

The Possibility of Developing a Tourist Ethno-Folkloric Route in the West Region, Romania

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Abstract

These days when globalization is intended at a European level, culture and folklore are the elements that help us keep our identity. The folklore tourist resources of an area can be the starting points for the development of niche tourism.

The West Region comprises four Romanian counties and numerous ethno-folkloric tourist resources.

By presenting the most special resources I have tried to raise the interest of economic agents, local communities, specialists and potential tourists.

Keywords: *region, tourist route, cultural tourism, ethno-folkloric heritage, ethno-folkloric events*

Rezumat. Posibilitatea dezvoltării unui traseu turistic etnofolcloric în Regiunea de Vest

În condițiile actuale, în care se încearcă o globalizare la nivel european, cultura și folclorul sunt elementele care ne ajută să ne păstrăm identitatea. Resursele turistice dintr-o zonă, din categoria folclor pot constitui punctele de plecare pentru dezvoltarea unui turism de nișă.

Regiunea Vest cuprinde patru județe ale României și numeroase resurse turistice din sfera etnofolclorului. Prin prezentarea celor mai deosebite astfel de resurse am încercat să trezesc interesul atât a agenților economici, comunităților locale, specialiștilor, cât și a potențialilor turiști.

Cuvinte-cheie: *regiune, traseu turistic, turism cultural, patrimoniul etnofolcloric, manifestări etnofolclorice*

Introduction

The region is considered a „big piece of land more or less homogenous, from a country or the globe that features common characters; area, zone” (DEX, 1998).

In the European Parliament’s view it is „a territory that forms, from a geographic point of view, a net unit or a similar territory ensemble where there is continuity, in which the population has certain common elements and wants to maintain its specificity and to develop it in order to stimulate cultural, social and economic progress” (The Community Charter of Regional Development).

Several types of regions were delimited (Popescu, 1999): political, incorporated, diversified, administrative, and functional, through cooperation.

The types of regions resulted following the classical concept method are (Constantin, 2000): homogenous; joint; for planning (programming).

For the homogenous regions certain unifying features or economic, geographic and socio-politic key criteria are taken into consideration.

Within the joint regions we meet a dominant centre that polarizes the activities and the internal relationships.

The existence of an institutional administrative frame, of regional development policies and programmes leads to the appearance of regions for planning.

The development of tourism in a region, regardless of type, supposes that people get acquainted to it, with its tourist resources and involvement desire of local authorities and communities.

Materials and methods

Culture is defined through its material and spiritual values that have been created by the humans from their appearance on earth till today.

Cultural tourism is present and manifests itself in both urban and rural environments.

According to various specialists „there is no tourism without culture” (Hunziker and Krapf, Tourism World Organization 1995).

Local and national communities have lately shown increased interest for cultural tourism, considering it profitable.

This interest has increased as a consequence of globalization that is manifesting with more and more emphasis. Cultural tourism can be considered a means of maintaining cultural, developing and diversification identities of cultural life.

The main motivation of this type of tourism is the knowledge of the entire cultural – artistic heritage of an area or place and the observance of the inhabitants’ lifestyle.

Within the cultural heritage we find literary creations, musical works, graphics, painting and sculpture collections, monuments, statues, commemorative plates, architecturally significant buildings, memorial houses, museums, crafts, folklore and the traditional costume, etc. A series of organizational resources that come to support the above mentioned are periodic festivals, celebrations and fairs.

Cultural tourism relies also on ethno-folkloric heritage, also known as ethno-cultural, that comprises: traditional costumes; seams and woven fabrics; crafts; traditional architecture; ethno-folkloric events (customs on the occasion of various events – religious celebrations, weddings, baptisms, funerals, local events – „rugi” (celebrations of the patron saint of the church), „nedei” (rural celebrations of the saint of the church), crafts fairs, gastronomy).

The ethno-folkloric centres are the places that still maintain the representative ethno-folkloric traditions and values in order to present them to visitors.

If by culture we mean the whole material and spiritual values created by humans along the years, all that maintains the folklore of a people is the ethno-folkloric, ethno-cultural inheritance.

Therefore, ethno-folkloric tourism is part of the cultural tourism.

In order to maintain the ethno-folkloric heritage intact, but also in order to include it in the tourist circuit the adoption of a sustainable development is necessary.

Through sustainable development is understood the satisfaction of existent tourists’ needs, by taking care of the environment and the tourist resources so that they could be useful in the future.

