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CONTENTS

Volume **XI, Supplementary Issue** (September 2012)

Theme Issue: Tourism and sustainable development

Identity and Sustainable Development in Rural Tourism Mirela MAZILU, Daniela DUMITRESCU	7
An Empirical Approach to Traditional Products from Europe Compared to the Traditional ones from Romania Georgică GHEORGHE, Puiu NISTOREANU	12
Opportunities for the Development of Tourism in Letea River Levee of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Tamara SIMON, Alina CARLOGEA, Victor TIMOTIN	16
Aspects Concerning Tourism-Related Communication. Case Study: Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Romania) Cătălina ANCUȚA, Elena CIOROGARIU, Martin OLARU	24
The Possibility of Developing a Tourist Ethno-Folkloric Route in the West Region, Romania Cipriana SAVA	32
Rural Tourism as a Strategic Option for Social and Economic Development in the Rural Area in Romania Elena BOGAN	37
Cultural Identity and Tourist Destination Development. A Case Study of the Land of Bârsa (Romania) Anamaria Sidonia RĂVAR	44
Residents and Non-Residents' Perception Towards the Touristic Image of Craiova municipality, Romania Amalia BĂDIȚĂ	52
The Individualization of the Hotel as Tourist Attraction in the Urban Area of Transylvania Armela-Linda RAHOVAN	59
The Natural Tourism Potential of Galați City and Its Sustainable Capitalization Monica FLUȚĂR, Constantin COCERHAN	66



Acknowledgment

2012 is an important year in the curriculum development and diversification of the Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Craiova. It marks the creation of a new Bachelor degree programme - Geography of tourism – starting with the 2012-2013 academic year and as well the quality of the human resources involved in the sustainable functioning of the department, all these metamorphoses occurring within the academic competitiveness.

The current publication, a thematic issue of the *"Forum geografic. Studii și cercetări de geografie și protecția mediului"* journal of the University of Craiova, is an Indexed DataBase journal, included in international databases and represents the proof of high quality and involvement of the Department of Geography academic staff who focus on the dissemination of relevant science in tourism and geography.

The 10 papers published in this issue gather together practitioners and researchers from many universities across the country such as: Academy of Economic Studies, Faculty of Geography- West University of Timișoara, Faculty of Geography- University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography- University of Wallachia, Faculty of Tourism Management- "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University etc.

This thematic issue of the journal continues a previous scientific activity with a similar topic - the 1st International Conference on Tourism and Economic Development (TED '11), organized by WSEAS and hosted by University of Craiova and the Department of Geography (see <http://www.wseas.us/conferences/2011/drobeta/ted/>).

The journal succeeded only with the support of the scientific community in submitting high quality papers and in undertaking prompt and effective peer reviews.

I am most grateful to the Editorial Board but equally to the colleagues who worked on this *"Tourism and Sustainable Development"* issue (Manager Editor Dr. Liliana Popescu; Assistant Editor Amalia Bădiță, to our host, Dr. Sandu Boengiu- Editor-in-chief of the *"Forum geografic. Studii și cercetări de geografie și protecția mediului"* journal) and to all reviewers, authors and co-authors for supporting the Journal and responding to our common desire of increasing the scientific quality of our current and future publications. We look forward to your continuing collaboration in the future.

Editor

Professor Mirela Mazilu

Identity and Sustainable Development in Rural Tourism

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Abstract

There are many studies talking about the "anonymity" in which our country is sinking, in terms of international tourist identity, of the symbols that define us. We have never known how to promote ourselves using the unique elements that we have and not because we do not have these unique features, but because it is possible that we do not know or we have forgotten what really represents us. There were several initiatives, some of them recent and costly to create and promote a country brand, starting from tourism, but these did not have the expected impact. Why did not have the expected impact? Have we got an element/several elements that may render a sustainable image, not a temporary one, for us and for the Romanian rural tourism? Are the village, the traditions, and the gastronomy authentic elements of tourist identity for the Romanian village as an element within the tourist offer? What symbols, values, ideas, feelings, places, emotions, personalities, food, artistic expressions are by excellence truly Romanian? How many of us recognize them? These are only a couple of the many questions we try to answer, not desperately, but with the interest of the person who is not only in love with tourism, its values, with its message over time. The article tries to underline the role of identity in the promotion of a tourist product, the Romanian village, a valuable treasure up to the present based on an adequate methodology of the tourism geography research (questionnaires, diagnosis, analytical prospecting, etc.).

Keywords: *identity, rural tourism, authentic, Romanian village, image, sustainability*

Rezumat. Identitate și dezvoltare durabilă în turismul rural

Există multe studii care vorbesc despre "anonimatul", în care țara noastră se scufundă, în termeni de identitate turistică internațională, a simbolurilor care ne definesc. Niciodată nu am știut să ne promovăm folosind elementele unice pe care le avem și nu pentru că nu avem aceste caracteristici unice, ci pentru că este posibil ca noi să nu știm sau să fi uitat ce ne reprezintă cu adevărat. Au fost mai multe inițiative, unele dintre ele recente și costisitoare de a crea și de a promova un brand de țară, pornind de la turism, dar acestea nu au avut impactul scontat. De ce nu au avut impactul scontat? Avem un element/elemente care pot da o imagine durabilă, nu una temporară, pentru noi și pentru turismul rural românesc? Sunt satul, tradițiile, precum și gastronomia elemente de identitate turistică pentru satul românesc ca un element în cadrul ofertei turistice? Ce simboluri, valori, idei, sentimente, emoții, locuri, personalități, produse alimentare, expresii artistice sunt, prin excelență adevărat românești? Câți dintre noi le recunoaștem? Acestea sunt doar câteva dintre numeroasele întrebări la care vom încerca să răspundem, nu cu disperare, dar cu interesul unei persoane care nu este doar atrasă de turism și valorile sale, cu mesajul său de-a lungul timpului. Articolul încearcă să sublinieze rolul identității în promovarea unui produs turistic, satul românesc, o comoară de mare preț până în prezent, pe baza unei metodologii adecvate de cercetare în geografia turismului (chestionare, diagnostic, analiză de prospecțiune, etc.).

Cuvinte-cheie: *identitate, turism rural, autentic, sat românesc, imagine, durabilitate*

Introduction

The Romanian village was approached in the literature either from multiple angles or belonging to different subjects, from museology, anthropology to statistics, management or marketing with application in rural tourism (Bran et al., 1997; Bran et al., 1995; Mitache et al., 1996; Nistoreanu, 1999; Bucur, 2006;

Mazilu, 2006). The common element of these studies is the intrinsic value of the Romanian village – i.e. object of study, raw material, offer, tourist product, all in one or taken separately, which are profitable elements in the perspective of the re-evaluation of this type of tourist product for marketing.

The identity is applied in activities as a resource and as a marketing instrument (external and internal)

for obtaining the competitive advantage, as well as in the case of entities (ethnic or geographical) for the

strengthening of the trust, the respect for oneself or for attracting new investments or tourists (fig. 1).

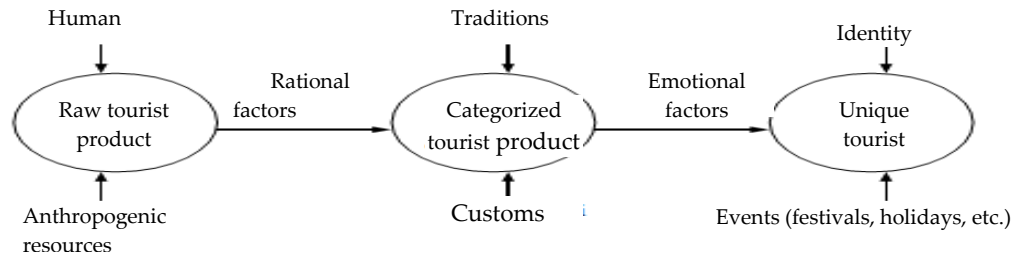


Fig. 1: The elements of differentiation/uniqueness for the tourist products

The attractive elements of Romania in the field of rural tourism are special. A strong tradition and a multi-millenary rural culture have been and are still found nowadays. The folkloric customs, as well as the whole richness of the folklore, constitute constant elements in the rural entire ambiance. The attractive elements are: the natural beauty of the landscapes (mountains, lakes, forests, etc.), the history and the famous people, the commercial areas, the cultural, recreational and entertainment objectives, the sports arenas, the events and different occasions, buildings, monuments and sculptural ensembles, the people and other attractions. In fact, this analysis (called "the audit of attractiveness" in the literature) represents the basis of determining the regional marketing objective and the actions within the marketing program for the respective region.

Within the context of the regional entities, the identity may be viewed as an instrument of putting into practice a complex marketing planning process as a part of the strategic marketing process and, respectively, a marketing program.

The rural areas folklore, respectively the village, offers the identity of each geographical region of the country. In time, the purity of the old culture has been preserved mainly unaltered. Due to its vitality, the folkloric culture has been preserved over time with different accents, imposed by the specific touch of each rural community. It is necessary and important that the direction of the Romanian culture to not move towards an unknown direction, because at the moment, due to the modern media, the message of modernism has been spread everywhere and sent rapidly to the world of the village, triggering messages and elements opposite to the traditional values.

The rural architecture represents another attractive element of rural settlements, being the work of different communities and of time and it must be preserved as a cultural heritage of humanity.

Globalisation and the accelerated industrialisation brought out problems in each country related to the preservation of the rural habitat, without opposing to its evolution. Globally, the traditional rural settlements are threatened by different factors, although almost everywhere their value is related to the habitat. Behind these settlements, there is a philosophy, an attitude, a conception in relation with the social life and work, which confers the quality of a document specific for each people. However, the preservation of the villages enters into conflict with the wish of their people to take advantage of the modern elements of life. We must take into account the integration of the new in the traditional area when solving this problem. The development of rural tourism is a solution to ensure the transmission of traditions to future generations, not to deprive the future generations of identity.

The development of tourism/the recovery of the rural areas are proposing to solve, outside the essential objective of its activity, the satisfaction of the tourist motivation and the economic problems of the areas related to:

- ❖ the depopulation caused by the rural population migration to the urban centres, thus ensuring conditions for practicing some profitable activities in the villages aiming at the improvement of the life conditions, the protection and the preservation of the environment as a recreational and recovery factor of the creative potential of the individual;
- ❖ the creation of conditions for the development of economic, industrial, agricultural, commercial conditions in the rural areas.
- ❖ the stimulation of the state institutions, the private sector and the associations in the field to intensify the efforts for obtaining a corresponding infrastructure related to the level of tourist development.

Being considered a special and more complex form of tourism, rural tourism has an advantage in terms of the possibilities of spending the spare time,

the originality, the specificity and the idealism shown by the local people. The rural tourism connection to the sustainable development concept is quite recent. If, in the past the development of tourism has aimed only the economic side, the achievement of its objectives being considered a total success, lately the attention of the specialists in the field has focused on other sides as the social and cultural consequences on the local population, as well as the ecologic impact.

These new directions are the component elements of the sustainable development, achieving thus a bridge between this new concept and the rural tourism.

The sustainable development answers to the present needs without harming the development ability of the future generations. This is closely related to tourism and the problem of the environment, of maintaining it within normal parameters so that the objectives and its beauties should have continuity in time, in tourism, thus creating a privileged relation between them.

Rural tourism from the perspective of the sustainable development takes into account the ecological problem, meaning the transmission of a healthy environment to future generations, with certain limits in its development. This problem is worldwide and it has become a current issue now. Actions and measures representing the interest and the preoccupation of all individuals are necessary at a national level, focusing on the educational side and on the awareness of each individual. A large number of developed countries have started to put into practice the application of special programs launching the so-called "*Green Revolution*". For the protection of the environment, the great world organisations (UNO, FAO, NATO, and UNESCO) have brought to light the problem of the environment.

One of the most important organisations at a national level supporting the development of the rural tourism is ANTREC (National Agency for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism), member of the European Federation for Rural Tourism, EUROGÎTES. Created in 1994, ANTREC proves to be the most viable of all the existing associations and foundations, mostly achieving its objectives as follows:

- the identification and the promotion of the tourist potential of the village space;
- the professional training through courses, seminars, symposiums of its members;
- specialty scholarships;

- the experience exchanges in the country and abroad;
- the publishing of magazines and informational newsletters;
- the setting up of a database about rural tourism;
- advertising campaigns for the hostels and the agritourist farms;
- creating a booking system in the Romanian rural tourism.

The same problems are followed - up with interest by other organisations as well, such as: the Foundation of Dornelor Land, Brain Impex with regional feature.

The elements, which constitute the basis of the elaboration of rural development strategies, are:

- ✓ the holiday administration manner constitutes the defining criterion for tourists;
- ✓ rural tourism presents specific particularities compared to the resort tourism due to the physical and human environment (interpersonal connections, an affective climate);
- ✓ the poor experience of the small entrepreneurs related to the appearance of this new trend - *organised rural tourism* - it has to be improved by pushing forward through public subsidies based on the fundamental strategic plan.

One of the most recent strategies that of Edward Inskeep, aims at "*the sustainable and integrated development*" of rural tourism complying with this feature of the region, because not all the regions can apply it. There are limits for the development within a given area; the practical application means particular management techniques to prevent the destruction of the ecological balance of the community. The experts want to determine key elements of the rural tourism sustainable development.

The involvement of the authorities and the local communities in rural tourism and agritourism

Rural tourism and agritourism represent a social and economic activity that re-evaluates the material, spiritual and human resources of a rural community and benefits from the services and technical and building endowments of the community. It appeared the need for the direct involvement of the local authorities in the organisation, the development and the promotion of this form of tourism as a component of the general activity of the locality.

This participation of the local community may be achieved through:

- The conclusion of a partnership between authorities and the local tourist association, the economic agents from tourism or other associated fields, which lead to a more efficient organisation, development and promotion of rural tourism/agritourism. Within this partnership, the tourism associations and the economic agents involved in the tourism activity must contribute financially to the achievement of the general economic development objectives of a locality (access ways, water supply, and telecommunications, technical and urban endowments). This may be achieved through the takeover of a share of the business volume and its assignment to the mentioned purpose, thus a larger contribution of tourism to the general development of the locality with indirect beneficial effects is created;
- The development of the commercial supply network and the service provision;
- The development and the diversification of the recreational and entertainment features to the local specific features;
- The development of the technical and urban endowments and of the general infrastructure;
- The diversification of the cultural activities, fairs, traditional manifestations;
- The support of the local initiative in the development of the crafts and local traditional art;
- The creation of facilities and the support of the development of hostels and agritourism households network;
- The achievement of some micro-complexes of agro-food production for the supply of the population and of the tourists with local products;
- The support of the tourist association in the promotion and the sustainable development of rural tourism/agritourism;
- The management of the tourism activity and of the actions of protection and preservation of the environment, of the natural tourist and historic-cultural resources and of the built heritage.

Materials and discussions

The European integration of the Romanian tourism represents a gradual-sequential process, seriously evaluating the chances to re-launch the purpose of its development at the same time with the protection of the environment and of the growth of the quality of services, tending to become similar to the one existing in the European Union.

The article tries to underline the role of identity in the promotion of a tourist product: the Romanian village, a valuable treasure up to the present based

on an adequate methodology for the tourism geography research (questionnaires, diagnosis, analytical prospecting, etc.).

Through rural tourism, the natural, historic and cultural richness of a rural area shall form the object of a remarkable economic activity, able to create incomes and to ensure a sustainable development.

The promotion and the preservation of a great image of the tourist activity needs the existence of an optimal ratio between the nature of the offer, the quality of services and the price, ratio that need protection from the financial abuses and professional negligence.

On the other hand, the possibilities of including the rural settlements in the tourist circuit are practically unlimited, taking into account the variety of the rural space. When talking about the Romanian rural space, there is allowed the elaboration of an extremely various range of tourist products, according to the specific resources and the territorial localisation. The tourist villages located along the main communication axes within the well-known tourist regions may be taken into account (the seaside, the Prahova Valley, the Olt Valley, Bucovina, Maramureş, etc.) The mountain villages may be taken into account as the support points for the mountain tourism, as well as the ones specialised in certain types of agricultural activities (vineyards, orchards, agricultural villages, pastoral villages, etc.). These villages might be locations for the agritourism and so on.

The wide range of offers constitutes a major advantage for the Romanian tourism, as well as for the rural one. Beyond the medium and high-comfort hotels, specific to the cities and tourist resorts, the rural space offers infinity of profitable possibilities: hostels, boarding houses, accommodation in the peasant households may support a wide range of activities as well as walks, cultural tourism, fishing, hunting, horse riding, winter sports, cycling, etc.

Each type of rural settlement offers particular possibilities and raises specific problems. Hence, the tourist product offered must be drawn up according to the presence of different components, in relation with the individualised feature of the settlement.

The various correction measures of the unbalances try to maintain the population living in the country in the European countries, from two main reasons:

- The need to maintain a human structure in the rural environment as a basis for the family structures;

➤ The diversification of the economic activities, when the ones purely agricultural become insufficient in order to maintain some corresponding incomes to the ones obtained in the enrolment of the productive activities in other sectors.

Finally, within the current context of globalisation imposing the integration of each country within a certain space (example, the European one), the efforts must be directed towards the adoption of models or standards, but with the re-evaluation of traditions, of customs and of national specific features, which are the elements creating the identity at any level (local, regional, national or European) in any field of activity and especially in tourism, where the emotional factors are especially active when choosing a destination and may constitute the main reasons for the chosen and preferred tourism forms by tourists everywhere.

These identity models must be achieved within a process of planning the regional marketing, with a well-set objective and with marketing actions emphasising the specific of the respective place.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the classical tourism seems to be in crisis, maybe because of the oversaturation of certain traditional areas or of the autonomy of movement of the European population who tries to allocate the holiday period along the entire year, distributing the periods of stays in traditional places and reaching other alternatives in the rural environment. "Identity Tourism: Imaging and Imagining the Nation" examines the role of tourism in the construction of national identity. To imagine a nation, nationalists must construct a national story about their history and culture that defines them as people, and counters the negative story circulated by their enemies. One of the objectives of this book is to identify the necessary historical and cultural components of a compelling national story. Yet, a story is of no use unless it is heard, so nationalists need media through which the national narrative can be told. The main objective of this article is to show that the identity in the Romanian tourism is a medium that can be used to tell the national story, both to group members and to outsiders too. Thus it is particularly useful in the construction of a national identity sense. Identity tourism, which incorporates both ethnic and heritage tourism, includes museums, heritage centers, performances, and other attractions in which collective identities are represented, interpreted, and

potentially constructed through the use of history and culture. One of the strengths of tourism is that it can convey a message to a broad, mass audience, and it can present that message in a vivid and lively way. A weakness of tourism is that vivid and lively presentations can degenerate into trivializing history, culture and politics to the point that any meaningful message is lost. Thus one of the main challenges in identity tourism is to balance educational goals against the entertainment imperatives of the medium.

Due to the fact that the international experience has proved that the countries that do not have a tourism policy and do not make efforts for the development and the promotion of tourism lose time and the position on the international market, favouring the profit of international competitors. The future solutions for a tourism policy, needed to regain the market of rural tourism, are difficult to find; the Romanian village must draw the attention and the will, but also the strategy of the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism on a period without time restrictions, due to the warranty given by the value of the Romanian village itself.

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An Empirical Approach to Traditional Products from Europe Compared to the Traditional ones from Romania

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Abstract

The traditional products exploitation is the source of income for many European manufacturers who have obtained the certification of traditional products at European level; thus, many of them avoided bankruptcy. This research has proposed to find out the situation at European and Romanian level for traditional product certification. In the end, conclusions were drawn based on the results, followed by ways to improve the situation in Romania.

Keywords: *traditional products, European Union, PDO (protected designation of origin), PGI (protected geographical indication), TSG (traditional specialty guaranteed)*

Rezumat. O abordare empirică a produselor tradiționale din Europa vis-a-vis de cele tradiționale din România

Valorificarea produselor tradiționale constituie sursă de venituri pentru mulți producători europeni care au obținut certificarea de produse tradiționale la nivel european, prin intermediul acestei certificări mulți dintre ei scăpând astfel de la faliment. Cercetarea si-a propus să afle situația la nivel european, respectiv la nivelul României, a certificării produselor tradiționale. În final au fost trase concluzii pe baza rezultatelor, urmate de recomandări pentru îmbunătățirea situației din România.

