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

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Received on <21-01-2012>, reviewed on <15-03-2012>, accepted on <10-10-2012>

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

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 Ighiş Mountains.

The first traces of human habitation in this land appeared during the Paleolithic Age, the evidence being represented by the archaeological discoveries from “Cetăţele”, “Lutariu”, “Fartăţii” (Bixad commune), ”Belovar” (Buneşti commune) and “Malu Turului” (Remetea Oaşului commune). Therefore, from Paleolithic up to the present, the people from these places, the “oşeni”, 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, Buneşti, Remetea Oaşului), the fortification with stone enclosure wall from Tămăşeni 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, Călineşti-Oaş, Buneşti, Gherţa Mică, Moišeni, Negreşti-Oaş, Prilorg, Rača, Tur, Vama and Turţ) 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, Timothey and Boyd, 2003) and in the Romanian one (Cocean, 2007, Herman and Wendt, 2011; Ilieş, 2006; Ilieş et al., 2008, Ilieş et al., 2009, Olaru and Ancuţa, 2010; LMI, 2010). However, at local level there is still a lack of knowledge in this direction. The studies conducted aimed at identifying and...
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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).
In Oaș 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 Oaș Land reveals a high proportion of historical sights (50%), followed by the religious sights (42.9%) and the cultural ones (7.1%) (Fig. 2).

The fourteen historical relics from Oaș 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 Pásztory 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–Oaș commune and the one from the Oaș Land Museum, Negrești-Oaș, 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 Oaș Land.

The two cultural sights are represented by the Mărucăt Iacob of Grigor house from Călinești-Oaș Village, Călinești-Oaș commune, no. 331, documented in 1727 and the Ethnographic Museum of Oaș Land from Negrești Oaș, 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).

The spatial location of monuments in Oaș 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 Oașului, Negrești Oaș 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 Oaș Land**

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

The natural resources from Oaș 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), Tribușor Peak (976), Rotundu Peak (1240), Bulanu Peak (1167), Flower Cave - and the hydrographic ones: Călinești-Oaș 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 Oaș Land, which represent the fundamental ingredient of local tourist resorts like Valea Măriei (Mary Valley), Băile Puturoasa, Turț-Băi, Tarna Mare-Băi and of the Bixad sanatorium.

The presence and abundance of anthropogenic tourism resources is strongly related to the fact that "Oaș is a geographic “Land” type region from Romania, where a clearly defined community exists and where people identify with their living space, becoming oșeni " (Ilieș, 2006, p 154). They are defined by some identity elements specific for the Oaș community, elements that can be identified directly in the area (houses, farms, traditional costumes, dances called "danțuri", songs called "țupurituri" etc.) or at the level of temper, action mode, mentality (Herman and Wendt, 2011; Ilieș, 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 Oaș, occupations, crafts, traditions and customs), the religious buildings, the cultural buildings (Mărcuț Memorial House) and the human activities suited for tourism (Sheep breeding in Huta Certeze, Strawberry festival in Halmelu).

The accommodation facilities include six units classified with two or three stars and located in four communes (Negrești Oaș, Huta Certeze, Orașu 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: Negrești Oaș (4 units), Huta Certeze (1 unit), Vama (3 units), Certeze (2 units) and Orașu Nou (2 units). The spatial analysis of the specific infrastructure shows up the fact that it is unevenly distributed, concentrated in the town of Negrești Oaș 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 Oaș 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, Batari, Câmârzana, Gherța Mică, Târșolț and Bixad);
- administrative units with low tourist offer (Turț, Călinești Oaș, Orașu Nou, Vama and Certeze);
- administrative units with average tourist offer (Negrești Oaș) (Fig. 4);

In conclusion, it is noticeable that the tourist offer in Oaș 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 Oaș Land

Until now, historical monuments, along with the elements of identity and specificity from Oaș 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 Oaș. As a result, Oaș 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.
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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