The principles of sustainable development take into account:

- the major importance of environment for tourism;
- tourism must be seen as a positive activity for the environment, the local communities and the visitors;
- the creation of a long-term mutual support relationship between the environment and tourism;
- the development of tourism activities with the respect for local characteristics;
- the balancing of the guests’ needs with those of the hosts and the chosen destinations;
- making all those requested to respect these principles responsible.

The sustainable development of cultural tourism can be achieved through the establishment and applying some strategies that take into consideration the presented principles.

Such development can have favourable effects if applied to all local, regional, national, world levels.

Results and discussion

The West Development Region is located in western Romania bordering Hungary and Serbia, and includes the province Banat (counties Arad, Timiș, Caraș-Severin) and a county from Transylvania (Hunedoara), its total area being of 32.034 km².

This region, together with four counties in Hungary and the autonomous region of Voivodina in Serbia, is part of the Danube – Kris – Mureș – Tisa Euroregion (DKMT), which was established in 1997 within a cross-border collaboration protocol.

Taking as departure point the interior of the region, the approximate distances to the nearest capital cities considered important socio-economic centres are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Distance from the important European centres

Approximate distance (km)	Capital name	Country
550	Bucharest	Romania
170	Belgrade	Serbia
300	Budapest	Hungary
550	Vienna	Austria

Source: www.adrvest.ro

Since the distances to the above mentioned cities are less than 600 km, we consider the position of the West Development Region towards the European tourist markets very advantageous.

Another advantage is its position in comparison with the main European countries to send tourists:

Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy, although the road distances are between 1100 and 2100 km (Germany, landmark Munich 1100 km, France, departure point Paris about 1900 km, Great Britain, 2100 km from London and Italy, 1450 km from Rome).

The administrative-territorial units in the region, included in table 2, highlight the predominance of villages and communes, the bigger number of towns and urban centres existent in the Hunedoara County.

Table 2 Administrative-territorial structure of the West Region

County	Number of villages	Number of communes	Number of towns	Urban centers
Arad	270	68	10	1
Caraș-Severin	287	69	8	2
Hunedoara	457	55	14	7
Timiș	313	89	10	2
West Region	1327	281	42	12

Source: www.timisinsse.ro/cmsrimis/rw/pages/statReg.ro.do

According to the statistics, in July 2009, the population of the West Development Region was 1,921,700 inhabitants, representing 8.95% of Romania's population.

The inhabitants of the region give it an ethno-cultural diversity since here live together Romanians, Germans, Serbians, Hungarians, Rromani.

In this region several cultural artistic units develop activities that provide possibilities to know the art and culture (table 3).

Table 3 Cultural artistic units

County	Museums and public collections	Performance and concerts institutions
Arad	9	4
Caraș- Severin	13	3
Hunedoara	11	2
Timiș	24	7
West Region	57	16

Source: www.timisinsse.ro/cmsrimis/rw/pages/statReg.ro.do

In the West Development Region there are 497 accommodation structures, from hotels to boats, classified on categories in order to provide accommodation for potential tourists (table 4).

The tourist potential of this region is valuable having outstanding natural and anthropic resources.

The value of the anthropic tourist potential is given, at some extent, by the specific situation of the region, connected with the geographic position, the territories that belonged to different historic

provinces, the mix of several ethnographic and folklore elements, several cultures.

Table 4 Accommodation structures

Type of accommodation structure	Number of units
Hotels and motels	140
Hostels	9
Tourist inns	2
Chalets	12
Camping sites	9
Villas and bungalows	56
School camps	12
Tourist pensions	156
Agro-tourist pensions	93
Tourist camps	8
Total West Region	497

Source: www.timisinsse.ro/cmsrimis/rw/pages/statReg.ro.do

The main ethno-folkloric centres in the West region are shown in table 5.

Almaș commune located in the north-east of the West Region is known for the folklore creation workshop established in 2005 at the town hall. This workshop has three weavers where different traditional woven fabrics are done (linen, towels, carpets).

Table 5 The main ethno-folkloric centres of the West Region

West Region	Ethno-folkloric centre	Visiting hours
Arad County	- Almaș;	- Prior appointment;
	- Buteni;	- Prior appointment;
Caraș –Severin County	- Biniș;	- Permanently;
	- Prigor;	- Permanently between 15 September-20 June and with appointment the rest of the year;
Hunedoara County	- Eftimie Murgu;	- Permanently;
	- Cristiu;	- Prior appointment;
Timiș County	- Târnăvița;	- Permanently;
	- Jimbolia;	- Daily between 9-17, Mondays closed;
	- Timișoara	- Daily between 9-17, Mondays closed;

In the same area, at 11 km away, there is Buteni commune where an ethnography, painting and archaeology museum was established. The „suman” (long peasant coat made of thick wool), part of the traditional costume, is made by local craftsmen and is well-known across the country for the pattern of the floral embroidery.