Cuvinte-cheie: *produse tradiționale, Uniunea Europeană, PDO (protejarea originii de fabricație), PGI (protejarea indicației geografice), TSG (specialități tradiționale garantate)*

Introduction

Traditional food has played a major role in the traditions of different cultures and regions for thousands of years. They include food that has been consumed locally and regionally for an extended time period. The preparation methods of traditional food are part of the folklore of a country or a region. Unfortunately, throughout Europe, some traditional food is on the brink of disappearance, due to altered lifestyles. Therefore, it is important to study and document traditional food to sustain important elements of European cultures. (<http://www.eurofir.net>)

Traditional food is an important element of the European cultural heritage. Production and sale of traditional food products provide a decisive economic input to many regions and can contribute to the diversification of rural areas and preventing them from depopulation. European consumers demand for safe and tasteful traditional food

products, but also for a higher variety, more convenient, more nutritive and healthier options that fit better with the present needs in modern societies (Guerrero et al. 2009). In this context, there are some unexploited opportunities for traditional food producers to maintain and even increase their market share by introducing innovations in their products, given that some of the current technologies involved in the production of traditional food products still rely on traditional manufacturing practices with low competitiveness and poor efficiency (Guerrero et al. 2010).

The European Union law lays down stringent requirements guaranteeing the standards of all European products. In addition, the EU quality schemes identify products and food stuffs farmed and produced to strict specifications.

Geographical indications and traditional specialties

The diversification of agricultural production should be encouraged. The rural economy could benefit considerably from the promotion of traditional products with specific characteristics, particularly in less-favoured or remote areas, both by improving the income of farmers and by retaining the rural population in these areas.

Three EU schemes known as PDO (protected designation of origin), PGI (protected geographical indication) and TSG (traditional speciality guaranteed) promote and protect the names of quality agricultural products and foodstuffs.

The following EU schemes encourage diverse agricultural production, protect product names from misuse and imitation and help consumers by giving them information concerning the specific character of the products: (<http://ec.europa.eu>)

PDO- covers agricultural products and foodstuffs which are produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognized know-how (<http://europa.eu>) (table 1).

PGI- covers agricultural products and foodstuffs closely linked to the geographical area. At least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation takes place in the area (table 2).

TSG- highlights traditional character, either in the composition or means of production (table 3).



To be registered a product must undergo certain stages pointed out in the outline below:

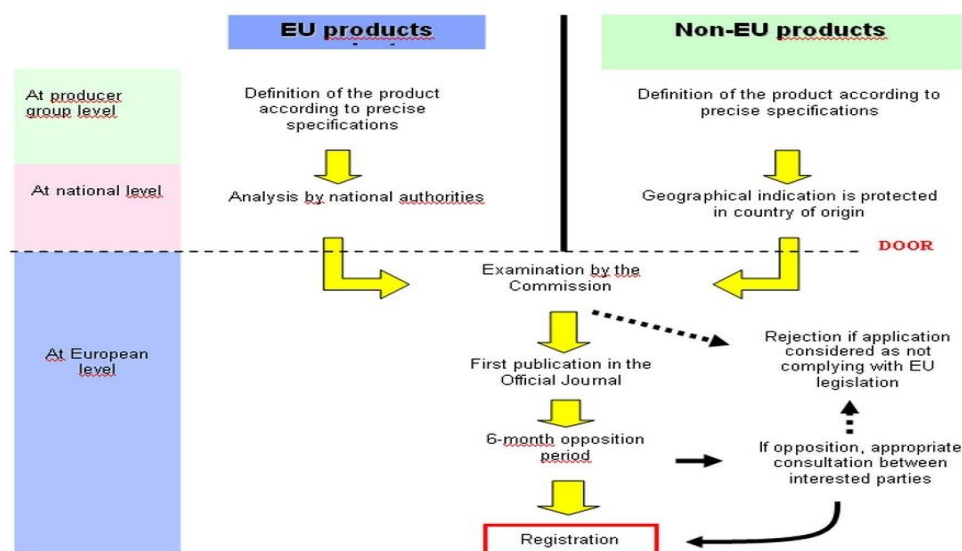


Fig. 1: Stages involved in products registration (<http://ec.europa.eu>)

The Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2006 of 20 March 2006 on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialties guaranteed is the EU law that stipulates the area of traditional specialties. (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu>).

Considering this definition as the starting point, we deepened the study on traditional products based on the data offered by the EU – Agriculture and rural development and we discover that at the European level they are: 511 PDO products, 37 PGI and 544 TSG.

Deepening on the division in the 27 EU Member States, we have found the following: The countries ranked first are France, Italy and Spain.

Table 1 PDO products

Austria	6	Italy	89
Belgium	5	Luxembourg	2
Bulgaria	1	Netherlands	3
Cyprus	2	Poland	16
Czech Republic	21	Portugal	58
Denmark	3	Romania	1
Finland	1	Slovakia	7
France	107	Slovenia	4
Germany	53	Spain	68
Greece	25	Sweden	3
Hungary	5	United Kingdom	23
Ireland	3	Total	506

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu>

This being due to the fact that they have a centuries-old tradition. The countries which joined after 2004 are poorly represented, except for Poland, which succeed to recognize the 16 products belonging to this category.

According to the data in table 1, four countries have not registered any items yet: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta. Romania has a single product, called „Magiunul de Topoloveni” (Topoloveni plum jam).

The leading country for PGI products is Poland, followed by Belgium, Czech Republic and Slovakia. Romania has no product in this category.

France's absence from this list is a surprise. More surprisingly, the countries that joined the EU after 2004 have the largest share in this category of products.

Table 2 PGI products

CZ/SK/Multi-country	4	Slovakia	2
Belgium	5	Slovenia	3
Finland	3	Spain	3
Italy	2	Sweden	2
Lithuania	1	United Kingdom	2
Netherlands	1	Total 37	
Poland	9		

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu>

The other countries have registered no such products.

Table 3 TSG products

Austria	8	Lithuania	1
Belgium	3	Luxembourg	2
Bulgaria	1	Netherlands	5
Czech Republic	6	Poland	8
Finland	4	Portugal	58
France	84	Slovenia	4
Germany	29	Spain	84
Greece	69	Sweden	1
Hungary	5	United Kingdom	17
Ireland	1	Total 542	
Italy	152		

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu>

By far, most of the products in this category belong to Italy followed, at a great distance, by France and Spain. Greece also has an important share in this category. Romania is missing from this list, just like other six countries. Poland is again the

champion for the countries which joined after 2004, followed by the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Traditional Products in Romania

At the end of 2011, Romania had 3,850 foodstuffs in Registry of attesting traditional products, with almost a thousand more than in 2010 (<http://www.manager.ro>).

According to the data of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR), most products are dairy products.

Unfortunately, for now, “Magiunul de Topoloveni” is the only foodstuff which managed to obtain the community protection. Two other Romanian products have documentation submitted to MADR for getting community protection. It is about “Carnații de Plescoi/ Plescoi sausages” and “Pestele Novac afumat - Smoked Novac Fish” from “Bârsa Land”.

The former product aims at getting protected geographical indication (PGI), while the latter for protected designation of origin (PDO), both by ensuring protection of the designation of products.

Traditional specialty guaranteed (STG) is another attestation system that ensures the protection of the designation of agricultural products at European level.

Other six Romanian products which could gain community protection began the formalities for the submission at MADR.

The six products that have the documentation for submission to MADR are “Brânza telemea de Mărginimea Sibiului/ Mărginimea Sibiului cottage cheese”; „Brânza telemea de Sibiu/ Sibiu cottage cheese”; „Lapte gros de Mărginimea Sibiului/ Mărginimea Sibiului thick milk”; „Sloi de oaie de Mărginimea Sibiului/ Mărginimea Sibiului mutton sloi”; „Brânza telemea de Covarlui (Galați)/ Covarlui (Galati) cottage cheese” and “Brânza de burduf din Bran”/ Bran skin cheese.

Results and discussion

Although Romania has so many certified traditional product at local level, on the European market Romania does not count (an example of a product is “Palinca” – which originates in Transilvania, but was register by Hungary as Hungarian traditional product), Romania has only one recognized product. Romania has too few initiatives to recognize its legacy regarding traditional

food. Maybe it is a problem of money, but that is not a reason not to try to do more.

We have so much to offer, and a lot of opportunity to concur on the European market dedicated to the traditional food (If these traditional products are recognised as ecological ones, this may be an advantage – but we have problems in this sector also).

Romania has implemented the European directives which are not put into practice due to different political interests, either due to the lack of vision on the part of bodies concerned, or recklessness, or bureaucracy.

The resort ministry should get more involved in the process of obtaining the certification. Romanian peasant's life can be improved if their products would be recognized at European level.

Currently they fall victim to agricultural products profiteers even for raw materials or finished products ("Brânza de Sibiu/ Sibiu cheese" can be found now in all markets - and producers from Sibiu do not benefit from any income resulting from selling this product).

Through a coherent policy, the Romanian agriculture would transform the country from one of importation of agricultural products in a country of exporting finished agricultural products. There is potential in the area of dairy products, meat products (Carnații de Plescoi), alcoholic beverages (wine, "țuica"), and culinary products specific to various regions of the country.

Romania may follow the example of Poland that managed to impose itself on the European market with a significant number of traditional products. From the success of traditional Polish products rural communities benefited on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the Polish State began to collect more income from agriculture and from trade with traditional products. (Furmankiewicz et al., 2010; Bianka Kühne et al., 2010)

Therefore, a greater involvement is needed from the part of all those concerned, since this is the way to stop the inflow of young people from rural areas to the cities. The villages are inhabited by many old people who possess the know-how, and young people who are interested in the conservation of the methods of production for traditional products of any nature.

Traditional products can be involved in the attraction of tourists in different regions of the country and thus make Romania more attractive, generating more income.

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Opportunities for the Development of Tourism in Letea River Levee of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve

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Abstract

At the level of the Delta rural areas dominate. The river levee is Letea – C. A. Rosetti locality and it is considered the most isolated settlement in Romania. Making a strategic tool for tourism development in the Rosetti locality from turning its entire natural and cultural heritage has proven to be a multi-step problem, given the economic and social context of human settlements. Lifetime socio-economic development depends on a minimum shipping and road access.

The main problem is to change the management of existing resources and to reduce the phenomenon of accentuated depopulation and the current economic underdevelopment. There are many drawbacks, and the last 20 years have brought essential positive changes to the community life.

The degree of geographical isolation does not need to be primordial and may diminish its influence by expanding and upgrading communication lines and standard of living by making facilities and utilities, by diversifying local occupations. There are real opportunities for investment to start work and develop rural tourism in this situation.

Keywords: *Letea river levee, rural community, tourism development*

Rezumat. Oportunități de dezvoltare a turismului pe digul râului Letea din rezervația naturală a biosferei Delta Dunării

La nivelul Deltei Dunării domină zonele rurale. Digul râului este Letea- localitatea C.A. Rosetti fiind considerată cea mai izolată așezare din România. Realizarea unui instrument strategic pentru dezvoltarea turismului în localitatea Rosetti pentru a transforma întregul său patrimoniu natural și cultural, s-a dovedit a fi o problemă cu mai multe etape, având în vedere contextul economic și social al așezărilor umane. Dezvoltarea socio-economică depinde de un transport minim și de căi de acces rutiere.

Problema principală este de a schimba gestionarea resurselor existente și de a reduce fenomenul de depopulare accentuată și subdezvoltarea economică actuală. Există multe dezavantaje, iar ultimii 20 de ani au adus schimbări esențiale pozitive în viața comunității. Gradul de izolare geografică nu trebuie să fie primordial și își poate diminua influența prin extinderea și modernizarea liniilor de comunicație și a nivelului de trai prin crearea de facilități și utilități, prin diversificarea ocupațiilor locale. Există oportunități reale de investiții pentru a începe lucrările și pentru a dezvolta turismul rural în această situație.

Cuvinte-cheie: *digul râului Letea, comunitate rurală, dezvoltare turistică*

Introduction

The Danube Delta biosphere reserve (DDBR) owns an exceptional tourist potential as a UNESCO Patrimony component. For many years, it has been one of the most valuable symbols of Romanian tourism, being promoted at most of the internal and international tourism fairs. The recent study dedicated to the possibilities of developing tourism in this protected area is concentrated on the natural, cultural and accessibility characteristics of some localities from this delta area.

From the physical-geographic point of view, the Delta is divided crosswise on the river branches in two big natural sub-regions: river delta and sea delta. The river delta occupies over 65% of the total surface of the delta and lies from the Izmail islet to the lower part of the river, to the Letea and Caraorman sand banks, on the Periprava line (on the Chilia branch) – Crisan (on the Sulina branch) – Iancea (on the Sf. Gheorghe branch) – Crasnicol – Perisor.

The sea delta occupies less than 35% of the Danube Delta surface, to the east of the Periprava-Crișan-Iancea-Crasnicol-Perisor line. Within this wild nature space, there are 327 bird species, of

which 218 species nest here and 109 species come here, while passing to other lands. The different origin of birds: Mediterranean, Mongolian, Siberian, European, Chinese, Arctic makes the Danube Delta be considered one of the most interesting deltas of the world.

This is a main tourist attraction of the country, with a unique status. Romania received the Blue Globe for the Danube Delta biosphere reserve inside the 10th reunion of the Parts Conference at the Convention for Biologic Diversity in Japan, in 2010, granted for the best management practice of wet areas on Terra.

River transport is the most important way to enter the delta; its specific making the circulation in its interior is almost exclusively by water, a fact which represents one of the most important tourist attractions. To this purpose, the natural hydrographic network is used, including the Danube branches, ponds, lakes, as well as the channels created through dredging for reed-fishing facilities. The geographic conditions of the delta and the navigation characteristics of its main branches and secondary channels determine the use of certain types of ships which should have access to all areas.

Having in view these characteristics of the Danube Delta, some localities have been selected which could be more attractive from the tourist point of view by creating some camping spaces, adequate for an organized and protective tourism to the existent wild nature.

Consequently, initially, before presenting the current documentation, the following localities have been selected:

- the Chilia branch – the localities: Pardina, C.A.Rosetti;
- the Tulcea branch – the Tulcea municipality;
- the Sulina branch – the localities: Maliuc, Crișan, Sulina;
- the Sf. Gheorghe branch – the localities: Beștepe, Mahmudia, Murighiol, Nufăru.
- the Razim –Sinoe complex – the Corbu locality - the Constanța county.

Currently, in the Danube Delta 4 authorised campings function, in the localities: Chilia, Sfântu Gheorghe, Partizani, Sulina, in the Gura Portiței area ('Ecomagazin', 4 June 2011, www.ecomagazin.ro). The initiation of the whole study was carried out by contacting town-halls, for obtaining relevant data and information in order to select the real possibilities of direct investments through public-

private partnerships for finding and building some camping fields. Having in view that few administrations have responded to our requests, formulated as official documents, sent by fax, others by telephone (the telephone calls were made by NIRDТ during 27 June-12 July 2011).

After analysing these data and telephone discussions, we have remarked that only some of the delta localities selected in this study own opportunities to create such tourist accommodation objectives. Later, after travelling there and discussing with the local officials about the real opportunities for tourist camping, other completions were made.

Finally, the following localities can be mentioned: Corbu, Beștepe, Sulina, C.A.Rosetti, Murighiol, Maliuc, Mahmudia which have formulated the option for direct investment in camping. Some of the localities do not own available fields (Nufăru, Pardina) or are affected by periodic floods (Crișan) or have proved less interest for this opportunity (Maliuc). Of these localities, C.A.Rosetti locality has the best chances to develop tourism, having in view that agricultural occupations have a secondary role due to the poor quality of the soils.

In these localities, the local public administrations have not understood that tourism, together with fishing and agriculture can become an activity with ascendant evolution, economically attractive, having in view the beauty and originality of natural landscapes and the possibilities of getting to know the Danube Delta specific bio-diversity, practice of sport fishing, water easy sports.

The economic activities will have to be carefully harmonised and with the new Danube Delta law (In early July 2011, the Romanian President promulgated the new Delta Law by Decree no. 614/2011 on 04.07.2011 as an organic law (Law no. 136/2011). The law draft was initiated in the Danube Delta Biosphere Administration (DDBA) after a series of consultations), promulgated at the beginning of July, that imposes strict restrictions concerning the activities in the strictly protected areas inside the Danube Delta biosphere reserve (DDBR), human activities being forbidden, except for research, education and ecotourism ones, with the limits initially described in the management plan.

Consequently, the greatest attention was offered to C.A.Rosetti locality which includes several villages, lying entirely on the Letea sand bank. Creating a strategic instrument for the tourist development of C.A.Rosetti locality, starting from the capitalisation of

its whole natural and cultural patrimony has proved to be an idea with multiple problems given by the economic and social context of this human settlement. The whole socio-economic life depends on the river navigation and a minimal route access.

Methodologic and documentary aspects

Most rural localities in the delta are confronted with a clear economic sub-development. The essential problem is that of changing the way of administrating the natural and cultural resources, to diminish the depopulation phenomenon, improving the life level of the local population. There are many delays and the last 20 years have not brought positive, essential changes in the community life.

The whole bibliographic and field documentation represents the start of a process of recuperation of some existing values with tourist valences, as a pre-condition of re - dynamization and diversification of tourism in this delta area. Consequently, an extended investigation of local problems and the main institutions with decision-making and implementing attributions have been consulted.

In this aspect, the data and information obtained from the two field trips, 13-16 July and 28-30 August 2011 on the Letea sand bank are very useful. This study has been a preparative action in order to support the carrying out of some investment works for the tourism development in this rural locality. In this context, we have asked for opinions and information from the Danube Delta biosphere reserve, the Danube Delta research-development institute, both from Tulcea, the town-hall of the C.A.Rosetti locality, the Environment ministry – the Biodiversity conservation, the “Vier Pfoten” Foundation, multiple interviews and articles from the central and local press.

The evaluation focused on the C.A.Rosetti locality. The analysis included the tourist, natural and cultural potential, demographic, economic aspects, others related to the town infrastructure and communication ways, environment quality and tourism development which are specific to C.A.Rosetti locality with all the component villages - Cardon, C. A. Rosetti, Letea, Periprava, Sfîstofca; an important aspect was the presentation of some solutions for managing the wild horses on the Letea sand bank. More than that, the current level of tourism development on the locality territory has been evaluated and a series of proposals to support

the development of the tourist function for this rural settlement have been made.

The tourism development level

C.A.Rosetti locality lies in the north-eastern part of the Danube Delta and of the Tulcea County. The distance between the Tulcea municipality and this locality is of 102 km and from the Sulina town of 18 km. This locality is one of the most isolated human settlements in DDBR. The component villages on the homonymous sand bank can be found at the following distances: Letea – 4 km from C.A.Rosetti; Periprava – 14 km from the locality residence village, Sfîstofca – 2 km, Cardon – 8 km.

The only route access is the DC3 locality road which connects the locality to Sulina and the component villages. Letea village lies at 23 km north-west of the Sulina town, the village being connected to Sulina through a stone road. Between the villages of the commune there is a land connection road covered with stone (big crushed granite), circulating for strong cars and those equipped with adequate tyres or tractors.

Naval access – excepting for C.A.Rosetti residence village, all the other four villages are connected to a stream - Letea to the channel Magearu; Periprava to the Chilia channel; Sfîstofca and Cardon to the Sulina channel and the Popina Fisheries Facility (data owned by the Vox Delta association.ro/e-town-halls). The main gateway to the sand bank is the Sulina channel with a length of 69.7 km, average width of 348 m and the second is the Chilia channel, 120 km long 340 m wide (Gâstescu, Ştiucă, 2008). Another access to the Letea village is made through the Dunarea Veche branch, through the Magearu channel that separates almost equally the smaller sand banks in the south (information in conformity to the Tourist map of the Danube Delta, by F. Huber şi Niculescu, Niculescu publishing house, 2008, Bucureşti).

In the villages there are no boat mooring pontoons, some are improvised by the local people from wooden beams or simple metal bars. Local people more and more rarely use the more traditional boats, with wooden paddles on the small channels, on short distances and for local fishing or for walking tourists. For a better navigation on the smaller channels, they must periodically be declogged.

The Letea river-sea sand bank consists of joining other smaller sand bank (ARBDD- Visitor's guide (2011) – boards 99, 100, 108, 116 – Sub-sand banks

Răducu, in south-west, Ichim, Părului, Chirilă in the south, and centre, Pocora, Semiraci, Movilă, Șchiopu, Ilie, Sulina in south-east, Mostiștea, Cherhanalei, C.A.Rosetti in north-east) and has a triangular shape with a pointed peak to the north and the basis to the south (Petrescu, 1957, p.106). The western edge of the sand bank is an extension of the Bugeac shore that lies in the north of the Delta, in Ukraine. Its existence is due to the accumulative processes of the Chilia branch, with sedimentary deposits of marine origin.

For large waters, of over 7 hydro-degrees, the sand bank has an area of 8758 ha and at low waters, 3 hydro-degrees and has an area of 12,710 ha. Compared with other sand banks, Letea has the largest area no matter of the river waters height. The average altitude is 5.1 m.

