

The Role and Importance of Historical Monuments in the Diversification of Tourism Offer in Oas Land (Romania)

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Abstract

In the context of the European and Romanian society transitioning from an industrial society to an informational one, based on knowledge, it becomes more and more necessary to analyze the problem of exploring the local potential and elaborating the best strategies for territorial development, starting from the local realities. In this respect, the following paper aims to identify and highlight the role and the importance of historical monuments in sustainable and responsible territory development through tourism at local level, in Oaş Land.

Keywords: *Oaş Land, authenticity, traditional, historical monuments*

Rezumat. Rolul și importanța monumentelor istorice în diversificarea ofertei turistice din Țara Oaşului

În contextul trecerii societății europene și implicit a celei românești de la o societate industrială la una de tip informațional, bazată pe cunoaștere se impune din ce în ce mai serios problema cunoașterii potențialului local și elaborarea celor mai optime strategii de dezvoltare a teritoriului, pornindu-se de la realitățile locale, din teren. Pe acest fundal, lucrarea de față are menirea de identifica și de a evidenția rolul și importanța monumentelor istorice, în dezvoltarea durabilă și responsabilă a teritoriului prin turism, la nivel local, în Țara Oaşului.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Țara Oaşului, autenticitate, tradițional, monumente istorice*

Introduction

Oaş Land, located in northwestern Romania, under the administration of Satu Mare County, is a well defined mental space that overlaps the territory of 12 communes (Fig. 1). The consciousness of belonging to the space called "Oaş Land" did not appear just recently, but it was shaped over the centuries in the homonymic depression sheltered by the Oaş and Igriș Mountains.

The first traces of human habitation in this land appeared during the Paleolithic Age, the evidence being represented by the archaeological discoveries from "Cetățele", "Lutariu", "Fartati" (Bixad commune), "Belovar" (Boinești commune) and "Malu Turului" (Remetea Oaşului commune). Therefore, from Paleolithic up to the present, the people from these places, the "oșeni", lived and built a separate civilization, in connection with the existential possibilities offered by the often restrictive environment. In these conditions, in addition to the

very rich ancient spiritual culture, this place has a number of historical monuments, evidence of material culture represented by: the Paleolithic settlements (Bixad, Boinești, Remetea Oaşului), the fortification with stone enclosure wall from Tămășeni village, Batarci commune, situated on the "Fortress (Varhegy)" plateau (13th century), a more recent monastery "Holy Apostles Peter and Paul" in Bixad, the churches (in Bixad, Călinești-Oaş, Boinești, Gherța Mică, Moșeni, Negrești-Oaş, Prilorg, Racșa, Tur, Vama and Turț) and the rural architectural heritage.

The problem of historical monuments and their integration in the tourist offer was widely debated, both directly and indirectly, in the foreign literature (Breathnach, 1994; Duffy, 1994; Featherstone, 1990, Herbert, 1995; Kealy, 1992; Nolan, 1992, Prentice, 1994, Timothy and Boyd, 2003) and in the Romanian one (Cocean, 2007, Herman and Wendt, 2011; Ilieș, 2006; Ilieș et al., 2008, Ilieș et al., 2009, Olaru and Ancuța, 2010; LMI, 2010). However, at local level there is still a lack of knowledge in this direction. The studies conducted aimed at identifying and

describing historical monuments (LMI, 2010), but currently there are no studies and research projects regarding their role and importance in tourism. Therefore, this study has a dual character: it contributes to the completion of the studies conducted up to the present on one hand and it supports the human communities of Oaş Land on the other hand by offering concrete solutions in what concerns the possibilities and the ways in which historical sights from this area can be rendered profitable through tourism.

Methodology

The carrying out of this paper involved the completion of five research stages, strongly interconnected, methods, tools and techniques of research being used for each of them. The first two stages consisted of bibliographic identification and analysis of historical monuments and tourist offers in Oaş Land. Once completed, the above mentioned steps created the possibility of identifying the current state of development through tourism of historical monuments (third stage). Knowing the importance of historical monuments in the tourist offer and their potential, it was easy to find the current state of development through tourism. The problem concerning the challenges encountered in

the development through tourism of historical monuments was approached in the fourth stage, the fifth stage aiming at the identification of key measures that are to be taken in order to surmount and overcome these challenges. The paper concludes by highlighting the findings.

