmaceutical field.

Figure no. 10. Distribution of unions in the Lower Danube Region, by areas of activity.



Source: National Register of NGOs administered by the Ministry of Justice, data processed by the author

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although there was an associative tradition in the Dunarea de Jos Region in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was eliminated during communism. In the period after 1990, in the Dunarea de Jos region there was a slow process of reconstruction of the non-governmental sector, compared to the central and western regions of the country. This is both due to the legislative and procedural difficulties that arise in the process of setting up non-governmental organizations, and to the lower standard of living in this region, compared to the rest of the country. In the studied Region, the associative sector predominates, which is very widespread in the territory, both in urban and rural areas. Foundation-type organizations operate mainly in urban areas, very few of which operate in rural areas. The fields of activity of the associative structures are diverse, but the trade union structures and the organizations that fight for the civil rights and interests predominate, and those that work for the defense of the business and professional interests.

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