On this sand bank there is a complex of lakes which lie on the same direction with the sub-sand banks, on the north-south direction (Petrescu, 1957, pp. 111-112). The lakes are billeted to the northern part of the sand bank and a more known lake is Nebunu, in the Periprava village. The current landscape of the sand bank is uneven, including sand dunes to the north and west but also small depressions created by the old lakes that were covered by sand and vegetation. The presence of the nature reserve in the Letea forest, with valuable flora items, some with unique value, the sand dunes specific vegetation and the forests of hasmace type is a great tourist attraction.

In the space of this delta, corresponding to C.A.Rosetti locality, there are two axes that concentrate the sightseeing attractions, namely:

✓ objectives belonging to the natural environment, as part of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, represented by: the Letea forest, the sand dunes on the sand bank, 'Sărăturile mari', the Magearu channel, the fishing areas in the surroundings, Matița lake - with an area of 652, 5 hectares, Merhei lake - with 1057.5 ha.

✓ on the basis of HG no .1284 of 2007 concerning the Natura 2000 network in Romania there are the following areas listed in ROSPA0031 – the Danube Delta and the Razim-Sinoe complex (published in MO, part I, nr.739/31.10.2007) and through Order M.1964/2008- ROSC 10065 - the Danube Delta (published in MO nr.68 bis/07.02.2008), legal documents where the share of the owned territories is presented. On the Letea sand bank there are several types of landscape, such as:

- aquatic surfaces landscapes, with forms of specific flora and fauna;
 - landscapes of the Letea forest, as distinct forest area, as flora and fauna biodiversity;
 - landscapes of the steppe meadows which include herbal and flower associations, which can also include the semi-wild horses;
 - landscapes of sand dunes, including specific vegetation forms ;
 - landscapes of the fishing villages, through the specific of the buildings and cultivated lands.
- ✓ a large number of endemic species makes the Romanian deltaic area be considered an important and valuable zoogenetic center (Drugescu, 1994, p.90). **The Letea and Caraorman sand banks are two cores of species of maximum value.** The Danube Delta went through a period of changes after the establishment of human settlements around 1800 and after the drainage interventions in 1976-1980, with the reduction of the number of aquatic species and increasing pests. After 1995, interventions were made for the renaturation of land areas and restoration of the water circulation.
- ✓ objectives related to the anthropic environment, due to preserving houses in time, churches, traditional architecture, popular technical facilities - Lippovan churches, old rite Orthodox of Periprava (a church dedicated to "St. Dumitru") and Sfiștofca (church dedicated the "Mother of God"), the windmill in the Rosetti village, fisheries in the Cardon and Periprava villages; the sweep wells in the old households, the ruins of the camp at Periprava;
- ✓ the "Annunciation" hermitage of 1990, in the clearing of the C.A.Rosetti-Cardon forest, the construction being carried out between 1990-1998, the cells and the church have already been completed, the first service took place in 2003. One can reach it from the Cardon channel and hence 1.5 km walking up to the monastery; it is at about halfway between C.A.Rosetti and Letea.
- ✓ objectives given by the existence of traditional old houses; these are mainly made of trellis work, adobe, wood, painted on the outside, beaten and cut thatch roofs, put in several layers, wooden fences; for some old houses the fretted wooden roof models from the roof top are impressive;
- ✓ traditional events - May 1st - Day of the village; the community celebrations of Lippovan Russian, orthodox of old rite – "Maslenitza", Jesus Resurrection, Jesus Birth, family traditions - baptism, wedding, funeral, specific cuisine: glapi,

varenki, piroghi, Blini, etc. (the site of the Lipovan Russians' Association in Romania);

✓ the possible tourist trails for the locality territory are given by the routes:

- Sulina – Periprava, on the direction Sulina – Cardon channel – Sfiștofca channel – Periprava;
- Sulina – Periprava, on the direction channel Cardon – Musura gulf – Musura branch – Stambulul vechi branch – Chilia branch – Periprava;
- Letea – C.A. Rosetti – Letea forest (proposed by ARBDD, 2010);
- Sfiștofca – C.A. Rosetti – the Nebunu lake and return;
- hiking is also made on a route in the dunes area on the direction Letea village – C.A. Rosetti village – Letea forest – Nebunu lake and back (Data of the Vox Delta Association, 2010).

From the above data, there results that the area has significant tourism potential, focused on natural resources, but the cultural ones, even if few, are not valued for being part of an attractive tourist offer. The local public administration has failed to find those instruments to develop local tourism or attract the local population in carrying out this approach.

The tourist reception units in this village are very few. There is a rural guesthouse of 4* with 15 rooms (30 beds) and 3* rooms for rent, respectively 8 rooms with 16 seats belonging to SC Gelmin SRL, near the Popina Fisheries Facility; the data can be found in the database of the Minister of Regional Development and Tourism, September 2011.

Another villa is Tado in the Letea village of 3 stars, a new building, used since 2008; it has 5 rooms with 2 beds and 3 rooms with three beds, each room equipped with bathroom. Both the villa and furniture have a style similar to the traditional one, specific to the delta. Inside the villa there is a restaurant, a bar and a conference room. In the courtyard, there are two pavilions, where people can have lunch or engage in any other outdoor activities. The location at only 3 km of the Letea forest will make it become a special attraction for tourists.

A land area of 9402 square meters in the built-up area of C.A. Rosetti, in the Sand bank area, right next to the Popina – Periprava Fisheries Facility, the SC. Ecoturism Danube Delta SRL company owns a number of 10 holiday huts, fully equipped, built of wood, thatched roof, each equipped with indoor bathroom and a dining room (fully equipped) which includes a kitchen, a bathroom and as annex – a boiler.

The holiday huts are destined for tourists accommodation (as well as for security personnel and employees) who come in the area, in particular to enjoy hunting and fishing, but also for making boat trips on certain routes in the Danube Delta, the main attraction point being the Letea forest where tourists can travel by foot, this being very close to buildings and huts (about 3 km). They are not registered by the Minister of Regional Development and Tourism-MDRT.

On the ruins of the former camp in Periprava, the French S. Remeter built the "Last Frontier" hotel, 4 *, which is already operational from 2011. This unit has 30 accommodation places in double rooms. The building, to the exterior, has kept something of the previous appearance, when the communist camp existed, but now, tourists have a special comfort inside.

This entrepreneur bought the land in 2006, transforming it into a resort for fishermen and nature lovers, with the support of EU funds. Also, he intends to transform the 46 military huts in a small museum.

The owner proposes to conduct several leisure activities, i.e.: fishing, bird watching, electric cars rental, kayaking tours, customized trips, guidance lessons, survival lessons, traditional cooking lessons, photography classes, Romanian interactive courses, Sulina beach, archery, volleyball, wii, games, petanque (data selected from the site of the accommodation unit, 2011).

The causes are multiple, but show that neither before, nor after 1990, there were no projects to support local people to find solutions for local development. Neither the local agriculture was supported or local handicrafts and tourism. The living conditions are below subsistence, which explains the high level of poverty and lack of urban facilities or medical assistance, better communication ways to reduce the degree of isolation.

Units of tourist reception with catering functions - there are no homologated food units in the MRDT database (updated on 20/06/2011); field studies have shown that there is a local buffet place which serves mainly alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, mineral water, soft drinks in pet bottles, packaged sweets, cans in every village.

The locality does not have a tourist information centre/point.

The recreational opportunities are given by the natural environment, in that one can go on trips to the villages by foot, go fishing, hunting and

participate in the few events related to holidays and patron festivals of churches and to sports performance about water sports and cooking, or ethnic minorities, but held in Tulcea and Sulina.

The tourism development possibilities in C. A. Rosetti locality

The locality has several specific aspects that can lead to the diversification of tourism activities here. The first aspect is given by solving the presence of horses and other by the modernisation of infrastructure and communication means between the component villages.

The recent history of these horses begins 80-100 years ago, when they were used for farming or transhumance. Although they were not many, were let free when the locals no longer exploited them economically. From the point of view of the race, the horses are the result of a cross between the 'huțul' and Arabic races and hence their colour and appearance. It is estimated they have reached the 7-8th Generation (considering some historical data, the civilization of the horse in delta lands would be much older, but the reality of their existence must be reported to the first farms and villages, when horses were used in agriculture, transport and sheep transhumance).

The strong numerical growth of the livestock dates from the last 20 years. The problem of the horses was due to the fact that there is no designed wilderness. A grazing fee is also required, being much higher than the local revenues.

The negative phenomena are generated by the increased number of these animals in an uncontrolled manner; they have not received adequate food resources and therefore, have found shelter and food in winter in the Letea forest, a strictly protected nature reserve. In addition, the horses had no identification chips (elapid species) and many have no ownership documents.

The DDBR officials estimate that there are, according to the Sanitary-Veterinary Tulcea department, about 4,000 semi-wild horses and thousands of cattle and pigs belonging to the natives that grow freely in natural areas of the delta villages. The number of horses has been greatly diminished by the severe winter in 2009-2010 (fig. 1, 2, 3, 4).

At C.A.Rosetti locality level, the Vier Pfoten NGO (procedure started in 2010), estimates there are about 750-800 horses, but their number is greatly/ by far exceeded by that of the free cattle, about 2,000, for which state subsidies are collected. The town-hall has the right to take unclaimed animals which do not have property and evidence documents, but it has no resources to feed and care for them.

The chosen solution on the short term was for these to be held in quarantine, with medical monitorisation, castrated and then kept in a large pen (about 1,000 ha). Another solution would be to create an association, local support for the local people raising horses, applying the current legislation for horse rearing, the auctioning of youngsters, building a riding center, as the one in the Rhône - Camargue delta (there is an International league for the protection of horses (ILPH) with the headquarters in the UK).



Fig. 1: Traditional house hold in Cardon village



Fig. 2: Typical house in Letea village



Fig. 3: Narrow street in the Letea, to the church



Fig. 4: Narrow street in the to Magearu Channel

Source: photos realized by T.Simon at Letea, August 2011

In addition, for the Danube Delta situation, the horses can be used for equestrian rides, gig rides or riding lessons, thereby bringing income to their care, beyond those allocated by different government local public institutions or NGOs.

They would have left a very small number of horses in freedom as mere tourist attraction. For the protection and care of horses, the Vier Pfoten foundation, according to the protocol signed in August 2011, needs about 1,000 hectares of land, an administrative and record center of the animals and feed store (for a period of 10 years). The document provides, among other things, micro-chips for horses, identification of the owners, sterilization of stallions genetically unworthy, a local community involvement in their care and educating people about the indirect benefits that horses can bring to the localities in the Delta. This project will have to be continued by local authorities, after the 10 years grace period.

Another important proposal was to create new possibilities for tourists; this is because on the C.A.Rosetti locality territory, the accommodation possibilities are very few, being one of the most isolated villages in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. Of all the villages in the C.A.Rosetti locality, Periprava is the most easily accessible, with a port at the Danube, on the Chilia branch; this is the only village of the locality which has water supply network, being in stage of completion.

The proposed site is very picturesque, being situated on the border of Nebunu Lake and near the Letea forest. The camping platform was created to include more buildings and accommodation specific facilities in camping structures, except that the particular location, i.e. inside the DDBR area, without car access, but only by ships, restricts the access of trailers and auto-caravans.

Nine modules of bungalow-type, with 18 rooms and 36 places were provided. The rooms have single beds, with 2.00x0.90 m with bedsteads, mattresses and protection mattress, nightstands, two doors wardrobe, table with chairs, luggage holder, hanger, and mirror, buffet-bar equipped with television and minibar refrigeration. The terrace of the building will have PVC furniture (round table and chairs with arms). The + / - 0.00 rate will be at 0.60 m above the ground.

These two proposals are just some of those that have been proposed, but financial resources lack and the town-hall does not have the ability to contribute to the support of some projects with European funds and its involvement is not very active.

The development of the communication ways and tourist infrastructure requires more investments to cover the needs of the locality and tourists. The emphasis was put on upgrading the inter-locality roads, de-clogging of side channels, the diversification of the local economy through the re-continuation of crafts, ending some contracts for the use of fisheries facilities abusively, affecting local people, making boat mooring pontoons, in the marginal area of channels leading to the Cardon, Letea and Periprava villages; creating some camping grounds in the mentioned villages, tourism panels in Cardon, Letea and Periprava, where at the entrance in the village information about the Letea sand bank-DDBR could be posted, with the distances between villages and main tourist attractions, building new towers for watching nature, inside the branches, for bird-fauna and watching 4 horses, etc. Knowing in detail the inhabitants' needs in these unique regions is important, for tourism to become part of a sustainable local economy.

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Aspects Concerning Tourism-Related Communication. Case Study: Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Romania)

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Abstract

Tourism is a phenomenon where communication is particularly important, being largely responsible for converting prospective tourists, into actual tourists. The article is based on the paradigm, functions and factors of tourism-related communication, and analysis how tourism-related communication takes place in the Poiana Rusca Mountains tourist area. This is a mountain area with complex tourism potential, located within the 1.5 hours isochrone of several urban centers, which makes it attractive for weekend, proximity tourism. The analysis considered several components: communication within the emitting spaces, communication within the studied area, as well as communication using the cyberspace. Based on the general theory of communication and its practice in tourism, the conclusion reveals several restrictive elements on the side of the sender - advertising being in short supply and lacking a coherent message -, as well as on that of the receiver - the absence of a predilection for outdoor tourism and hiking.

Keywords: *communication in tourism, tourist signaling, local actors, Poiana Rusca Mountains, Romania*

Rezumat. Aspecte privind comunicarea în turism. Studiu de caz: Munții Poiana Ruscă (România)

Turismul este un fenomen pentru care comunicarea este în mod special importantă, fiind responsabilă în bună măsură de transformarea turiștilor potențiali, în turiști efectivi. Articolul pornește de la paradigma, funcțiile și factorii comunicării în turism și analizează modul în care se realizează comunicarea turistică în cazul arealului turistic Munții Poiana Ruscă. Acesta este un spațiu montan cu un potențial turistic complex, situat în interiorul izocroniei de 1,5 ore față de mai multe centre urbane, ceea ce-l face atractiv pentru turismul de proximitate, de week-end. Analiza a avut în vedere mai multe componente: comunicarea din spațiile emițătoare, comunicarea din arealul studiat, respectiv comunicarea prin intermediul spațiului virtual. Concluzia evidențiază, în raport cu teoria generală a comunicării și a practicii comunicării în turism, concluziile relevă câteva elemente de constrângere din partea emițătorului – insuficienta atenție acordată publicității, nerealizarea unui mesaj coerent –, respectiv din partea receptorului – absența unui interes predilect către turismul în aer liber, de drumeție.

Cuvinte-cheie: *comunicare în turism, semnalizare turistică, actori locali, Munții Poiana Ruscă, România*

Introduction

A complex social and economic process, tourism starts with carrying tourist flows between places distant from each other: the emitter and, respectively, the receiver spaces. Tourist flows between the two spatial components are always preceded by information flows. In order to mobilize

the desired tourist flows, the information flows project images of the destination areas in the emitter areas. The images are far from being the result of spontaneous informing, left to chance.

The tourist space image, the image of the destination, is a key element of any tour operator strategy, being, therefore, the product of a sophisticated communication process.

Communication in tourism: paradigm, functions, factors

Communication: definition, evolution of models

Gerbner suggests that communication is social interaction through messages (as cited in McQuail, 2001). Communication differs from informing, as it occurs whenever a system – the source – affects another system – the recipient – by using messages sent through the channel connecting the two systems (McQuail, 2001). In other words, unlike plain informing, communication involves intentionality directed toward a targeted outcome (ibid.).

The initial, generally accepted model of communication highlighted a transmitter, a channel, a message and a receiver.

As studies, guided by practical concerns, have multiplied and deepened, the model has undergone adjustments, integrating such aspects as:

- the context in which communication occurs, the relationship between the transmitter and the receiver, the contents the messages cover, the intent/purpose of the fact of communication or reception;
- two additional processes: the coding (at the end represented by the emitter), where the following are important: the technical changes, the choice of words, images, formats; and, respectively, the decoding (at the end represented by the receiver)/ the re-translation of the message to capture the meaning;
- the ineffectiveness of communication links (Gerbner, as cited in McQuail, 2001);
- the way in which the communicator refers to the receiver, in order to intercept the latter's needs and interests;
- the way in which communication is guided by the anticipated requirements of the audience, more than by the communicator's interests (Popa, 2005);
- the way in which the active audience is outlined;
- the progressive inadequacy of the ideal model of communication through a centralized media institution, which broadcasts the same content to large and stable audiences.

Communication in tourism: factor, forms, means

As a specific form of commercial communication, communication in tourism refers to the transmission of messages to: tourists (present and prospective), partners (present and prospective), as well as to all

the other tourism involved actors in the public or private sector (institutions, associations, businesses, individuals), with the purpose of ensuring the growth of the economic and social efficiency of tourism.

In the field of tourism, communication takes place in/between several scalar levels: global, national, regional, departmental and local level.

Depending on the means employed, communication can be: publicized (print media, radio, TV) and non-publicized (via mail, including electronic means, event organization) (Rotar, Campeanu-Sonea, Ilieș & Ilieș, 2006).

Tourism-related communication carriers are diverse:

- advertisement carriers like booklets, brochures, catalogs, posters, postcards, maps, tourist guides;
- electronic carriers: audio and video cassettes;
- carriers provided by new information and communication technologies: the Internet, CD-s, DVD-s;
- complementary carriers like tourist objects (handicrafts, postcards, etc.).

An important part of tourism communication is the signaling, which is largely responsible for the satisfaction felt by tourists, once in the destination space.

Signaling carriers include: signs (tourist road signs, for tourist attractions), billboards (for directions and for information, for identification) markings, landmarks.

Recognition of the significance of signaling – as part of tourism communication – led to the international regulation of this activity (Huet, Rabeyrin & Sultan, 1999).

Case study: the analysis of tourism communication for the Poiana Ruscă Mountains

Premises of the study

The Poiana Ruscă Mountains are a component of the Western branch of the Romanian Carpathians, being accessible from a number of urban poles in less than two hours (Fig. 1) and having a complex tourism potential (Fig. 2).

More precisely, there are 7 towns (table 1), situated next to this mountainous area. All these are big towns, according to Romanian classification, 4 of them are county capitals (Timișoara, Arad, Alba Iulia and Deva) and one is the most important town from the Western part of Romania (Timișoara).

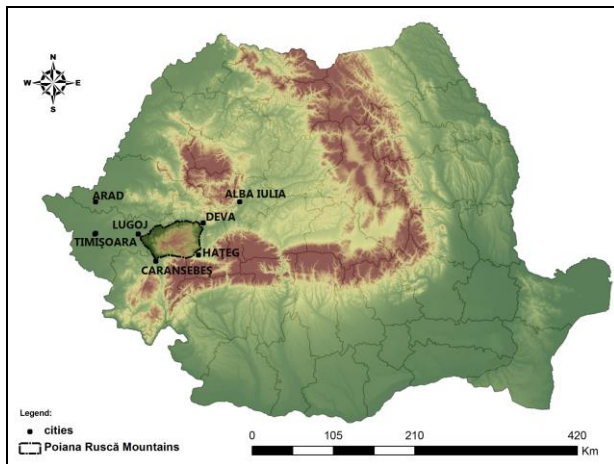


Fig. 1: Geographical Position of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains

These towns constitute the potential tourism market for the analyzed area for several reasons:

- as in all big towns from Romania, there is an important proportion of young adults, from which a great number have children - from which results the interest for week-end tourism in the proximity (with the form of team-building in nature, ecotourism, cultural tourism);
- these towns concentrate an important number of schools of all levels and an important number of pupils - the school tourism is a constant component of extracurricular activities, well related with the major objective of knowing the national space and nature and also with that of cultivating the values of ecology ;
- the Poiana Ruscă Mountains are surrounded by European and national roads and also bounded in North, West and East by rails, the journey from these towns last between 30 minutes to about 1,5 hours.

Table 1 Main characteristics of the towns situated in the proximity of the study area (2010)

town	no of inhabitants	type	% of people aged between 20 – 65 years	school population (nr.)	unemployment ratio (%)*	journey (minutes)
Timișoara	311440	regional pole	70.97	149161	2.69	90
Arad	165014	county capital	68.52	90074	3.10	90
Alba Iulia	68450	county capital	71.67	34194	4.91	90
Deva	66365	county capital	68.55	27829	5.42	30
Hunedoara	69916	2 nd rank town	66.54	27376	5.46	15
Lugoj	44596	2 nd rank town	68.07	19989	3.31	20
Caransebeș	28461	2 nd rank town	68.80	15719	3.21	20

- The unemployment ratio at the national level was 7.5% .

Source of data: INSSE (2010), Law no 351/2001 concerning the Approval of the Plan for Arrangement of the National Territory, Road Atlas of Romania (2010)

The quasi-unaffected by human intervention natural environment, the diverse landscape, the large share of forest vegetation, alongside with the punctual presence of elements of the traditional rural culture, all establish this area as one of the most suitable areas for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of the urban population.

Poiana Rusca Mountains are medium height mountains.