Historical monuments in Oaş Land

Historical monuments constitute a particularly important anthropogenic tourism resource along with other resources including economic buildings with touristic function (the Călineşti-Oaş dam and the Mujdeni dam), human activities suited for tourism (pottery activities in the craft shop from Vama, weaving, sewing clothes and embroidering, making peasant's hats, collars and torsos), and ethnographic resources (folk songs and dances, authentic traditional costumes from Oaş) etc.

The National Institute of Heritage, under the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, includes historical, religious and cultural sites in the category of historical monuments.

Their development through tourism depends largely on how they respond to "the five attributes that all anthropogenic resources store, namely: age, uniqueness, originality, size and function "(Cocean and Dezsi, 2001; Cocean, 2007).

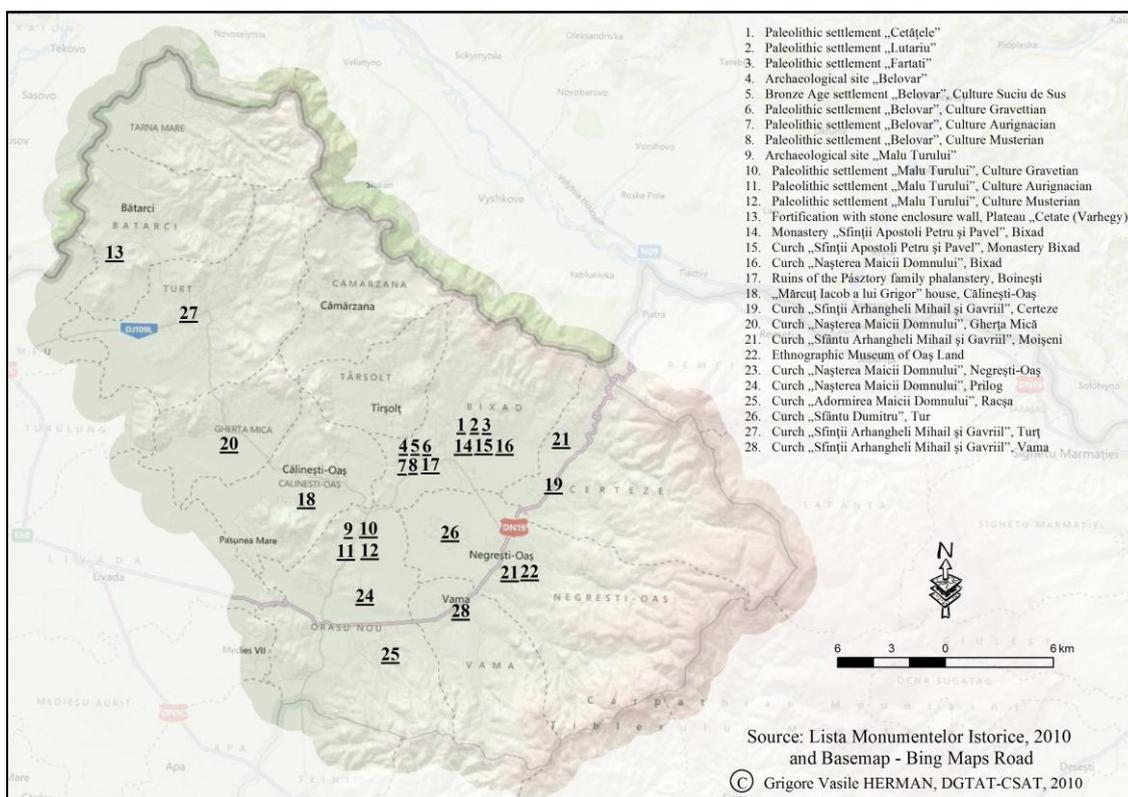


Fig. 1: Distribution map of historical monuments in Oaş Land

In Oaş Land, in 2010, a total of 28 sights of this type, distributed in 14 towns and 9 administrative units (Fig. 1) were identified and included in the list of historical monuments created by the National Institute of Heritage, under the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

The analysis of the distribution map of different types of historical monuments in Oaş Land reveals a high proportion of historical sights (50%), followed by the religious sights (42.9%) and the cultural ones (7.1%) (Fig. 2).