The best-known Banat ceramics is the one made in Biniș, in the Caraș-Severin County. The place is easily reached being located 5 km away from Bocsa. The ceramics is not enamelled, the decoration is made in yellow and kaolin clay which during burn, that takes

between 6 and 7 hours, changes the colour to red and white. The modelling is done with the help of the wheel turned with the foot. The workshop of Stepan Ionică is open for visit to all interested.

Another place in this county where one can admire woven fabrics, traditional costumes, and wooden objects is Prigorul. They are exhibited in the Museum of the Arts and Crafts School.

Rudăria Mills Park, the biggest in southern Europe, registered in the UNESCO heritage, is located in Eftimie Murgu commune in a picturesque area. Here one can admire the 22 water mills spread on 3 km, on the Rudăricii Valley, 9 in the village and 13 outside the village. The mills are built in wood and function with a horizontal wheel.

Târnăvița is a village under the administration of Hălmăgel commune, not far from the Buteni area, so at the border of two counties: Arad and Hunedoara. The village is known for its enamelled ceramic products made by the local people. Tourists can visit the pottery hall and the workshops of the potters' Ștefea Cornel and Betea Viorel. The objects are made in red clay, while the enamel is yellow with green tones.

Cristur, close to Hunedoara has for its visitors a traditional house transformed into a museum. The exhibits are from the Bucovina area because the population is formed of the Bucovinean Secui who came back to Ardeal in 1910.

In Jimbolia there is a museum, the sections of which are ethnography, archaeology, and photography. It also includes Stefan Jäger's painting workshop because most of the museum is dedicated to the painter that gives its name.

The Banat Village Museum in Timișoara, established at the initiative of Ioachin Miloia, opened in 1971, lies on 17,47 ha and offers the possibility to get in touch with the ethnographic culture from the entire Banat region. It is located in the Green Forest and comprises the civic centre of a typical Romanian village and houses of the ethnic minorities in the Banat (Germans, Serbians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Slovaks).

Besides these big well-known centres, there are other smaller centres that could develop through a good management of the existent resources. Thus, we can mention the centres in the Arad County in Bârsa (pink-orange not enamelled ceramics), Șicula (traditions, customs, traditional costumes), the ones in the Timiș County in Buziaș (the ethnography

collection), and the crafts centres in Făget, Jupânești, Tomești and Coșevița.

The best-known traditional events in the West Region are:

“The Girls Fair” on the Găina Mountain; The Traditional Craftsmen Fair and the Traditional Costume Parade in Moneasa;

The Repast of New Bread in Pecica and Beliu;

The Kissing Fair in Hălmațiu;

“The Underpants Ball” in the Banat villages in Caraș-Severin County;

The Codreni Fair in Văsoaia, Hunedoara;

The Celebrations in Țebea;

Ruga Banateana in Timișoara;

The Banat Ethnies Festival, Timișoara.

The distance from Timișoara, the biggest town of the region, to the main ethno-folkloric centres is quite small, less than 200 km, as one can notice in table 6.

Table 6 Distance in km of main ethno-folkloric centres to Timisoara

Timișoara, distance in km to :	
Almaș	143
Buteni	112
Cristur	116
Târnăvița	147
Prigor	169
Eftimie Murgu	171
Biniș	78
Jimbolia	45

Source: www.maproute24.ro

The location of these centres can be seen in figure 1.

Considering the facts mentioned above, establishing a tourist route can have the departure in Timișoara, that is: Timișoara- Buteni- Almaș- Târnăvița- Cristur- Prigor- Eftimie Murgu- Biniș- Jimbolia (717 km).

Such a route can be done in minimum three days.

Besides this complete route, other short routes can be done, so that they include only one, two or three ethno-folkloric centres according to the motivation of the potential tourist:

- Timișoara- Buteni- Almaș- Târnăvița;
- Timișoara- Cristur;
- Timișoara- Biniș- Prigor- Eftimie Murgu;
- Timișoara- Jimbolia.

Besides these routes there can be organized trips or weekend packages to the destinations where ethno-folkloric events take place.