The complex petrographic structure, combining crystalline rocks, dolomite and limestone, provides a varied landscape:

- sharp peaks (Fades and Rusca) or special forms (a sphinx, like those close to the Crivina and Nădrag settlements);
- large plateaus, broad summits;

- steep slopes (Sohodol, Beghei, Sașa, Zlatul valley realms); sometimes the slopes stand 250-300 m above the valleys, which thus look like gorges (the gorges of the Cerna at Hunedoara) or even like canyons, on short sectors: the Cerna valley (between Hasdat and Cerna Meadow) and the valleys of the Runcu, Valerița, Sohodol, Bega, Zlata and Lăpugiu;

- small and medium-sized caves, known as fossil caves, grouped in the Bega, Lăpugiu, Dobra, and Runcu Sohodol pools; the caves Stanca lui Florian (Florian's Rock), Piatra Fetii (The Girl's Stone), Românești (Tomești village) Peștera Crucii (The Cross Cave – Roscani village) are among the best known (Ciorogariu, 2011).

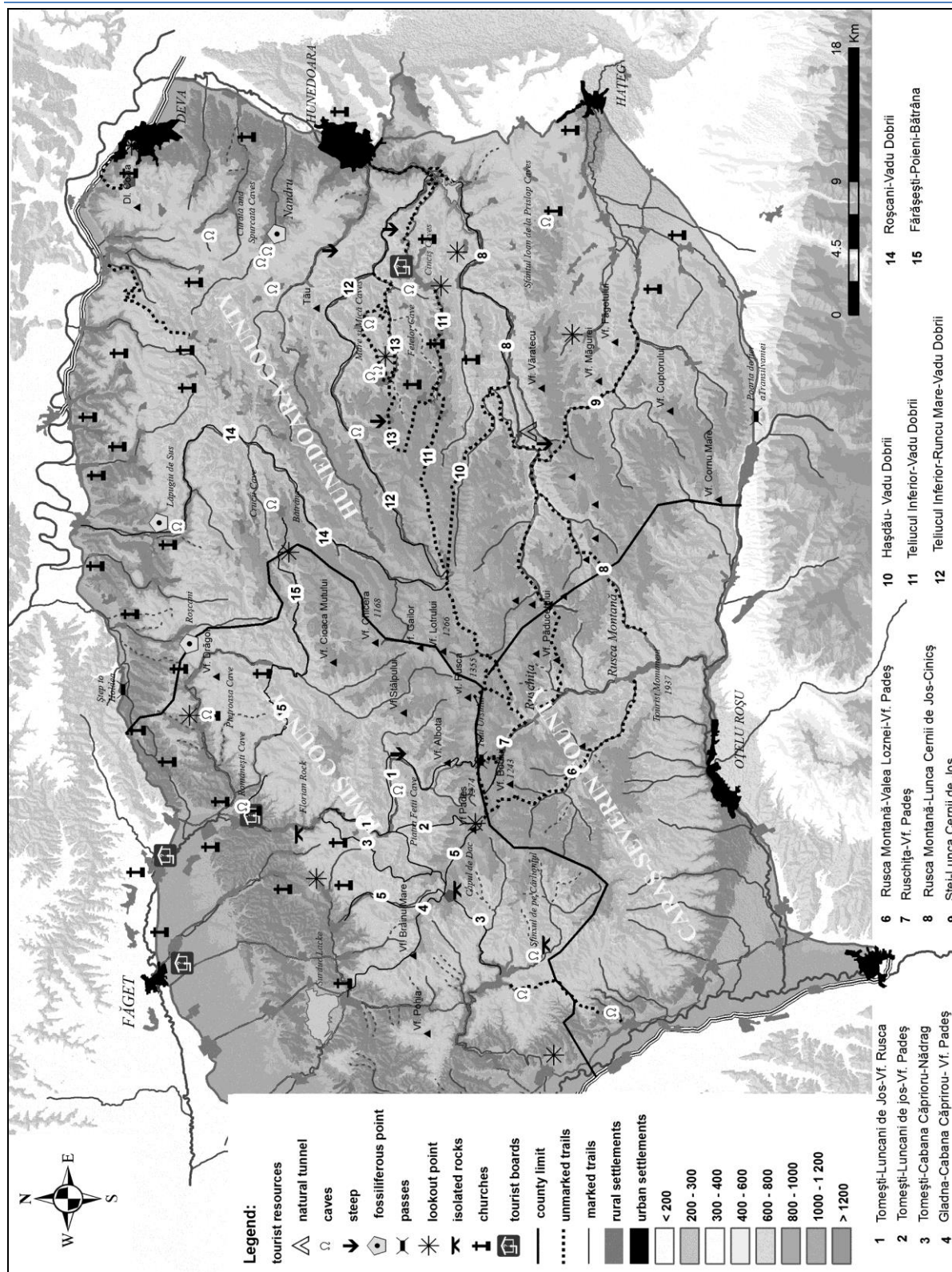


Fig. 2: Tourism Resources and Signaling for Tourism in the Poiana Ruscă Mountains (©Ciorogariu, 2012)

The length and continuity of human settlements in the territory afferent to the Poiana Ruscă Mountains is attested by numerous archaeological sites that exist in this area. Sites from the Geto-Dacian, Roman, 2nd – 3rd century AD are prevalent, and the most important locations are: the

archaeological site at Deva, with the “dealul Cetatii” (“Citadel hill”) point, the archaeological site in Hunedoara, with the „dealul Sânpetru” (“St. Peter hill”) point, the archaeological site of Bucova, with the “Iron Gate of Transylvania” point, the

archaeological site from Nandru, and the "Water cave" archaeological site - Românești.

Besides these archaeological sites, the Poiana Rusca Mountains area and the immediate vicinity include important cultural buildings, religious buildings (the wooden churches in the Făget area and on the Mures Valley, monastic establishments: Prislop, Luncanii de Sus, Românești), ethnographic resources (all over the mountains, represented by local architecture, costumes and artistic manifestations).

Starting, therefore, from the premise that the Poiana Rusca Mountains present a certain tourism value in a regional context (Figure 2), the main objective of this study is to analyze the forms and means of tourism-related communication concerning this mountain.

We considered:

- communication with target audiences (prospective tourists), performed in the emitting spaces and on the Internet;
- tourism signaling within the studied area.

Main findings

Communication of messages with tourism content in potential tourist-emitting areas

The research carried out at the level of the travel agencies from the 7 towns located within the 1.5 hours isochrone (Figure 1) pointed out that none of the travel agencies promotes the Poiana Rusca Mountains area.

It should be noted that the regional area in general, and even the national area, are poorly promoted by these agencies.

The interviews performed with tour operators revealed the following explanative factors:

- most of the urban population has relatives or homes in the close proximity rural areas, which satisfies the need for recreation in unpolluted areas;
- the prospective tourists favor foreign destinations, which are relatively easily accessible, due to the Western location of their towns and to the presence of an international airport in the region;
- the relatively modest accommodation-related infrastructure in the Poiana Rusca Mountains is improper for a significant holiday tourism, hence the disinterest of tourism agencies.

In cyberspace, the Poiana Rusca Mountains are present in two categories of sites: sites of

associations working in the regional area and conducting their businesses in an area including the Poiana Rusca Mountains, and sites of the politico-administrative units responsible for the areas that include these mountains.

In the first category of sites, namely those of associations, in relation to the type of information provided about the study area, we distinguished between:

- sites providing tourist information (web pages of the following associations: Concordia Travel Club from Lugoj, SPEOTIMIȘ Speleological Association from Timișoara, Carpathians Mountain Association)
- sites including touristic and scientific information (web pages of the following associations: Prusik Speleological Association from Timișoara, Proteus Speleological Association from Hunedoara;
- sites providing only scientific information (web page of the SpeleoTeam Association, from Timișoara).

The sites of the administrative units of the Poiana Rusca Mountains differ in relation to the type of information provided about the mountains, as follows:

- sites providing tourism information (web pages of the following communes: Ghelari, Lelese, Cerbul, Vețel, Lăpușiu de Jos, Bunila, Pietroasa, Tomești, Nădrag, Fârdea, Rusca Montana);
- sites that provide tourism-related information and information about their geographical characteristics (web pages of the following communes: Dobra, Bătrâna, Teliucul Inferior, Toplita);
- sites that include only geographical information about the mountains (as in the case of Lunca Cernii de Jos).

Onsite tourism signaling

In the Poiana Rusca Mountains area, signaling is performed through tourist billboards, and through tourist road markings and signs.

From the 40 communes from within the mountain area, only one has produced tourist billboards: Ghelari village, located in the Eastern mountains, has two billboards, each presenting one characteristic aspect of the cultural patrimony (the churches) (Fig. 3) and of the local occupations (mining and steel work) (Fig. 4).

Another two billboards are identical and provide information on the wooden churches in the proximity and within the mountains, churches that

are on the list of national cultural patrimony. Both billboards are placed in two localities situated on the westerly access axes (in Faget and Margina

settlements). In addition to the information about churches, the billboards include a distribution scheme of these tourist objectives (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3: Billboard about churches – Ghelari (Ciorogariu, 2012)



Fig. 4: Billboard about local occupations - Ghelari (Ciorogariu, 2011)



Fig. 5: Wood churches billboard in Făget and Margina (Ciorogariu, 2011)

A fourth billboard presents the tourist map of a small area around the village where it is located - Românești.

We can assume that the billboards comply with the conditions of visibility, size, and aesthetics.

Field verification of the way in which tourist routes are marked on the tourist maps pointed out that only approximately 50% are identified by markings.



Fig. 6: Markings made by a local (Ciorogariu, 2011)

There is a clear distinction, in this regard, between the Eastern and Western mountain areas (Figure 2).

Thus, the markers are present on the western board of the mountain, which are administrated by Timis County, and specifically around the Pades - Rusca ridge and of Nădrag, Ruschița, Luncani settlements.

It is notable that around Nădrag town, the markings are made in a primitive style (Fig. 6), being the result of the private initiative of a connoisseur and enthusiast of the area.

In the rest of the Western area, the markings are restored in a standardized manner, on an almost yearly basis, by members of two associations: the Association of Geography Students in Timisoara - GEOTIM and the Banat Travel Club (Fig. 7).

Sometimes the marking signs are posted at longer distances from one another, which endangers tourist safety, especially in areas where tourist routes do not overlap forest roads or trails.



Fig.7: Markings made by the Geotim ONG (Ciorogariu, 2011)

The Eastern side of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains, belonging to Hunedoara County, has no markings, except a single route, marked by the owners of the neighboring guesthouse.

Tourist road signs are only present in localities that have wooden churches and are used solely for their signaling.

Conclusion

The performed analysis allows us to appreciate tourism-related communication concerning the Poiana Ruscă Mountains as being modest in nature, by considering the following:

- tourism-related messages concerning the researched area are nonexistent in the regional level poles, which are potential tourist emitters;
- only 25% of the sites of the territorial administrative units across the Poiana Ruscă Mountains provide information about them;
- there is no special site dedicated to tourism in the Poiana Ruscă Mountains;
- signaling is minimal, unsatisfactory for the (orientation-related) tourists' security requirements; there is no signaling at all for 50% of the trails, lookout points, natural sites; there are no such signs as terminals and flags at all.

Considering the fundamental premise that the researched area has a real potential for regional tourism, as well as the positive effects that tourism could have on local development, we believe it is highly needed that the regional development institutions, respectively the local authorities concerned, improve the communication gaps, including signaling, thus ensuring the inclusion of this space in the regional tourism circuits.

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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; - Buteni;	- Prior appointment; - Prior appointment;
Caraș –Severin County	- Biniș; - Prigor;	- Permanently; - Permanently between 15 September-20 June and with appointment the rest of the year;
	- Eftimie Murgu;	- Permanently;
Hunedoara County	- Cristiu;	- Prior appointment; - Permanently;
	- Târnăvița;	
Timiș County	- 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 Hălmașiu;

"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.

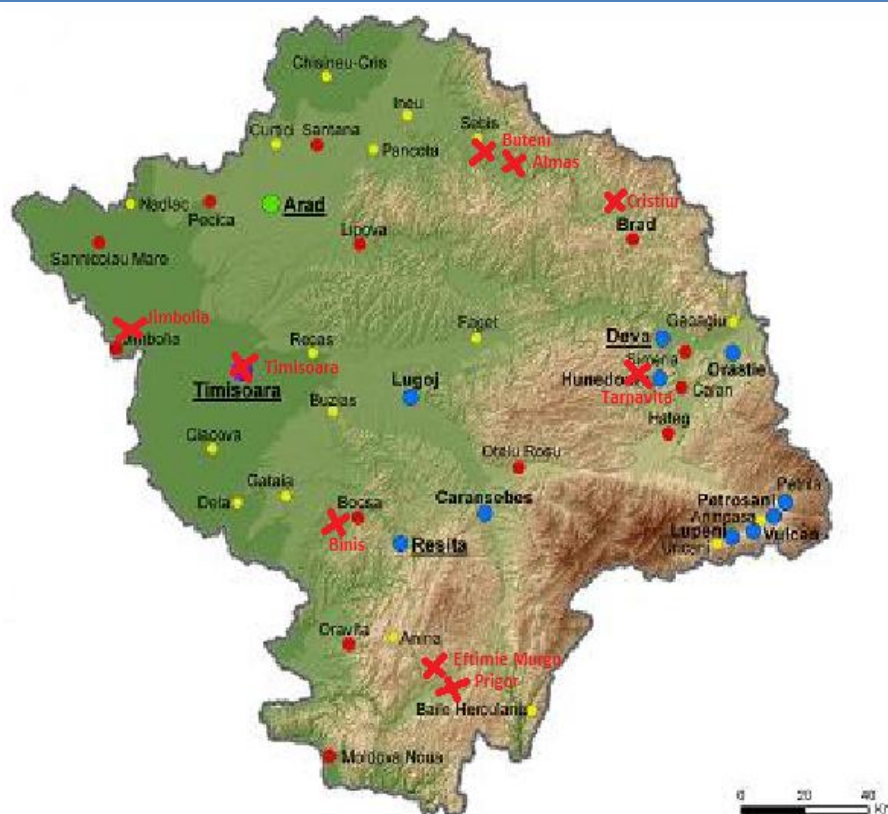


Fig. 1: Ethno-folkloric centres in the West Region

Conclusion

Within a region there are bigger possibilities through community polities for development of certain types of tourism

The West Region, through its geographic position and its components, offers opportunities for the development of cultural and ethno-folkloric tourism. Through this type of tourism we can maintain the inhabitants' cultural identity.

The involvement of local authorities and communities seems to have increased, which is seen in the land arrangements, the maintenance of exhibits, the transmittal of crafts, traditions and customs to the young generations, the organization of ethno-folkloric events.

In the region there are a few important ethno-folkloric centres that, valorised through a tourist route, could attract tourists, from the country and from abroad. At present, tourists' accommodation and food is not possible in all these centres, which makes the development of the tourist activity more difficult. At the same time, prior appointments for visiting a tourist sight could be an impediment for the ethno-folkloric tourism in the West Region.

The development of the ethno-folkloric tourism is possible, a fact demonstrated by the tourists'

interest for the annual ethno-folkloric fairs and festivals. The participants' number to these events has always been impressive.

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Rural Tourism as a Strategic Option for Social and Economic Development in the Rural Area in Romania

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Abstract

The rural tourism is considered a strategy that can contribute to the decreasing of population mobility, creating employment opportunities, and also to the social-economic development of the rural area. Rural tourism and agritourism can satisfy the need for open space through recreation activities, responding to the increasing interest of the urban population for the natural patrimony and rural culture. Rural tourism marks the economic growth stimulation, the underdeveloped areas viability, the life standards improvement for local population. If the rural tourism accomplishes all these functions, it requires a development through which the resources durability is secured during its expansion. The tourism sustainable development in the rural area demands the ability to develop the tourism resources, creating links between different activity sectors in a certain way that the space value is preserved.

Keywords: rural tourism, social-economic development, rural area

Rezumat. Turismul rural ca opțiune strategică pentru dezvoltarea social - economică a zonei rurale din România

Turismul rural este considerat o strategie care poate contribui la scăderea mobilității populației, crearea de oportunități de angajare, precum și la dezvoltarea social-economică a zonei rurale. Turismul rural și agroturismul poate satisface nevoia de spațiu deschis prin activități recreative, răspunzând interesului crescut al populației urbane pentru patrimoniul natural și cultura rurală. Turismul rural marchează stimularea creșterii economice, viabilitatea zonelor subdezvoltate, îmbunătățirea standardelor de viață ale populației locale. Dacă turismul rural îndeplinește toate aceste funcții, acesta are nevoie de o dezvoltare prin care durabilitatea resurselor să fie asigurată în timpul expansiunii sale. Dezvoltarea turismului durabil în zona rurală necesită abilitatea de a dezvolta resursele turistice, creând legături între diferite sectoare de activitate într-un anumit mod astfel încât valoarea spațiului să fie păstrată.

Cuvinte-cheie: turism rural, dezvoltare social-economică, zonă rurală

Introduction

Rural tourism and agritourism, in the same time represents important elements of the strategic local and regional development, through which the resources should be used and granted in the most efficient way possible. Also, the tourism efficient organization and practice in the village demands, especially, the usage of the existing capacities in the destination area – usually small equipments or farms with a strong degree of familiarity; the direct contact with the local residents and area authenticity; avoiding the rural area sintering with a valuable tourism potential, and also the conservation and perpetuation of present values. At

the basis of rural tourism there are four essential elements (fig. 1), which creates it, as well:

In the last decades, the rural tourism has reached a rising curve. In its evolution from simple tourism activities and services to the ones today, more sophisticated and modern, this form of tourism benefited of favourable conditions of development. From the moment when most European countries had registered higher economical performances, the level of incomes, live standards and free time options of the population have risen to higher levels. Responding to new economic and social requirements, the rural tourism tried to become a viable alternative for the mass tourism, also the development of the communication ways, the means of transport modernization, specific infrastructure attracted important tourist flows for the rural space.

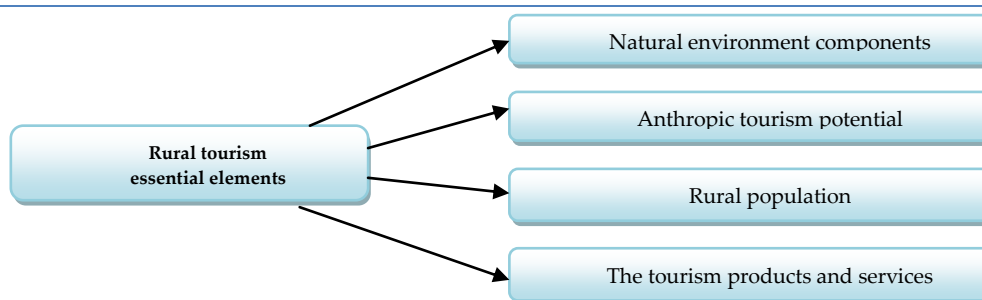


Fig. 1: The basic elements of rural tourism

Rural tourism is a complex activity, capable to determine mutations regarding the territorial profile development; from this angle, it is considered to be a method of attenuation for the interregional discrepancy, at a national and European scale. Furthermore, it promotes the consumption of different local resources, employment capital. It needs to be mentioned the tourism ecological vocation, in its strategic development the environmental protection has been imposed also.

On a social scale, tourism manifests itself as an education value, increasing the level of training, the local rural culture and civilization and the visitors, also. It made an important contribution to the population leisure activities and represents one of the main destinations for weekend recreation and holidays.

Tourism is an alternative and a necessity for the area social-economic recovery, its progress depending also on the national and local authorities assistance, but especially on the local community willing to change.

The rural space holds a variety of natural, historical, social-cultural tourism resources, indicating a high level of enhancing the value of the existing potential, moreover a significant factor in the social-economical development, being the main approach in the economic growth of an area. The tourism natural heritage is vastly rich and diverse, but is being only partial used.

The basic criteria and objectives for rural tourism

In the last decades, the EU regional development policies, together with the national policies of the member states encouraged the tourism orientation towards the rural areas, taking into account its effects and social positive implications. The studies made by the World Tourism Organization show the

fact that rural tourism is developing at a faster pace than the international tourism in its ensemble.

The necessary objectives in the tourism activities management in the rural area can be separated in three categories:

- ⊙ objectives that emphasize the prevention of rural population migration for the cities and the stimulation for returning to the rural settlements;
- ⊙ objectives that stress the lifestyle and civilization improvement in the rural space throughout additional incomes;
- ⊙ objectives regarding the rural environment protection and conservation (Mitrache et al., 1996), therefore with an ecological approach.

It is noticeable that, in the case of rural tourism and agritourism, the economic objectives (which express in a direct manner the interests of the involved parties in this certain activities) are correlated with the social objectives, unquantifiable, a fact that is reflected in the growing concern for social responsibilities of the farms or the agritouristic associations, responsibilities that require a "certain form of auto control", of increased sensibility for the social aspects (Ionescu et al., 2002).