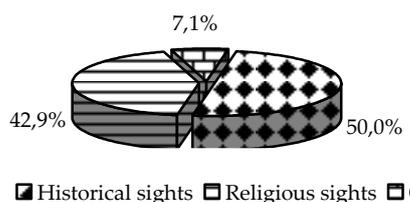


Fig. 2: Percentage distribution of historical monuments in Oaş Land

Source: *Lista monumentelor istorice 2010*

The fourteen historical relics from Oaş Land testify for the continuity and the creative genius of the Romanian people since ancient times (Paleolithic) and up to present. In this category, ten human settlements were identified, dating from the Stone Age (Paleolithic) and Bronze Age (Suciu de Sus Culture), two archaeological sites with unknown attestation, a fortification with stone enclosure wall from the 13th – 15th centuries and the ruins of the Pásztoy family phalanstery from the 18th century.

The share of religious sights is close to that of historical sights. This category comprises eleven Orthodox churches dating from the Modern and Contemporary Age and the "Holy Apostles Peter and Paul" monastery in Bixad built between 1769 and 1771. While in the past churches were built of wood, just like the wooden church from Lechința, Călinești-Oaş commune and the one from the Oaş Land Museum, Negrești-Oaş, nowadays they are masonry constructions covered with sheets. The large number of Orthodox churches included in the historical monuments category reflects the predominantly Orthodox religion and the ethnic composition, of Romanian majority, of people from Oaş Land.

The two cultural sights are represented by the Mărcuț Iacob of Grigor house from Călinești-Oaş Village, Călinești-Oaş commune, no. 331, documented in 1727 and the Ethnographic Museum

of Oaş Land from Negrești Oaş, Livezilor street, no. 3-5. Both sights are real vestiges of art, ethnography and folklore, testimonies of ancient times.

In terms of documented historical monuments, the ones from the Stone Age and Modern Age predominate, each with 33.3%, followed in descending order by the ones from the Medieval Age (18.5%), Contemporary Age (7, 4%) and Bronze Age (3.7%). Historical monuments with unknown attestation reach only a percentage of 3.7% (Fig. 3).

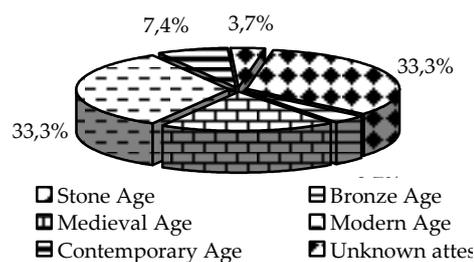


Fig. 3: Percentage distribution of historical monuments in Oaş Land according to the attestation time

Source: *Lista monumentelor istorice 2010*

The spatial location of monuments in Oaş Land highlights a great density in the centre of the homonymous basin, in the administrative units Bixad, Orașu Nou, Negrești, Certeze, around the communes Bixad, Remetea Oaşului, Negrești Oaş etc. This can contribute to a better use of historical monuments in tourism, the high density being an asset and also an advantage in terms of arrangement for tourist purposes (Fig. 1).

Tourism offers in Oaş Land

The analysis on the Oaş Land revealed a concentration of the tourist offer in the area of several communes like: Negrești Oaş, Huta Certeze, Vama, Bixad, Valea Măriei, Luna Șes, Orașu Nou and Turț Băi.

The natural resources from Oaş Land are particularly diverse in terms of quality and quantity. The most noticeable are the orographic ones: Pietroasa Peak (1200 m), Small Mountain Peak (1012 m), Soci Hill, Vezeului Peak (1057 m), Tribușoru Peak (976), Rotundu Peak (1240), Bulanu Peak (1167), Flower Cave - and the hydrographic ones: Călinești-Oaş Lake, Mujdeni Lake, Turului Valley, Talna Valley, Lechința Valley, Brada Valley, Gypsy Valley,

Deep Valley, etc. This category also includes mineral waters or the so called "borcuturi", one of the main attractions in Oaş Land, which represent the fundamental ingredient of local tourist resorts like Valea Măriei (Mary Valley), Băile Puturoasa, Turţ-Băi, Tarna Mare-Băi and of the Bixad sanatorium.