In addition, certain objectives can have a contradictory aspect, such as: the increasing tourist circulation and, also the rural environment conservation and protection; improving the available resources from the rural areas and the objective stating the natural components conservation.

Successful rural tourism systematization involves more than the simple idea of accommodation and meal, it also entails the fulfillment of certain basic criteria:

- ⊙ the rural function capacity, capacity that is build on the existence of additional factors with an impact on the agritourism (rural buildings, rural residents, tradition, rural aspect, agriculture activities, fresh air, fresh products);
- ⊙ the necessity of expanding the rural tourism practice further than the farms, in larger areas,

creating a similar spectrum with the recreation opportunities;

© the business requires to be organized in the close relation with the local families (Page, Getz, 1997).

In the long term, the social and economical development strategy of the rural area, the significance and evaluation of all types of capital (natural, human, economical and environmental) is a very important issue.

Tourism expansion involves the coordination between all activities sectors: agriculture and transport, commerce, industry.

The key factor in the tourism development in the rural space represents the application of favourable marketing studies, necessary for any national or foreign investor.

Characterized by a differential natural social-economic potential, the rural areas have low or high chances of local economic diversification. The premises of the tourism development complete approach entail the theoretical, practical, historical, organizational, economic, ecological, social and cultural aspects achieved a first step for indicating that the rural space has real chances to increase its present development status.

The Romanian rural tourism and agritourism evolution

The rural tourism is a new phenomenon, but old in the same time. The interest for rural recreation started manifesting itself since the 19th century, as a reaction to the stress produced by the urbanization and industrialization processes (Ratz, Puczo, 1998).

The rural tourism in Romania is practiced "since forever" (Galvan, V., 2003), but it is practiced "spontaneous, randomly and unorganized". Its beginnings are situated around the '30s and it is linked to the mountain and balneary tourism resources capitalization. Thus, it is focused on the areas of Bran-Rucar, the Olt Valey, Harghita-Covasna counties. Around the distinguished tourism locations, and also in their boarding rural areas, accommodation was offered during the summer, in the houses, later the activity developing with the construction of tourist boarding houses (The Industry and Commerce Ministry Report, 2004).

After the World War 2 and beginning of communism, as a political system, the tourism activity diminished till disappearance. The restoring of rural tourism was made between 1972 and 1974,

when a request from The Tourism Ministry launched the action of "identification", "for ratification" of certain "touristic villages" and peasant households from all areas. Therefore, The International Tourism Promoting Centre identified and selected 118 representative villages for Romania, which could be introduced in the internal and international tourism circuits. A year later, fourteen touristic villages were declared experimentally: Leresti and Rucar in Arges County, Fundata and Sirnea in Brasov County, Vaideeni in Valcea County; Sfantu Gheorghe, Murighiol and Crisan in Tulcea County, Sibiel in Sibiu County, Tismana in Gorj County, Poaiana Satara – Bacau County, Racos – Timis County, Bogdan-Voda – Maramures County, Vatra Moldovitei – Suceava County.

Although the touristic villages remained non-functional for the international tourism because in 1974 the accommodation of foreign tourists in the private households was banned, by law,. Only a few villages, which had the opportunity to establish external contracts through National Office for Tourism Carpathians-Bucharest, succeeded to follow up international activities, but only in that certain year (Rucar, Crisan, Murighiol, Sibiel).

The organized rural tourism started after the year 1989, with a focus on the mountain area of the country, which records a population of 1.7 million inhabitants and over 600 thousands family households, grouped in approximately 2 500 rural villages and towns (The Industry and Commerce Ministry Report, 2004).

After the year 1990, it was registered a promoting and encouraging tendency of the rural tourism and agritourism from the local and national authorities, and also from the professional associations from the tourism industry.

The first households that were listed in the rural tourism scheme were the ones from the Moeciu-Bran area, Barsa area, Dornelor, Maramures, Apuseni Mountains. Different associations were created, such as The Romanian Villages Association, in 1988-1989.

Other promoting associations for the Romanian rural tourism were formed after 1990, the most renown being: The Romanian Mountain Development Federation (1990), The National Rural, Ecologic and Cultural Tourism Association from Romania (1994), The Romanian Agritourism Agency (1995) and The Configuration and Innovation Centre for Carpatian Development – CEFIDEC (1994), ANTREC (2007).

The accommodation basis and rural tourist flows

Following the evolution of the accommodation structures specific for the rural tourism and agritourism, until 1995, according to the reports of the Ministry of Tourism, there are only few details about tourist and agritourist boarding-houses, and the mentioned tourist boarding houses contained the existing accommodation units, in the rural and urban areas, also. Thus, the situation of the accommodation structures involved in the rural tourism and agritourism cannot be evaluated.

Scarcely from 1996 there was a trend observed regarding the two categories: the classified and certified rural and urban tourist boarding-houses and agritourism boarding-houses; the number of these accommodation structures between 1995 and 1999 increased significantly, despite the fact that the support from the local and national authorities was almost inexistent regarding the organization.

The boarding-houses specific for this type of tourism are scattered in the mountain areas (where almost 25% of the total number of boarding-houses are located), hilly areas, the Danube delta, national and natural parks, peripheral areas. The evolution of the accommodation structures number registered, after 2001 an increasing tendency, the highest one being recorded after 2006 (Fig. 2).

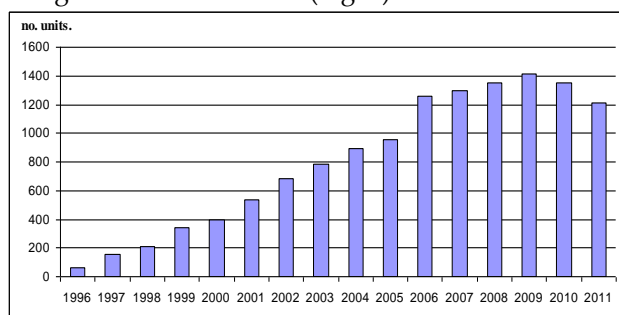


Fig. 2: The accommodation structures dynamics in Romania (1996-2011)

Albeit the existence of diverse and valuable tourism resources, of a large range of villages (approximately 13,000), the agritourist and tourist boarding-houses register a low number (1,050 structures and 1,210 respectively), with a total existent accommodation capacity of 20,683 guests in the agritourist boarding-houses and 20,499 guests capacity in the tourist ones, in 2011, circumstances that reflect a low interest from the rural residents to develop a private tourism business (table no. 1 and 2). At national level, a non homogenous dispersion is registered concerning the tourist boarding-houses,

a large number being centralized in the mountain area villages and in the renowned counties for their natural and anthropic tourism potential (Brasov, Sibiu, Arges, Suceava, Maramures, Vrancea, Tulcea, Constanta Counties).

The accommodation in the touristic villages or farms from the rural area can be organized and arranged under multiple forms, depending of the location and type of the area (mountains, hills, beach, close to national parks, delta or lake areas). The profitability is as higher as the location is strategically situated; the means of access are maintained appropriately, the opportunity of enjoying the beautiful landscape, local culture and the particular architecture are maximized.

The constant ascending trend of the rural tourism incomes, and also the rural tourism development projects implementation determined an increasing of the tourist and agritourist boarding-houses number (in certain areas with a high degree of centralization, rural micro resorts were formed).

The majority of the boarding-houses are included in the 2 and 3 daisies category, similar to stars, in the last 5 years boarding-houses of 4 and 5 daisies were created in the main national tourism areas. The tourist flow is linked with the accommodation possibilities development (Fig. 3).

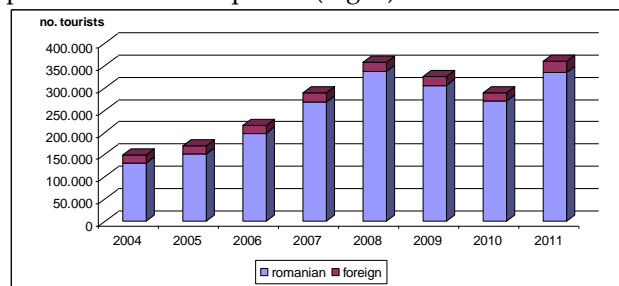


Fig. 3: Tourist flows evolution in the rural tourism product (2004-2011)

The tourism flow confirms the continuous increase in the number of tourists until 2008, afterwards registering a slightly decreasing trend caused by the economic crisis, so lowered financial opportunities, the rural boarding-houses being hired especially by the Romanian tourists and fewer foreign tourists. The phenomenon can be explained considering the decline in the ways of communication quality which secure the access for the majority of the villages, the modest recreation and leisure possibilities, the prices which are not always a reflection of the offered services quality. Thus, rural tourism and agritourism directs itself for the internal tourism and in a small range to the international tourism. The average length of stay was

low: 1.5-2.5 days/Romanian tourist and 2 to 3 or even more than 3 days/ foreign tourist.

Table 1 The accommodation structures evolution, rated by types of the units (1989-2011)

Accommodation structures by type of units	1989	1994	1998	2008	2010	2011
Total number – from which:	360.963	292.479	287.268	294.210	311.698	278.503
Recreation villages	-	38	36	180	157	307
Tourist boarding-houses	-	748	2.854	14.538	18.422	20.499
Agrotourist boarding-houses	-	-	1.003	16.906	20.208	20.683

Source: The National Statistical Institute, Bucharest

Table 2 The accommodation services evolution in the rural touristic product (2004-2011)

Category	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Units	892	956	1.259	1.297	1.348	1.412	1.354	1.210
Guest capacity	9.405	11.151	14.551	15.448	16.906	19.789	20.208	20.683
Guest capacity-days	2.132.008	2.528.316	3.188.350	3.625.647	4.038.817	4.735.468	4.891.862	5.378.364

Source: The National Statistical Institute, Bucharest

Consequently, the direct incomes obtained from the tourism services are low, the marketing being frugal, the direct communication between tourists and private boarding-houses owners being preferred.

The tourists that select a village as a holiday destination are the ones who use their private car, mainly because the local transport is inadequate, and the opportunities for surrounding visits are reduced. As a result, the rural boarding-houses investors redeem their investment in a period of seven to ten years, due to the fact that a prognosis about the ascending and constant tourist flows cannot be made (yearly) and there are no resources for an active marketing.

The socio-economical development of the rural space as a tourism activities consequence

The agritourism and rural tourism development amid certain limits, with the preservation of the other traditional activities (agriculture, artisanal) allows the local rural communities to evolve without major changes, to be involved in the modern economy assertion, without diluting the traditional characteristics. All the aspects and positive and negative effects need to be taken into account to allow a future sustainable development of the rural tourism. For rural tourism and agritourism to become factors in the social and economical development, there is the need to overrun the superficial approaches, empirical and use efficient political, economical, social strategies that place the village and its activities on a global tourism scale,

according to its future trends. Hence, there is a necessity to create certain means and tools that will support this activity field in the rural area at a further local and individual level.

For the countries with a great range of experience in the rural tourism and agritourism activities, the excessive tourism activities and accommodation spaces development was not always a progressive factor due to the fact that there were registered great losses in the traditional ways of life.

Rural tourism and agritourism can facilitate the diversification and thus the stabilization of the local economy, new business opportunities and consequently new employment opportunities, promotion and development of services, the change of employment force practice, attracting new investments.

Agritourism asserts itself as an activity capable to improve the accommodation resources present in numerous households, organized and arranged to receive guests for a limited period of time. Thus, the household owner is motivated to plan the interiors and exteriors of its property with the purpose of obtaining additional incomes, stimulated to develop complementary activities apart from its basics activities, to reach a quality standard required by the tourists. Radu Rey states the fact that "agritourism is not only an economical equilibrium factor, which gears a large range of additional factors and reproducible resources, but also becomes a cultural-educational intermediary, a constant and not very expensive tool for social progression" (Romanian Carpathians, 2001, p. 61).

Establishing a political, legislative, economical accurate frame will allow for this new type of tourism industry to evolve on an ascending trend and

economically attract the existing tourism resources, reducing the illegal practice of the tourism activities, clearly delimiting the classical forms of tourism, with which is commonly compared.

Certain changes in the rural areas were beneficial, while others were not, leading to alterations in the traditional ways of life, disappearance of some forms of culture and civilization. The phenomenon was determined by the fact that the rural area was not perceived as a whole, with a well-structured social and economical system. The villages degree of modernization requires to be maintained to an acceptable level, and temporary accommodation structures proliferation limited in time and space (for reducing the agriculture and forest areas which are used for new constructions and infrastructure modernization), because this way the new urbanization issues are transferred into the rural areas, as well.

The rural tourism evolution will depend on the local community economical potential, on the profitable agriculture activities, the development of public and private services that will increase the tourism accommodation units' comfort. The current rural boarding-houses have an island character and can be found especially in the well-known tourist areas (e.g.: the Prahova and Olt Valleys, Rucar-Bran couloir, Maramures, the Aries Basin). The increasing tourist flows will depend, to a great extent, not only on the accommodation structures development, but also on the leisure and recreation structures, as well. Thus, villages such as Bran, Moeciu (Brasov County), Arieseni, Garda de Sus (Alba County), Rucar, Leresti (Arges County), Corund (Harghita County), Ieud, Vadu Izei, Saliste (Maramures County), Sibiel, Biertan (Sibiu County) are areas where the preservation of certain agriculture, foresting activities permitted tourism to become an important alternative in the area development and assuring an acceptable income for the local residents.

Due to the increasing number of the residents that leave the rural area for other European countries, for employment offers, the incomes allowed the construction of modern housing, but only for their private comfort, not for tourism activities, especially because this group diverged from the old tradition and rural customs.

The tourism development influences, also, positively and negatively the social-cultural characteristics of the rural destinations. In what concerns the positive influences, it can be mentioned that rural tourism facilitates the efficient usage of the

existing resources (land, employment force, financial capital, natural and cultural attraction), brings social-economic changes, contribute to the monuments and rural area conservation, encourages relationships between the local residents and the tourists, increases the chance of learning more about other cultures (Keanne, Quinn, 1990).

The negative aspects are related to the fact that tourism in the rural areas modifies or degrades the rural landscapes, natural and cultural regional values, reorganizes the social structures (fact that can be interpreted also as a positive change), induces change in the life rhythm and intimacy, in authentic tradition and costumes presentation, adapting to the tourist desires.

The realistic environmental management, local implication, legislation frame, marketing strategies and plans are crucial in the rural tourism sustainable development and contribute positively in the local community lifestyle.

The economic impact, which can be materialized through the dynamic of the productive activities, economic branches diversification, supporting the traditional costumes and artifacts, includes the following aspects:

- ⊗ increasing the viability of settlements with modest economic resources;
- ⊗ amplifying the local residents' incomes;
- ⊗ modernization and completing the general and local infrastructure important for increasing the lifestyle standards;
- ⊗ organizing special areas for artisan activities;
- ⊗ an improved agriculture materials capitalization and secondary forest resources;
- ⊗ public services improvement with an important role in the lifestyle quality;
- ⊗ the local and regional diversification of tourism forms with a role in increasing the national and international currency incomes.

The social impact states the tourism activities influence over the traditional lifestyle, recreating old traditions and regional astronomical costumes, materializing through:

- ⊗ increasing the national recognized professional training for the young population involved in tourism activities;
- ⊗ increasing the number of the jobs in the art crafts manufacturing, infrastructure, agricultural and secondary forest material processing;
- ⊗ securing the public hygiene, local population and tourists' safety;

- ⊗ diminishing the poverty degree and developing a tolerance and comprehensive attitude towards tourists;
- ⊗ developing a positive conduct towards protecting the environment quality.

The cultural impact manifests itself through the regional and local cultural and civilization identity conservation, especially when minority groups are involved. This type of impact has beneficial effects that can be expressed through:

- ⊗ increasing the local residents interest for the preservation of minority culture;
- ⊗ organizing events and cultural-artistically manifestations, which can have a traditional activity potential;
- ⊗ allocating a part of the economical, commercial and tourism incomes for the cultural patrimony restructuring and conservation, and creating new local museums institutions.

For the rural villages to keep and develop their tourist function, it is necessary to solve certain issues regarding the general social-economical development level:

- General interest requirements have the role to assure a better local budget and a larger autonomy for prioritizing. Thus, very constructive initiative are: introducing a new fiscal policy in the rural areas, increasing the local autonomy, avoiding economical conflicts, local resources capitalization, developing an entrepreneurial spirit, completing and modernization of the general and local infrastructure, natural and historical monuments preservation and restoration, preserving the present environmental quality.
- Special interest requirements concern certain social-economical activities development which can provide the local population greater stability and viability for the rural villages throughout: agriculture and farming diversification, amplifying the possibilities for agriculture and forest materials processing, creating touristic structures according to the local tradition, traditional lifestyle and customs conservation.

Conclusion

Considering that the tourism services costs will increase in the well-known areas, due to the energetic issues pressure, this form of tourism tends to become a full expansion phenomenon, with a large opening for the inbound and outbound tourism. The development of tourism in the picturesque rural areas well organized, within a less polluted zone, with

traditional customs, a rich historical background, ancient monuments and housing will turn the tourist function into a desirable one and a constant in the social-economic development.

Rural tourism is requested to contribute, as a first step, in the maintaining and preservation of the agriculture services. Moreover, through its consolidation and modernization, it will become a premise for the local and regional social-economic development.

The development of rural tourism in Romania will require as a basis a strategy focused on the sustainable and integrated development principles, environmental protection, due to the over utilization of certain natural and cultural resources, accommodation and recreation structures concentration. In spite of the present important issues regarding the negative aspects of agriculture, low direct investments and financial resources for the rural areas, reduced agricultural professional training, rural tourism and agritourism begin to be more appreciated in the local Romanian villages.

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Cultural Identity and Tourist Destination Development. A Case Study of the Land of Bârsa (Romania)

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Abstract

As the competition for the attraction of tourists has become even more intense, tourist destinations and not individual operators are now the main actors operating on the tourist market. This shift in focus has taken place as the tourism transformed itself from a simple recreational activity into a quest for knowledge and discovery due to the growing complexity of tourist' needs and demands.

Today, culture plays an essential part in tourism as it represents the very object of this quest for knowledge that Auliana Poon defines as the "new tourism". The culture of an area, expressed through the cultural identity of its people can become a tourist attraction in itself, thus contributing to the strengthening of tourist destinations' competitive advantage.

The current paper aims to demonstrate the vital role that cultural identity has in the development and promotion of different destinations, showing that when economic, social and demographic changes lead to a dilution of an area's cultural identity, the competitive advantage that the cultural heritage offers is eroded.

Keywords: *cultural identity, cultural heritage, competitive advantage, tourist destination*

Rezumat. Identitatea culturală și dezvoltarea unei destinații turistice. Studiu de caz: Țara Bârsei (România)

În condițiile unei competiții acerbe pentru atragerea turiștilor, destinațiile turistice și nu operatorii individuali au devenit principalii actori pe piața turistică. Schimbarea de roluri pe piața turistică a avut loc pe măsură ce turismul s-a transformat dintr-o simplă activitate de relaxare într-o adevărată misiune de cunoaștere și descoperire, ca urmare a complexității crescânde a cerințelor și nevoilor turiștilor.

Cultura face astăzi, mai mult ca niciodată, obiectul acestei misiuni de cunoaștere, pe care Auliana Poon a denumit-o "noul turism". Cultura unei zone, exprimată prin identitatea culturală a locuitorilor, poate constitui o atracție turistică de sine stătătoare, contribuind la consolidarea avantajului competitiv al destinațiilor turistice.

Lucrarea de față își propune să demonstreze importanța majoră a identității culturale în promovarea și dezvoltarea diferitelor destinații, arătând că, atunci când schimbările economice, sociale și demografice duc la o diluare a identității culturale, avantajul competitiv pe care cultura și patrimoniul cultural al unei destinații turistice îl oferă este erodat.

Cuvinte-cheie: *identitate culturală, patrimoniu cultural, avantaj competitiv, destinație turistică*

Introduction

In the current economic environment, natural and man built-tourist attraction are no longer sufficient for ensuring the long-term competitiveness of tourist destinations. Tourists are becoming increasingly sophisticated as their requirements expand beyond the provision of personal services, such as accommodation, dining or entertainment.

More than ever, tourists want to learn, to discover, to face new challenges, to explore new cultures, different from the one they belong to and

identify with. This is the "New Tourism", which has long superseded mass, standardized tourism and which Auliana Poon describes as being increasingly focused on consumers and the environment (Poon, 1994, pp.91).

Thus, tourism is no longer an activity that people undertake to satisfy their need for rest and relaxation; tourism has become a quest for knowledge.

However, this demand for knowledge cannot be easily satisfied by one tourist attraction or economic agent alone, which leads companies in the tourism

industry to adopt a common strategy and behave in a coordinated manner.

Cultural identity and destination competitiveness

When tourism businesses are located in close proximity to each other, the synergies allow individual tourist attractions to form coherent destinations or tourism clusters. It is therefore fair to say that competition in the tourism industry does not occur between countries and neither between companies or attractions, but between destinations or clusters (Porter, 1998, pp.78-80).

The emergence of destinations and clusters does not occur automatically. In order to behave in a coordinated manner, individual attractions and businesses must share common or at least similar resources. These resources can be either physical – such as landscape, climate, flora and fauna – or cultural.

What most successful destinations have in common is however the cultural background or cultural identity, comprising habits and traditions, social structures and mentalities, local people's way of life and work (Adler, 2002, pp. 365).

A destination's cultural identity is what tourists perceive and remember even after returning home from vacation. And culture is, indeed, a driving force in multiple forms of tourism: cultural tourism, rural tourism, events tourism, urban tourism (Jelincic, 2002, pp. 3)

Not surprisingly, tourist destinations and ethnographic areas often overlap, Romania making no exception. In fact, the vast majority of Romanian micro-destinations, such as Bucovina, Maramureș, the Prahova Valley, Mărginimea Sibiului, Târnava Mare or the Rucăr-Bran Corridor are actually ethnographic areas with unique cultural backgrounds.

Interesting enough, these are also the destinations known for the practice of sustainable tourism – a tourism which perfectly fits A. Poon's definition. Rural tourism, agritourism, cultural tourism are concepts which place equal emphasis on environmental protection and customer satisfaction.

Although the "new tourism" defined by A. Poon may be developed through the exploitation of both physical and cultural tourist resources, the physical heritage alone is not always enough to satisfy the tourists' permanent desire of knowledge. In this

case, not the physical heritage, but the destination's cultural identity is of primary importance.

This leads us to formulate *Hypothesis 1: between two destinations disposing of equally valuable and diverse physical attractions, a tourist will most likely prefer to visit the destination with the strongest cultural identity.*

Thus, cultural identity is a strong determinant of a destination's medium and long-term competitiveness, directly influencing the direction, frequency and intensity of tourist flows.

Cultural identity cannot however be automatically endorsed by local people within a certain destination. Cultural identity is built and developed in centuries or even millennia of history, as moral values, behavioural patterns and traditions are embraced and reinforced by society.

Similarly, when certain behaviours are no longer perpetuated and when traditions are no longer practiced, cultural identity tends to lose its strength, as local people within a destination no longer identify themselves with the values they once used to hold.

As cultural identity dissipates, as locals no longer consider themselves as belonging to a certain ethnographic area, tourists also tend to lose their interest in the destination's cultural background.

We may thus formulate *Hypothesis 2: An area or community with a weak cultural identity is less likely to be perceived by tourists as a coherent destination but rather as a sum of individual and independent attractions or tourism businesses.*

The destination is, in this case, reduced from an ethnographic area to individual attractions. Ethnographic areas may even cease to exist, as the elements which are fundamental to cultural identity – such as folklore, traditional economic activities or traditions – are forgotten.

Method

Based on the hypotheses defined above, we will proceed to analyze the case of the Land of Bârsa (in Romanian, Țara Bârsei), a destination which is rarely mentioned in the offers of local tour-operators despite the fact that it encompasses one of the most frequently visited tourist attractions in Romania.

Although a case study alone is not enough to demonstrate the validity of the proposed hypotheses, it does offer a starting point for further

research on the critical success factors of tourist destinations.

Furthermore, we will proceed to present the results of a survey performed in the first half of 2012 on 80 potential consumers of tourism services from the Bucharest-Ilfov development region. The study is supported by statistical data offering an image of the distribution and intensity of tourist flows in the Land of Bârsa in the past few years.

On one hand, the aim is to show that when asked to choose between two or more destinations, a potential buyer will most likely indicate the destination with the strongest cultural identity.

On the other hand, we seek to demonstrate that an area with a weakened cultural identity, such as the Land of Bârsa, is often perceived as a sum of individual tourist attractions or businesses rather than a tourism destination in itself.

This research initiative will most likely continue with further studies on the determinants of destination competitiveness as well as into how cultural identity is measured and perceived.

Thus, we feel that the assumptions on which the current paper is based on are strong enough to set the scene for a much comprehensive analysis of the relation between cultural identity and long-term destination competitiveness.

Discussion

The following sections will thus discuss the challenges faced by an ethnographic area in the south-east of Transylvania in preserving its cultural identity and developing a coherent image on the tourism.

Based on the "Land of Bârsa" case study, we will argue that the way in which a destination and its culture is perceived by its local inhabitants is strongly reflected in the perception that tourist hold about that particular destination.

The Land of Bârsa. Historical premises and cultural background

The Land of Bârsa is the ethnographic area located in the southern sector of the Braşov Basin (in Romanian, Depresiunea Braşovului), in an area of exquisite beauty, being bordered by the Bran-Rucăr corridor and the Piatra Craiului Mountains to the west, the Postăvaru and Piatra Mare Mountains to

the south, the Ciucaş mountains to the south-east, and the Perşani and Baraolt mountains to the north.

The mountainous landscape nearby allowed and even facilitated the appearance and development of two of the largest Romanian ski resorts – Poiana Braşov and Predeal – as well as one training base for winter sports competitions, at Râşnov.

However, the natural landscape is not the Land of Bârsa's only asset. The cultural heritage, extremely rich and diverse is equally important.

Social and economic life in the Land of Bârsa gravitates around the town of Braşov (in German, Kronstadt; in Hungarian, Brasso), a community of more than 200,000 inhabitants, developed in the late Middle Ages by the Saxon settlers established in the south and south-east of Transylvania in the 13th century.

However, the area is also home to numerous other establishments, either urban – Râşnov (in German, Rosenau), Codlea (Zeiden), Săcele (Siebendorfer) and Zărneşti (Sănescht) - or rural, such as Prejmer (Tartlau), Hărman (Honigberg), Cristian (Neustadt) and Ghimbav (Wiedenbach).

Indeed, the Land of Bârsa is home to some of the earliest human communities in the Carpathian area, with establishments dating back to Palaeolithic. However, the Land of Bârsa is better known for its medieval citadels and fortified churches, built between the 14th and 17th century by the German settlers brought in by Andrew the 2nd, King of Hungary to protect the far-east borders of the Hungarian Empire against the Turkish and Tartar invasions.

The density of the tourist attractions which are part of the cultural heritage is mainly due to the Land of Bârsa's location at the interference of the German and Hungarian colonization areas in the south of Transylvania, superposed over early Romanian communities.

Thus, the Land of Bârsa is "par excellence" a multicultural area, being known in the past centuries as "little Transylvania".

The Saxon or German population has, in fact, played a major role in the social and economic development of the entire area. The German cultural model has long imprinted itself in the local communities' cultural identity, bringing Romanian and German communities alike together in a unique and highly complex cultural landscape.

This multicultural character is perhaps most obvious in Braşov, a town of culture. While its stone

walls, central square and famous gothic cathedral – the Black Church – date back to the 14th and 15th centuries, a period when the German population flourished as merchandisers and manufacturers grew wealthier, the Romanians played their own part in shaping the town's development.

Indeed, the Romanian neighbourhood, known as "Șchei" was, starting with the Middle Ages, a capital city for orthodox Romanians in the Land of Bârsa. It is home to one of the oldest and largest orthodox churches in Transylvania, the "St. Nicholas" church and, most importantly, to the first Romanian school and one of the earliest printing centres in Transylvania.

The rural and "small town" cultural landscape is dominated by the peasant fortresses and fortified churches built by the Saxons to protect themselves in times of invasion. Some of these still exist today, as proof of the area's tumultuous past.

The most representative peasant fortress is probably the one in Râșnov, which is, in fact, one of the few Transylvanian fortresses that have never been conquered by the Turks or Tartars. Older but otherwise less known is the fortress in Feldioara, which is believed to have been built by the Teuton knights during one of their earliest incursions in southern Transylvania.

Apart from these peasant fortresses, the villages and small towns are home to some of the largest, oldest and most well-preserved Lutheran churches in Romania. Surrounded by thick stone walls, these churches have been places of worships in times of peace and fortresses in times of war. Unique in Europe, the fortified Saxon churches are among Transylvania's most representative cultural landmarks. In fact, one of the fortified churches in the Land of Bârsa – the church in Prejmer – has been included on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

However, after thousands of Germans from the Land of Bârsa were deported to the Russian gulags in the aftermath of World War 2 and other tens of thousands fled to Germany in the late 1980s and early 1990s, most fortified churches experienced a period of neglect and decay.

As the remaining Germans (less than five hundreds) do not have the resources necessary to restore and preserve the built heritage, many churches are now in danger of collapsing. The churches which are still functional are exploited by local authorities as tourist attractions, although none

of them disposes of information points, specialised tour guides or minimal facilities for tourists.

Only the Black Church and the Church of Prejmer dispose of tourist guides which are able to properly explain to the tourists that Lutheran churches represent an important part of the Saxon cultural model, which is why many visitors still consider that fortified churches are actually of Romanian or Hungarian origin and often leave the Land of Bârsa without being aware of the critical role that Germans played in the development of southern Transylvania. .

Another tragic consequence of the German immigration is the loss of folklore. After some villages were left almost deserted in the early 1990s, unique traditions, such as the Fasching or "Roaina"- festivals of pagan origin taking place in early spring, before the beginning of the Easter Fast - seized to exist.

In some villages, the Romanian population made significant efforts to maintain traditional celebration despite the Saxons' disappearance. However, these efforts have been insufficient to close the cultural gap, as dances, singing, wear, and dishes have been forgotten.

Today, the Junes Parade (in Romanian, Parada Junilor) remains one of the few traditions which is still practiced and perpetuated despite the demographic changes and the passing of time. As some historians indicate that the event has its origins in ancient Dacian celebrations of spring and fertility, the parade stands as proof of the Romanian communities' continuity on Transylvanian soil.

However, as the German population left and people from outside his area settled in Brașov and its surroundings, even the Romanian traditions began to dissipate. The new inhabitants do not always value the culture of the area and are therefore less likely to support, preserve and promote this culture.

In this context, tourism plays an extremely significant role, as it offers people – either locals or immigrants - the economic motivation to exploit the tourist heritage in a manner which is both sustainable and profitable.

Indeed, cultural identity is not a rigid concept but rather a complex of shared values and beliefs which permanently develops and adapts to the demographic structure of the local communities.

Distribution and intensity of tourist flows in the Land of Bârsa

With Braşov as its capital town, the Land of Bârsa attracts a significant number of tourists. In fact, despite the fact that 2009 marked a decrease in the total number of arrivals as a consequence of the generalized economic crisis, 2010 and 2011 were characterized by increasing tourist flows (Fig. 1).

Furthermore, although the land of Bârsa occupies a territory whose surface is less than half of that of Braşov County – a county which also includes the Făgăraş, Bran and Rupea-Cohalm ethnographic areas – it accounts for more than 80 percent of the total number of tourist arrivals in the county.

However, statistical data show that the distribution of tourist flows within the destination is extremely unequal.

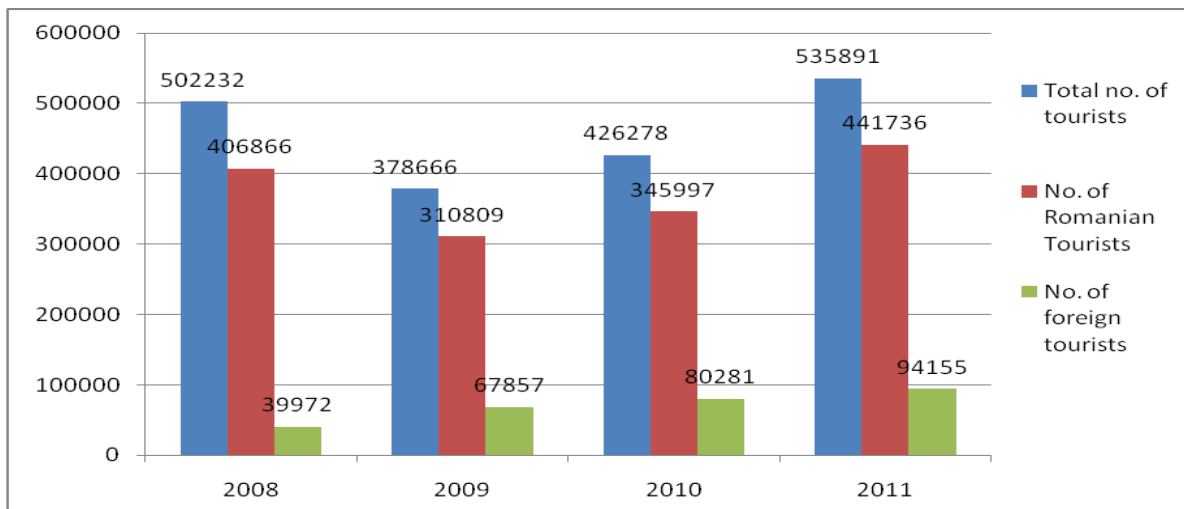


Fig. 1: The evolution of tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa, 2008-2011

Source: Braşov County Direction of Statistics, 2012

Thus, out of the 536 thousand tourist arrivals in 2011, approximately 200 thousand (40 percent of all tourist arrivals) were registered in Braşov, the Land of Bârsa's capital town, while 116 thousand (21 percent) were registered in Poiana Braşov and over 130 thousand (25 percent) in Predeal. Thus, 80 percent of all tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa are concentrated in only three localities, two of which are winter resorts.

Figure 2 clearly shows that other localities which dispose of an extremely valuable cultural heritage register less than 5 percent of the total number of tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa.

In fact, only 780 tourists are accommodated each year in Prejmer, a UNESCO World Heritage site which is one of the last communities in Transylvania still hosting the "Fasching", a typical Saxon festival which takes place every year, before the beginning of the catholic Easter fast. At the same time, the town of Râşnov, with its famous peasant fortress, registers less than 8000 tourist arrivals per year.

Thus, in spite of its rich and diverse cultural heritage, few tourists in the Land of Bârsa actually visit other tourist attractions except for the town of

Braşov and the Poiana Braşov and Predeal winter resorts.

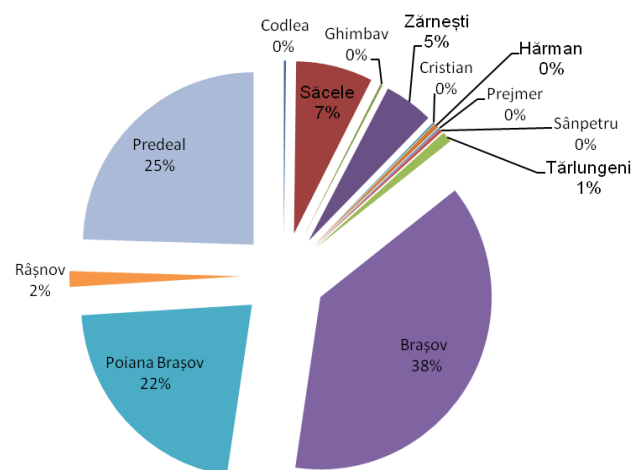


Fig. 2: The distribution of tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa, 2011

Source: Braşov County Direction of Statistics, 2012

Even though the number of tourists in the Braşov County and in the town of Braşov is actually increasing, other original attractions

remain largely unknown to many visitors, as the destination's cultural identity is little promoted on the tourism market.

Cultural identity and tourist perception

On the basis of the two hypothesis introduced in the beginning of the paper, a questionnaire research was conducted on 80 potential tourists from the Bucharest-Ilfov region – a region which represents the area of residence for more than half of the tourists visiting the Land of Bârsa.

The goal of the research was to determine the visitor's perception with regard to the destination's attractiveness, as well as their knowledge of the area's cultural identity and attractions.

When asked to indicate five localities of tourist appeal, most respondents named Brașov (80 respondents), Râșnov (64 respondents), Predeal (40 respondents), Prejmer (32 respondents), which point out that, on one hand, tourist are usually attracted to larger and widely-promoted communities, while on the other hand they are unfamiliar with other localities which – although smaller in size – dispose of a diverse and rich cultural heritage.

In what regards individual tourist attractions, all 80 respondents indicated the Black Church and the Râșnov citadel as the most representative attractions in the Land of Bârsa (Table 1). Other popular points of interest mentioned by respondents are the Brașov Citadel (in Romanian, Cetățuia Brașov), the Council Square (Piața Sfatului) and the Council Hall (Casa Sfatului) and the First Romanian School, which suggests that the attractions located within the town of Brașov tend to prevail in the tourists' preferences with regard to the Land of Bârsa destination.

Table 1. Most popular tourist attractions in the Land of Bârsa (multiple answers)

Tourist attraction	No of. respondents
Black Church	80
Râșnov Citadel	80
Brașov Citadel	36
Rope Street (Strada Sforii)	9
Poiana Brasov	18
Council Hall	27
First Romanian School	18
Prejmer fortified church	9

Source: Results obtained by the author after the completion and analysis of questionnaires

In fact, the only tourist attractions situated outside Brașov and which was indicated as of major

importance by more than 5 respondents is the Râșnov Citadel.

As far as the cultural events are concerned, 60 percent of all respondents were not able to indicate any cultural event taking place in the Land of Bârsa, which leads us to believe that local cultural events – although unique – remain largely unknown outside the Brașov County.

Out of the 32 respondents (40%) which did indicate a cultural event, 30 mentioned the Junes Parade (in Romanian, Parada Junilor), while one respondent indicated the GHOST festival in Râșnov and another one a music festival.

Although the Brașov Metropolitan Development Agency and the Brașov Sustainable Development Agency are currently implementing two projects with the aim of promoting the cultural tourist heritage in the Land of Bârsa – each having a budget of approximately 1 million Euros - only 5 out of the 80 respondents are familiar with these projects.

The results of the research clearly show that few potential tourists and visitors are familiar with attractions such as the fortified churches or with the traditions and customs typical to communities in the Land of Bârsa. Of course, this problem may be attributed to numerous causes.

We can argue however that a factor of major importance is that locals within the Land of Bârsa do not identify themselves anymore with the destination's cultural heritage. Taking into account the historical premises described in the previous section, we may argue that due to the fact that a large part of this cultural heritage was built and developed by the German community in the south of Transylvania, the disappearance of this community had lead to the weakening of the destination's cultural identity.

Inevitably, the current inhabitants of the Land of Bârsa do not feel culturally connected to many of the tourist attractions within the destination and therefore do not have an intrinsic motivation to promote or exploit them in any way. This is particularly true for the fortified churches, which, in spite of their unique character and historical values remain unknown to many Romanian tourists.

Furthermore, more than half of the respondents claimed that although they did visit Brașov, they were not aware of the fact that the town and its surroundings are part of an ethnographic area known as the Land of Bârsa. In fact, 57 of the 80 respondents (71%) consider that the Land of Bârsa does not have a

coherent image on the tourism market, as it is not yet perceived as a destination in itself, but rather as a collection of unrelated attractions.

Therefore, we feel that the Land of Bârsa does confirm our second hypothesis: *an area with a weakened cultural identity is likely to be perceived by tourists not as an independent destination, but rather as a sum of individual tourist attractions or tourism businesses.*

Last but not least, one goal of the research was to determine the comparative advantage of the Land of Bârsa. Respondents were provided with four pairs of destinations – each destination located at relatively similar distances from the Bucharest-Ilfov region – and were asked to vote or to select from each pair one destination they would like to spend their vacation in. The results are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparative advantage of tourist destinations

Pair of destinations	No. of votes	
	Land of Bârsa	Destination 2
Land of Bârsa – Bran-Rucăr corridor	48	32
Land of Bârsa – North Oltenia	62	18
Land of Bârsa – Târnava Mare (Sighișoara-Viscri area)	34	46
Land of Bârsa – Prahova Valley	55	25
Land of Bârsa – Sibiu and its surroundings (Mărginimea Sibiului)	33	47

Source: Results obtained by the author after the completion and analysis of questionnaires

Thus, if faced with the situation of choosing between two tourist destinations, most tourists would choose the Land of Bârsa over the Bran-Rucăr area, Prahova Valley and North Oltenia, but not over Târnava Mare and Sibiu and its surroundings. Not surprisingly, these later destinations are particularly well-known for their cultural heritage and for their well-preserved traditional life-style, cultural events, shared values and beliefs.

The Târnava Mare area is particularly important as it emerged on the national and European tourism market relatively recently, due to the efforts of two non-governmental organizations functioning under the patronage of HRH Prince Charles. However, not Prince Charles' contribution is surprising, but the fact that the area managed to revive itself out of its own ashes.

Despite the fact that the number of Saxon inhabitants in Târnava Mare significantly decreased in the past two decades, the remaining population understood that the exploitation of the cultural heritage is the only chance they have for ensuring the community's survival and development. As a consequence, locals reaffirmed their culinary traditions, their songs and dances, their traditions and values in an effort to attract tourists, both national and foreign.