The presence and abundance of anthropogenic tourism resources is strongly related to the fact that "Oaş is a geographic "Land" type region from Romania, where a clearly defined community exists and where people identify with their living space, becoming oşeni" (Ilieş, 2006, p 154). They are defined by some identity elements specific for the Oaş community, elements that can be identified directly in the area (houses, farms, traditional costumes, dances called "danţuri", songs called "ţupurituri" etc.) or at the level of temper, action mode, mentality (Herman and Wendt, 2011; Ilieş, 2006).

The above mentioned identity elements constitute a real tourism resource, a generator of tourism motivation not only at a national level, but also at an international one. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the ethnographic resources (traditional architecture, traditional costumes from Oaş, occupations, crafts, traditions and customs), the religious buildings, the cultural buildings (Mărcuţ Memorial House) and the human activities suited for tourism (Sheep breeding in Huta Certeze, Strawberry festival in Halmeu).

The accommodation facilities include six units classified with two or three stars and located in four communes (Negreşti Oaş, Huta Certeze, Oraşu Nou and Vama) with a capacity of 113 rooms and 231 beds. They represent, at county level, 11.6% of the total number of rooms for accommodation and 10.44% of the offered beds. In terms of structure type, there are three boarding houses (with a capacity of 29 rooms - 60 beds, classified with 2 stars) and three hotels (with a capacity of 84 rooms - 171 beds, classified with 2 and 3 stars). In conclusion, by analysing the above data it can be seen that the ratio between the number of rooms and beds from the two types of accommodation is superior for a hotel-type structure (LSPTC, 2012).

The catering includes 1371 places (21.78% of the total number of places in the county) and it is structured in 12 catering units classified with two and three stars. In terms of spatial distribution they are located in five municipalities namely: Negreşti Oaş (4 units), Huta Certeze (1 unit), Vama (3 units), Certeze (2 units) and Oraşu Nou (2 units). The

spatial analysis of the specific infrastructure shows up the fact that it is unevenly distributed, concentrated in the town of Negreşti Oaş and its surroundings, Huta Certeze, Vama and Mujdeni. A comparative analysis on the catering units and the accommodation ones highlights the higher number of the former compared to the latter. This is explained by the fact that tourism in Oaş Land is of local - regional interest, specifically addressed to the tourists from the immediate proximity, tourists who do not require accommodation (LSPTAP, 2012).

The analysis on tourist offer at spatial level revealed the existence of three types of administrative units, namely:

- administrative units with very low tourist offer (Tarna Mare, Batarci, Cămărzana, Gherţa Mică, Târşolţ and Bixad);
- administrative units with low tourist offer (Turţ, Călineşti Oaş, Oraşu Nou, Vama and Certeze);
- administrative units with average tourist offer (Negreşti Oaş) (Fig. 4);

In conclusion, it is noticeable that the tourist offer in Oaş Land is unevenly distributed in terms of space, situation caused on the one hand by the lack of infrastructure, especially tourism infrastructure, and on the other by a bad management in what concerns the promotion and development through tourism of anthropogenic resources, particularly the ethnographic ones and the historical monuments.

Present state of the capitalization through tourism of the historical monuments from Oaş Land

Until now, historical monuments, along with the elements of identity and specificity from Oaş Land have contributed very little to tourism development because of the closed system in which this complex has evolved (Herman and Wendt, 2011). Tourist offer was intended for domestic consumption and only to a lesser extent for the external one. The historical monuments, the identity and the specificity were not new for people living in Oaş. As a result, Oaş Land first started to render profitable the natural resources (relief, hydrography and natural springs). Only the recent opening towards the European Union brought a slight emphasis on the development through tourism of the elements of identity, specificity and history. This improvement comes with the awareness of possessing an ethnological, folkloric, historical heritage and as a natural response to foreign demand.