The results have been more than positive. Largely unknown until 2005, Târnava Mare became a competitive tourist destination, highly recognised and appreciated for its cultural heritage – which, in fact, stood at the heart of the “Wild Carpathia” 2011 documentary.

Giving the fact that the Land of Bârsa, the Târnava Mare plateau and the Sibiu basin dispose of similar cultural resources – medieval Saxon burghs, fortified churches, picturesque villages and diverse traditions – the results of the research point to a comparative disadvantage that the Land of Bârsa holds with respect to its main competitors.

We may therefore conclude that in the case of the Land of Bârsa, the first hypothesis also proves valid. *Between two destinations disposing of equally valuable and diverse physical attractions, a tourist will most likely prefer to visit the destination with the strongest cultural identity.*

Conclusion

The discussion above points to the fact that the loss of a destination's cultural identity may lead to a decrease in the area's competitiveness on the tourism market. Although this loss might be inevitable in some cases, being caused by major demographic changes or changes in a population's cultural model, it is not necessarily irreversible. In fact, the Târnava Mare area stands as a clear proof of the fact that cultural identity can be rediscovered, redeveloped, redefined and reaffirmed, both internally as well as externally.

However, cultural identity cannot strengthen itself automatically. Action needs to be taken on multiple levels, within a close partnership between local state tourism agencies, private enterprises and civil society representatives.

One measure towards the redefining of the Land of Bârsa's cultural identity would be the promotion under a single brand of all the cultural attractions

within the destination. This idea is not new however, as it has already been proposed by the Braşov Metropolitan Development Agency, which is currently working to develop the brand "Legends of the Land of Bârsa".

But although the projects is in its third year of implementation, only 3 out of the 80 respondents taking part in our study were familiar with this brand, which draws attention to the efficacy and efficiency of promotion efforts.

Not surprisingly, very few respondents were able to identify cultural events taking place in the Land of Bârsa; as a matter of fact, except for the Junes Parade, no other festival is promoted online and offline to potential tourists. Celebrations, such as the Fasching in Prejmer, Roaina in Cristian or the Shooting of the Cock in Apața are not promoted to potential tourists in Romania and abroad and are therefore known only locally.

Thus, a coherent and comprehensive promotion strategy is highly needed. An important step in the implementation of this strategy would be the creation and development of tourist information and promotion centres in the proximity of cultural tourist attractions.

This need is considerably stringent as the Land of Bârsa currently disposes of only 4 information centres, of which two are located in Braşov, one in Predeal and the other one in the Râşnov Citadel.

There is no information centre in the Prejmer area – despite of the existing UNESCO World Heritage site – and not even an information point in localities such as Sânpetru, Hărman or Cristian, which encompass some of the most complex and valuable fortified churches in the south of Transylvania.

One role that these tourist information and promotion centres could have is the development of thematic trails and tourist products.

For example, in the Land of Bârsa, thematic trails focusing on the exploitation of the local cultural identity could be the Fortified Churches Trail, the Spring Festivals Trail or the Peasant Fortresses Trail (the later could encompass the Râşnov Citadel and Feldioara fortress, but also the Rupea fortress and the Bran castle so as to offer tourists a more comprehensive image on the local inhabitants' life in the Middle Ages).

Furthermore, tourists and information centres can work with local incoming travel agencies to develop and promote cultural tours. In the case of the Land of Bârsa, the surface of the area is small enough to allow the development of one-day cultural tours, complementary to other forms of tourism, such as winter sports tourism, adventure tourism or even business tourism.

These tours are the so-called "optional programmes" which are highly demanded in southern and Western Europe but little promoted in emerging countries. One condition that needs to be satisfied in order for these programmes to positively contribute to the revival of a destination's cultural identity is to actively involve local inhabitants, offering them a real long-term motivation for preserving their traditions, wear and architecture.

It is thus apparent that although the loss of cultural identity might have negative consequences on a destination's competitiveness, this loss is not irreversible. In fact, if the culture and cultural heritage of an area or community is properly promoted and exploited, it can become a driving force of the new, sustainable tourism and a source of long-term competitive advantage.

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Residents and Non-Residents' Perception Towards the Touristic Image of Craiova municipality, Romania

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Abstract

As for every major tourist destination, the touristic image plays an important role serving to consolidate the binding between visitor and destination, being an amalgam of knowledge, feelings, expectations and impressions that people have about a location (Henderson, 2007). The destination identity is created by the sender (essentially the marketers), being sustained by the natural and man-made tourism resources, while the image, supported by the experiences and communications of the senders, is perceived by the receiver. In the touristic selection process tourists take into account tangible features such as the elements of the natural background and anthropic patrimony and intangible elements (relaxation, freedom). This study aims at exploring in which way Craiova municipality seen as a tourism destination conveys into a unique identity within the consumer's mind, focusing on the identification and explanation of the attitudes of a sample of urban residents and non-residents towards tourism in Craiova and their grouping with respect to these attitudes. Thus this helps to identify the main tourism attractions and forms of tourism associated with this city and to further develop tourism activities.

Keywords: *touristic image, touristic identity, perception, Craiova municipality, urban residents*

Rezumat. Percepția rezidenților și non-rezidenților asupra imaginii turistice a municipiului Craiova, România

Pentru fiecare destinație turistică, imaginea turistică joacă un rol important care asigură consolidarea legăturii dintre un vizitator și destinația aleasă, fiind un amalgam de cunoștințe, sentimente, așteptări și impresii pe care oamenii le au despre o anumită locație (Henderson, 2007).

Identitatea destinației turistice este creată de către emițător (în esență, marketeri turistici), fiind susținută și de resursele turistice naturale și antropice, în timp ce imaginea, susținută de experiențele și comunicările expeditorilor, este percepută de potențialul vizitator, adică receptorul. În procesul de selecție turistică, turiștii iau în considerare caracteristici tangibile, cum ar fi elementele cadrului natural și antropic și elemente intangibile (relaxare, libertate). Acest studiu vizează explorarea modului în care municipiul Craiova este perceput ca destinație turistică și cum se transmite într-o identitate unică în mintea consumatorului, concentrându-se pe identificarea și explicarea atitudinilor unui eșantion de respondenți din mediul urban față de turismul din Craiova, cât și gruparea lor cu privire la aceste atitudini. Astfel, studiul ajută la identificarea principalele atracții turistice și forme de turism asociate cu acest oraș pentru a dezvolta activități turistice pe viitor.

Cuvinte-cheie: *imagine turistică, identitate turistică, percepție, municipiul Craiova, rezidenți urbani*

Introduction

The conceptual approach of the tourist image and tourist identity in terms of tourist perception reveals an area of great complexity, which can be used as a successful assessing tool in tourism, communication and marketing.

The tourist destinations are constantly in a territorial competition because of the current global economy. Although many of them offer the same product (the same territory, the same infrastructure, the same education level of the population), they must identify, exploit and promote the competitive advantages and/or unique selling points that they have in order to compete at global level for

investments, tourism, political power etc. (Messely et al., 2010).

Thus the attitudes, perceptions and images play an important role in destinations choices.

Destination image is a critical factor in destination choices (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Chon, 1991; Dann, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Gartner, 1993; Goodrich, 1978; Mayo, 1973). Thus, the identification, tracking, marketing, and management of image should be among the top priorities of tourist destinations as touristic images don't always reflect reality (Hunt, 1975) and may send away potential tourists.

In this context, tourism marketers (senders) are those that imprint a tourist identity to a tourist destination, formed of natural and anthropic touristic resources, but they also create a touristic image formed of experiences, communications etc. The receiver, i.e. the potential tourist, is the person who perceives the natural and human elements, i.e. the identity, and also the feelings of relaxation, freedom, welfare induced by the tourism image.

Thus the *image* represents all perceptions and beliefs that people have about that destination. It is not necessarily based on a previous experience, i.e. a visit to the destination. All tourist destinations have their own image and the marketer interest is to develop, to sustain or to modify certain elements of the image in order to influence the behaviour of potential visitors (Fig. 1).

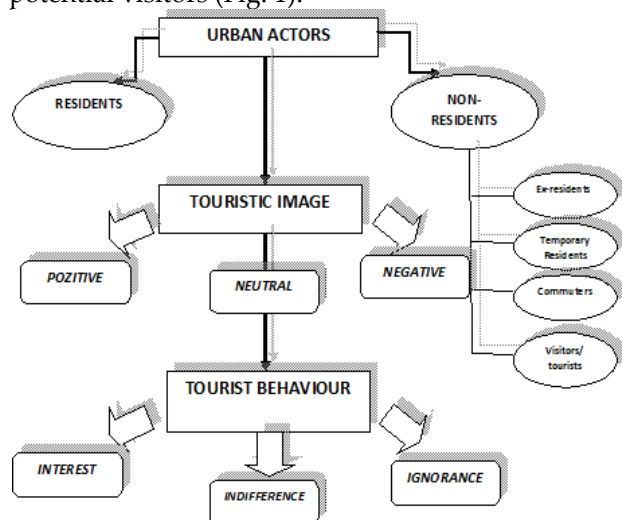


Fig. 1: The relation between urban actors, touristic image and types of tourist behaviour (adapted after Neacșu, 2010)

Touristic image plays an important role for every tourist destination, determining the connection between visitor and the chosen destination. Henderson (2007) defined the *destination image* as

"multidimensional, with cognitive and emotional spheres (...) an amalgam of knowledge, feelings, beliefs, opinions, ideas, expectations and impressions that people have from a particular destination".

Crompton (1979) offers an integrative definition of touristic image as the sum of beliefs, impressions, ideas, and perceptions that people hold of objects, behaviours, and events. When travellers discover a destination, both their general and tourist images may be impacted. This notion is particularly pertinent to the study of international destination image because tourism may offer the best and only opportunity for countries to correct misperceptions.

Building a touristic image takes time and is based on several steps presented in fig. 2. Word of mouth communication between friends and family, independent tourism information and personal experiences are factors, in addition to the advertising, that exercise a great influence on building destination images (Governs and Go, 2004; Hanlan and Kelly, 2005).

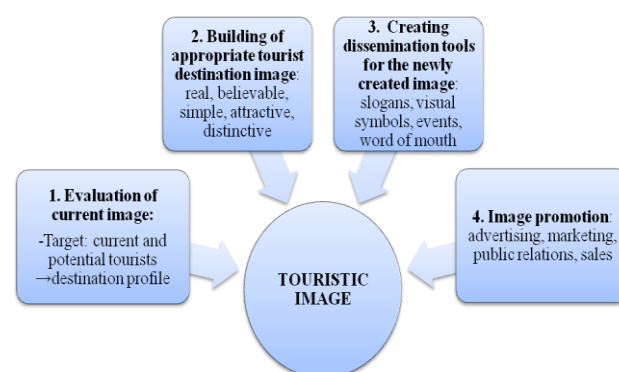


Fig. 2: The building system of a touristic image

As image may be destination-determined and formed by personal or actual experiences (Crompton, 1979), investigating and attending the current tourists provides a baseline of information from which to build and tailor marketing and service promotions.

The study aims at exploring how Craiova municipality is perceived as a tourist destination, representing basically the first stage in building Craiova's touristic image. The main objectives are:

- Identification of the predominant form / forms of tourism in terms of purpose, motivation, duration of stays and visibility through promotion;
- The perception of residents and non-residents towards the tourism elements of the city;

- c) Capture the positive / negative effects of tourism activities development in the municipality;
- d) Identify the main tourist attractions and forms associated with the city in order to further develop tourism activities.

Data and methods

The study involves underlining and mapping the residents and non-residents perceptions towards the touristic image of Craiova, but also the general impression about the city. It was conducted through a survey, i.e. a questionnaire, on internet in the spring of 2011-2012.

The sample of respondents consists of 165 residents and 158 non-residents. Their selection was done randomly leading to some specificities of the social group that used the internet.

The survey was formed of 15 questions for both residents and non-residents, which were closed, semi-closed (like other / specify what) and open items, the latter reporting major tourist attractions and tourist areas of the city or deficiencies that can be corrected on a later stage. The obtained data was processed statistically, being outlined a mental map of tourist perception of the city's tourist image.

Limitations of the study are given by the random sampling of respondents in terms of age, sex, education, profession and the closed questions with items that may limit the tourist perception of the city, being also other ways to capture the perception that are not integrated in the questionnaire. Another limitation is that in order to be conclusive, such research should be conducted continuously / periodically as trends in tourists' expectations and demands are becoming bigger and more complex due to the overall changes and trends and due to the increasing competition between tourist destinations.

Results and discussion

The sample of 323 people (165 residents and 158 non-residents) was from different cities located in the counties of Oltenia, Wallachia and Cluj county. Their demographic structure is presented in table 1.

The analysis of the touristic image from the residents/non-residents' perspective is grouped in four main categories.

Table 1 The respondents' (residents and non-residents) demographic data (%)

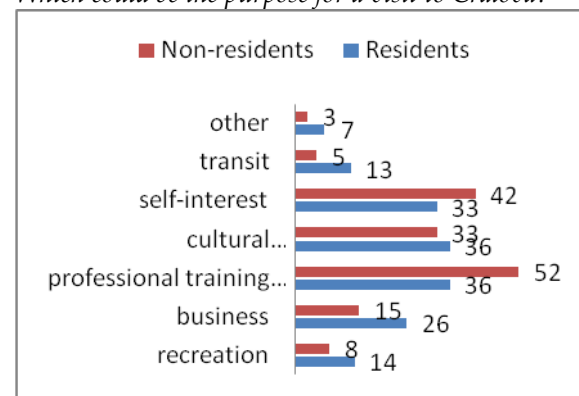
	Structure	Residents	Non-residents
Gender	Male	81	78
	Female	84	80
Age	younger than 30 years	67	59
	31-50 years	84	84
	older than 50 years	14	15
Marital status	unmarried	100	86
	married	53	58
	divorced	10	11
	Widow/er	2	3
Level of studies	Inferior	17	13
	Medium	34	48
	Superior	114	97
Sector of activity	Primary	4	7
	Secondary	63	58
	Tertiary	98	93
Income	Under 670 Ron*	27	16
	670-1200 Ron	111	73
	over 1200 Ron	27	69

* 1 Ron= 0.22 Euro

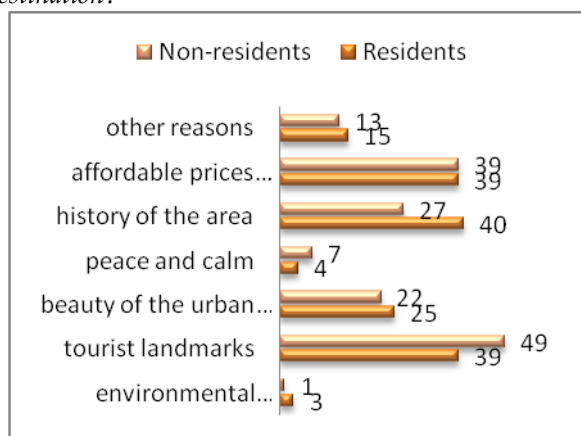
a. Forms of tourism in Craiova municipality

The four questions regarding tourism in Craiova presented that the main **purposes** for a visit to Craiova is professional training and self-interest according to the non-residents' perception and professional training, cultural festivals, concerts and self-interest according to the residents answers. Tourist landmarks, history of the area and the affordable prices are some of the **reasons** to visit Craiova. The **length of a journey** in Craiova is the weekend, meaning 1 to 2 days of staying in the city. The **visit frequency** of the tourist landmarks in the city was performed several times by the both categories of respondents. The results of the answers are presented below (fig. 3):

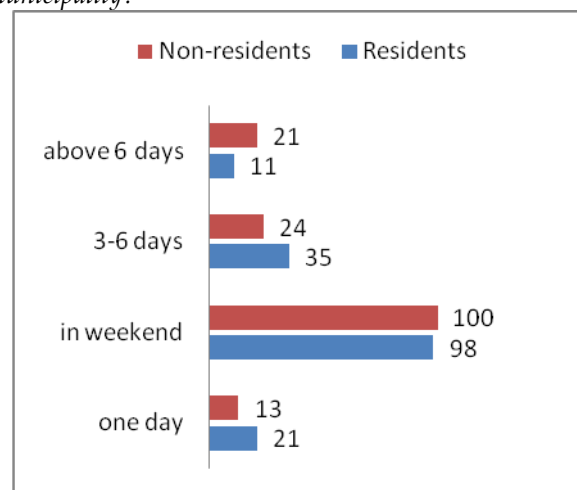
Which could be the purpose for a visit to Craiova?



For which reasons will you choose Craiova as a tourist destination?



How long should be a journey in Craiova municipality?



How many times have you visited the tourist landmarks of Craiova?

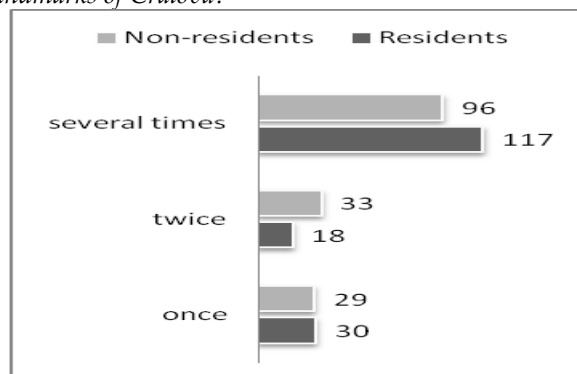
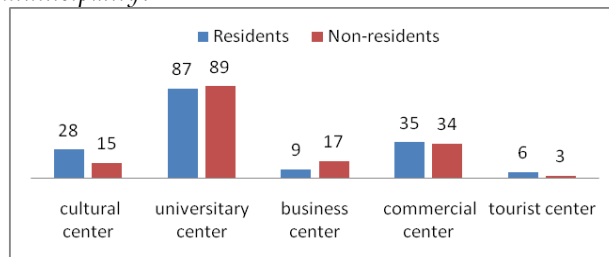


Fig. 3: Forms of tourism in Craiova municipality according to the respondents' perception

b. Tourist visibility by promotion

Residents and non-residents identified Craiova as an university and commercial centre; 80% of respondents consider that Craiova's tourism potential is insufficient promoted, but the major means of promotion are word of mouth communication of friends and relatives, and internet (fig.4).

Which characteristics are more relevant for Craiova municipality?



From which sources of information do you know Craiova's tourism resources?

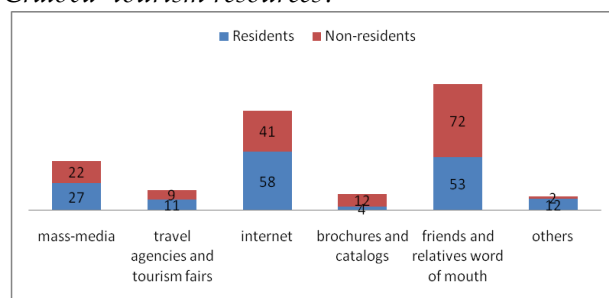


Fig. 4: Visibility of Craiova municipality through promotion

c. Tourist services and tourism development

Regarding the accommodation more than 50% of the respondents would recommend a hotel in the city or friends and relatives houses (fig.5).

What accommodation would you recommend during the stay in Craiova?

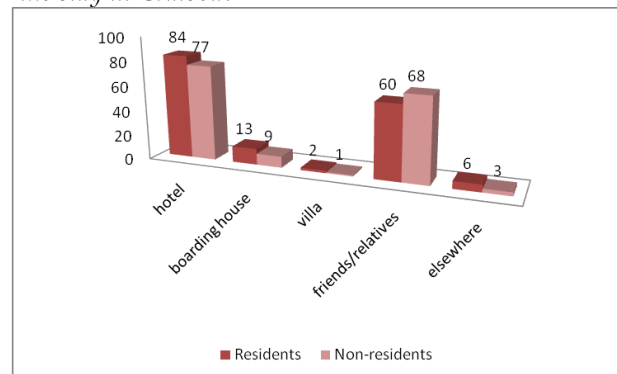


Fig. 5: Forms of accommodation in Craiova recommended by respondents

The tourist services analysis show that both 50% of residents and non-residents are satisfied with the accommodation, alimentation and recreation units.

50% of respondents show their dissatisfaction regarding the transportation infrastructure, but they are indifferent concerning SPAs and treatment facilities in the city as well as the auxiliary tourist services.

Fifty percent of the respondents are satisfied with the *tourist employees in HORECA* in terms of attitude, behaviour and level of training in the field. Above 50% are also satisfied with the *organization of events* and the *overall opinion about the stay* in Craiova is good.

The tourism development was also another issue analyzed in the survey, measuring the *tourism positive and negative impact on the local community*.