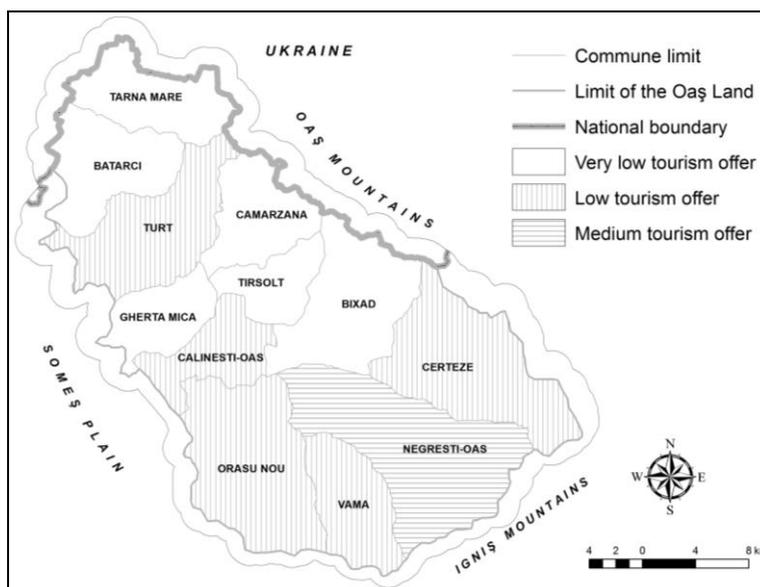


Fig. 4: The distribution of tourism offer in Oaș Land at the administrative unit level

Challenges encountered in the capitalization through tourism of the historical monuments from Oaș Land

Although it owns a great variety of historical monuments, Oaș Land finds itself only in an early stage of development through tourism. This is caused by a low level of education, poor infrastructure and engineering services, poor tourism promotion, wrong mentality, lack of involvement from the authorities and local communities to promote tourism etc.

The analysis of the opportunities to capitalize the historical monuments from Oaș Land revealed the existence of several challenges of major importance like: lack of involvement of population, local and county authorities in the protection, development and promotion of historical sights at national or international level, lack of involvement of higher education institutions in order to create a development plan for the historical sites from Oaș Land, advanced degree of deterioration of several historical sights, inexistence of a landscape design that highlights the historical sights, inexistence of protected areas for historical monuments, lack of infrastructure for access to historical monuments in Oaș Land, lack of effective promotion and development of historical monuments, lack of a strategy to attract investments in tourism and to stop external migration, lack of a strategy for a sustainable and responsible development etc. The surpassing of the above listed challenges will constitute a guarantee and also a condition regarding the opportunities to develop the historical monuments

from this region and beyond. This requires, as a sine-qua-non condition, a set of specific measures, in close agreement with the realities.

Measures required for the capitalization through tourism of the historical monuments from Oaș Land

The emphasis on the challenges found in the capitalization of the historical monuments from Oaș Land has led to the identification of appropriate measures to be taken in this direction, namely:

- involvement of population, local and county authorities in the protection, development and promotion of historical sights at national or international level, through an effective planning that aims at the preservation and restoration of the historical monuments;
- involvement of higher education institutions in order to create a development plan for the historical sites from Oaș Land;
- measures for the rehabilitation and the preservation of historical sights;
- creation of a landscape design that highlights the historical sights;
- creation of protected areas for historical monuments;
- development of an infrastructure for making the access easier to historical monuments by upgrading the vehicles access, by facilitating each sight with parking space and healthcare points;
- creation of an effective promotion system that suggests maps with recommended routes, boards, banners, signs, leaflets, brochures, website pages etc.

- strategies to attract investments in tourism and to stop external migration;
- development of the area in compliance with the principles of a sustainable and responsible development.

Conclusion

Even if Oaş Land possesses many historical sights, they are not fully taken advantage of in the absence of an optimal strategy for their recovery through tourism. The existence of historical resources along with other types of tourism resources is an additional argument, a plea for the need to develop tourism in Oaş Land according to the principle of sustainable and responsible development and the principle of environmental protection. This would contribute to tourism development and to the diversification of these places, to their integration in the national and international tourism circuits. It would also increase the number of tourists from the national and international tourist market, thanks to local and regional potential, it would increase the socio-economic level of the area, it would preserve the cultural-authentic heritage and it would strengthen the identity and the specificity of Oaş Land.

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