Above 82% of respondents (residents and non-residents) saw the positive impact of tourism on the local community, scoring with *important* and *very important* some tourist aspects such as: increasing investment in local community, creating various cultural activities for the city population, creating new jobs, improving the quality of life in the city, increasing the value and prices of the built land, more parks and recreational areas that residents can use, creating an urban and touristic identity in order to reduce the existing urban negative aspects. Most of the respondents didn't specify any negative impact of tourism on the urban community of Craiova.

d. Perception of touristic areas in Craiova

Based on a study of Craiova's urban image conducted during 2012 (Bădiță, 2012) the urban

topophile and topophobe areas were located within the city. Thus there was noticed that the last section of this questionnaire shows through open questions the major tourist landmarks and the most attractive areas of the city in the respondents' perception and there could be seen that they overlap perfectly the attractive (or repulsive) tourist areas within Craiova (fig.6).

The most attractive areas proved to be the city centre with the historic buildings and 1 Mai (due to the Romanescu Park) and Valea Rosie neighbourhoods. The major tourist landmarks are: Romanescu Park, central area (with several landmarks: National Theatre, The University, Singing Fountains, Art Museum, Mihai Viteazu Square, The Philharmonic, Lipscani Street), museums, churches, restaurants/bars, the Botanical Garden and the stadium (fig. 7).

Some negative aspects that may affect the tourism sector in the city were underlined by both residents and non-residents: the presence of minorities in the city centre, crowded traffic, stray dogs, neglected tourist landmarks, pollution, poor tourist promotion of the city, critical infrastructure and the authorities' disinterest regarding tourism activities etc.



Fig. 6: Attractive and repulsive touristic areas in Craiova municipality

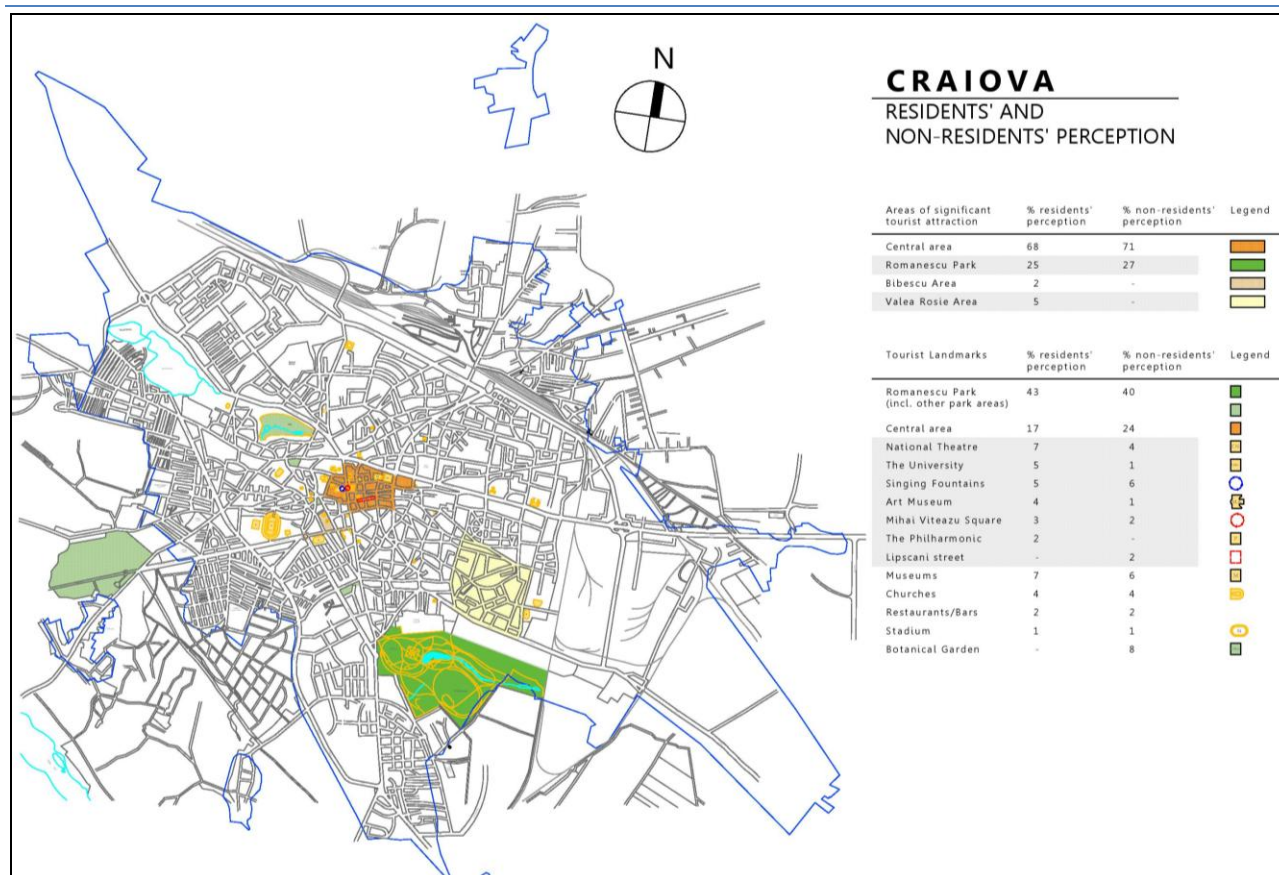


Fig. 7: The mental map of Craiova's touristic image

Conclusions and further study

The findings of this touristic image study show that:

- Over 50% of respondents would visit Craiova because of:
 - personal, cultural and training reasons,
 - the historical and cultural sites,
 - affordable prices in comparison with other touristic areas
 - during weekend
- Over 40% of respondents know the city from friends, internet, media, and would stay at a hotel or friends
- There was a high degree of satisfaction, over 50%, in terms of accommodation, public alimentation units, personnel and organized events
- There was registered 30-40% degree of dissatisfaction with transport
 - infrastructure, traffic, stray dogs, Roma minorities and neglected tourist landmarks
- Over 80% of respondents believe that tourism development in the city has many positive effects

on the local economy but also on the social environment and only 20% see its negative impact.

This study represents a base for conducting similar further studies during the following period focusing also on the impact of Craiova's touristic image on the urban image of this city and on some strategies of improving the tourists perception on the area.

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The Individualization of the Hotel as Tourist Attraction in the Urban Area of Transylvania

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to emphasize the importance of the hotels as accommodation establishments within the urban area of Transylvania. The study involves ten counties (Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Mureș, Sibiu and Sălaj), focusing on their towns. The geographic distribution of the hotels highlights the differences that can be observed between the studied counties. These dissimilarities started to appear due to the different tourist potential and the economic development. With more than two centuries of tradition in the background, the hotels in Transylvania experienced, along their evolution, a series of transformations that led to changes in the structure of their offer. In the urban context, the hotel stands as a main element when defining the city's tourist role, also taking into account that for the city, the presence of hotels, from different categories and with different levels of comfort, is imperative.

Keywords: *hotel, city, tourism*

Rezumat. Individualizarea hotelului ca sursă de atractivitate turistică în spațiul urban din Transilvania

Lucrarea de față își propune să evidențieze importanța pe care o au hotelurile ca unități de cazare în spațiul urban al Transilvaniei. Arealul de studiu cuprinde zece județe (Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Mureș, Sibiu și Sălaj) cu accent pe orașele acestora. Repartiția geografică a acestor unități hoteliere evidențiază diferențele care există la nivelul județelor studiate, aceste diferențe datorându-se dezvoltării economice, a potențialului turistic existent și a gradului de dezvoltare turistică. Cu o tradiție de mai bine de două secole, amenajările hoteliere din Transilvania, în evoluția lor, cunosc o serie de transformări ce conduc la modificări în structura ofertei lor. Imaginea antagonică a orașului include hotelul ca un element important în determinarea funcției sale turistice având în vedere faptul că pentru un oraș turistic existența hotelurilor, variate ca tipologie și implicit ca și grad de confort, este un imperativ.

Cuvinte-cheie: *hotel, oraș, turism*

Introduction

At the same time with the development of the economy and tourism, the city turns into one of the most important tourist destinations. After the researchers having denied the importance of the city as tourist destination, believing that its only purpose is to send out tourists (Law, 2002), the later studies have placed this type of tourism in the center of present investigations.

If at first it had been looked at as a simple accommodation establishment, nowadays the hotel has become itself the destination due to its individualization in the landscape of the cities, tourist resorts, etc. The development of the

transportation infrastructure as well as the economic development has influenced the evolution of tourism. The city has become a real "epicenter of the urban, social, political and business activities" (Rutes, Penner&Adams, 2001, p. 2), it represents the most important centre of goods and service exchange for both urban and surrounding areas.

At an international level, the end of the 18th century brings on the hotel sector the concept of urban hotel with the opening of the *City Hotel* in New York, in 1794 (Rutes et al., 2001). Besides the impressing five floor structure, the accommodation establishment also comes with a different approach of hospitality through its new components of the public areas: the ballroom and the banquet hall. After the appearance of this urban accommodation

symbol, we can observe later on other two remarkable hotels – Tremont Hotel (1828) and Hotel Buffalo Statler (1908) – that diversify the typology of the urban accommodation and contribute at the same time to the expansion of the tourism in the city. It is now the time of the commercial hotels and the 19th century brings on the European hotel sector the *grand hotel* concept defined by “luxury, even social life opulence of a certain privileged social category” (Hariton, 2007, p.10).

The expansion of trade starting with the 19th century will lead to business trips (Law, 2002). The increasing spare time and financial resources and the development of the transportation infrastructure, lead to positive changes in the demand for tourist services. The leisure travel had turned in time into a lifestyle feature. By traveling, the modern tourist aims to satisfy not only physical needs, but also psychological ones. The evidences, dating from the year 130 a.Ch., of using thermal water for bathing, healing but also as recreational means, in the resorts of Dacia Felix, Geoagiu Băi (Germisara), Călan (Acquae) and Băile Herculane (Ad aqua Herculi Sacras-Ad Mediam) proves that since those early times, man used to travel in order to heal various illnesses. The Romans used an ingenious technique to collect water and they used to heat the rooms by their hypocaust system (Ciangă, 2006).

In the **Middle Ages**, in Romania and worldwide, hospitality was understood as an act of good will, a Christian virtue. In the context of the uncertainty of travel, it is improper to refer to tourist flows; it is more appropriate to refer to pilgrimage and to travels made in order to enrich one's knowledge and professional skills. The ones that travelled around could find a place to sleep and to enjoy a hot meal within the monasteries. Here the hosts expected in exchange to know the travelers names, where they came from and their status. Also they were advised by the clerics to make a donation for the church (Pop, Coruțiu, 2006). Thus, the ones that belonged to the lower class were not allowed into the monastery, while the individuals of the middle class had to pay an amount established by the church. Although in the Middle Ages it has been registered a decrease in the material and spiritual culture, the region of Transylvania proudly mentions wealthy towns of that time, such as Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu and Brașov. The most popular Transylvanian inns were “La Sultanul Turcesc” (1555, “At the Turkish Sultan”,

today known as “The Romans’ Emperor” hotel), and “Calul Bălan” (“The White Horse”) or “Feher Lo” (1604, nowadays the building became home of the Ethnographic Museum, on 21 Memorandum street, Cluj-Napoca). In the context of a developing economy and trade relations with the Western and Eastern countries, the travelers flow increases and evidently also does the expectation to have better accommodation conditions. In Sibiu, in 1773 it opened – on the same location where the oldest inn in the country (“At the Turkish Sultan”, 1555) used to stand – the first hotel known under the name of “The Romans’ Emperor”. The hotel still functions nowadays and the actual building dates from 1895. It is known as hotel meant for the high society as along time it hosted numerous celebrities among which: Mihai Eminescu, Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, Johann Strauss, etc. (Bonfert, 2007).

The 19th century reflects the care showed by the inn owners’ in an effort to improve the services offered to the guests. Therefore, they extend their properties; they embellish the rooms and they diversify the meals that they used to serve. Showing a special attention to all these aspects they manage to transform the inn in what will become the hotel. In what concerns Cluj-Napoca, there are two remarkable hotels in the central part of the town: *Pannonia* Hotel (1878) and *New York* Hotel (1895). In 1891 “Comitetul oficial de informațiune pentru străini”(The Official Committee of Information for Foreigners) issued “Călăuz al streinului”(Guide for the Foreigners) which stated that: “Brașov has besides restaurants and small inns also six bigger hotels: București Hotel, *Central* Hotel no. 1, *Europa* Hotel, *Pomul verde* Hotel, *Coroana* Hotel, *Union* Hotel, that do their best to fully satisfy the fair expectations of the traveler” (apud Ene, 2004, p. 19). For the same town it was mentioned (Petit, 1922) an accommodation capacity of 297 rooms in a total of thirteen hotels: H. *Coroana*, H. *Continental*, *Vila Kertsch*, H. *Metropol*, H. *Coroana Veche*, H. *Cârciuma Roșie Pister*, H. *Mielul Alb*, H. *Romer*, H. *Kristea*, H. *Pesta*, H. *Calul Alb*, H. *Predeal* and H. *Schneider*. The author (Petit, 1922) mentions these accommodation establishments under the name of “otel” instead of “hotel”. It is worth to say that the *Coroana* Hotel was considered the largest and the most popular hotel in Brașov. Its rooms, cold and hot running water, bathrooms, central heating, elevator, café, restaurant and terrace were meant for the wealthy members of the high class (Cicio-Pop, 1939). At the end of the

19th century, in **Sibiu**, the following hotels were considered to be the most imposing hotels (Bonfert, 2007): *Împăratul Romanilor* Hotel, *Habermann* Hotel (11, Unirii Square), *Melzer* Hotel (that afterwards became *Bonfert* Hotel, on 11 Mitropoliei St.), *Central* Hotel (71, 9th of May St.), *Royal* Hotel (no. 2, Train Station Square), *Schmidt* Hotel (9 Blănarilor St.), *Boulevard* Hotel (10 Unirii Square), *Dacia* Hotel (41 Ocnei St.), *Gundisch* Hotel (11 Tg. Peștelui St.), *Krone* Hotel (11 Turnului St.), *Transilvania* Hotel (37 Constituției St.) and *Neurhrer* Hotel.

According to *Guide de la Roumanie* (1939) written by Cicio-Pop Alexandru, the most important hotels in the urban area of Transylvania, at that time, were: *Covac* Hotel, *Fritsch* Hotel, *Schneider* Hotel, *Dacia* Hotel, *Marcovici* Hotel (Bistrița), *Astoria* Hotel, *Central* Hotel, *New York* Hotel, *Parc* Hotel (Cluj-Napoca), *Splendid* Hotel, *New-York* Hotel, *Transilvania* Hotel, *Central* Hotel (Tg. Mureș), *David* Hotel, *București* Hotel, *Central* Hotel, *Europa* Hotel, *Sanatoriul Dr. Hugi Horsch* (Miercurea Ciuc), *Transilvania* Hotel (Covasna), *Hotelul Orășenesc*, *Central* Hotel, *Teglaș* Hotel (Sf. Gheorghe), *Dacia* Hotel, *Europa* Hotel, *Transilvania* Hotel (Alba-Iulia).

After the Second World War, many hotels were transformed into homes for the war victims, residences for students or even hospitals. Hotel *Central* (Hotel *Pannonia* until 1890) from Cluj-Napoca was nationalized and transformed into residences for students (Lukacs, 2005) and the *New York* Hotel had the same destiny (Cicio-Pop, 1939). Both hotels were re-opened: *Pannonia* Hotel in 1960 and *New York* Hotel in 1975. During the 1945-1948 period, the financial situation of Romania had become very instable, mainly due to the negative influence of the Second WW. In 1948 the tourism infrastructure was nationalized, meaning that the State became its owner and it could and did transfer it to certain social structures, such as the Syndicates or the Ministry of Labor (Ciangă, 2006). In Romania there began a recovery of the hospitality field by reorganizing the entire sector of public nutrition, started by the Ministry of Interior Commerce. The units that no longer corresponded to the needs of the population in those difficult times, or to the new social ambiance, ceased their activity. A series of new restaurants and hotels had opened after few rearrangements that have been done. Everything built in this period shows a total contrast with the previous architecture. The focus is on the vertical

construction and the desire is to build imposing hotels, disregarding of the real need of accommodation places. The offer does not correspond to the demand.

Starting with 1956, the hotels and the resorts are provided with wellness systems and they adopt the "tout service" system that offer to the guests not only accommodation but also wellness and diversion, all in the same establishment. While the wellness resorts adopted this system, in the urban environment the hotels were built on the principle of the separation of different functions in individual buildings (Ciangă, 2006).

The prosperity of the sixth and seventh decades of the 20th century reflects in the most remarkable hotels at that time: *Transilvania* Hotel (Cluj-Napoca), *Dacia* Hotel (Sebeș), *Coroana de Aur* Hotel (Bistrița), *Alpin* Hotel (Poiana Brașov), *Ciucaș* Hotel (Poiana Brașov), *Ursul* Hotel (Poiana Brașov), etc. The period between 1960 and 1975 registered the most dynamic tourism activity in Romania. Great amounts of money were invested in the tourism infrastructure, and at a greater extent in the hotel accommodation. During this time the constructions have neither meaning nor purpose (Curinschi, 1981), as the great number of buildings often prove to be useless. The accommodation buildings become part of the town and their location had to be as central as possible. Some examples in this direction are: *Transilvania* Hotel (nowadays *Belvedere* Hotel, Cluj-Napoca), *Napoca* (Cluj-Napoca), *Sarmis* (Deva), *Dacia* (Deva), *Boulevard* (Deva), *Turist* (Deva), *Ruscă* (Hunedoara), *Diana* and *Geoagiu* (Geoagiu-Băi), *Transilvania*, *Cetate*, *Parc* (Alba-Iulia), *Hebe*, *Someșul* (Sângeorz Băi), *Coroana de Aur* (Bistrita), *Parc*, *Silva*, *Apollo*, *Hermannstad* Hotel (Sibiu) etc. The principles of the tourist arrangements were often disregarded, especially the harmonization with the landscape, the dynamic balance between the tourism infrastructure and the general infrastructure. Starting with 1980, the tourism infrastructure begins to regress because of the social and economical conditions in Romania. This decrease lasts until the beginning of the 21st century. Although it has been given a lot of credit to the economical and respectively to the tourism development, by the privatization process, the consequences proved to be unsuccessful due to the lack in informing people, bureaucracy, inappropriate professional training of the ones that got involved in the hotels' management; in most of the cases it has been registered a regression, not a

progress, as expected. The regression of the Romanian tourism had already started in the 1980 and it became more prominent after 1990, mainly because of:

- the physical deterioration of the accommodation units;
- the poor quality of the services;
- the change of many accommodation establishments' purpose as a consequence of the retrocession to their original owners;
- the defective management of the accommodation units such as the hotels.

The new generation hotels, the construction of which started in 2000, are characterized by a higher level of comfort, by multiple demands, particularly in what concerns business and wellness tourism. The proprietors try their chance with the most unusual mixtures, obtaining as a result an entire complex appealing to the guests. The hotels that were constructed after 2000, have built an entire personalized world that reflects the cultural preferences and the lifestyle of the target customers. Thus, the hotel becomes once again the central element of the social life by the restoration of the old, distinguished accommodation establishments. The focus is on the values of the past, on design, on details and very personalized services. The *Boutique Hotel*, the *Design Hotel*, the *Urban Hotel* and the *Wellness Hotel* are the appreciated hotel types in the 21st century. The town offers a contrasting image. Features such as crowded, dirty, loud, unhealthy, unsafe are counterbalanced by a series of positive images showing that the town is also animated, civilized, cosmopolitan and full of opportunities (Law, 2002).

The development of the tourism sector in a certain region is conditioned by the existence of the structures required in order to receive the guests (Snak, 2003). They also influence the tourist activity flow. The evolution of the transportation infrastructure has increased the safety of traveling and has made it possible to travel on long distances. The modern tourism is not conditioned anymore by the long distances. The town has become the appropriate destination for a *city break* (the activity of visiting a city with a significant tourist value and spending one to three nights in that city).

Though it has not been defined as a physiological need, the desire to take a holiday can be understood as a series of needs that the simple human existence involves. And this is why every tourist product has

to include as many elements as possible in order to satisfy these needs. The hospitality industry started to exist out of the physiological necessities to eat and sleep (Borchgrevink, 1999). Since the 18th century there existed the desire among the wealthiest people to visit Europe's greatest cities, particularly the ones in Italy and France in order to learn about the latest artistic and scientific discoveries. This habit of the Grand Tour so "en vogue" at that time can be considered as the origin of the urban tourism which today represents an important activity within the big cities, which aims to restore their old historical parts, to organize great cultural events and to activate the interest of the tourists for the cultural heritage. "*The urban tourism represents an ensemble of tourist resources and activities implanted in the city*" (Ilieș, 2008, p. 10). The demand comes as a result of the human need for culture, amusement and relaxation. The target of this type of tourism is: business tourists, weekend tourists, the tourists that come to the city to visit friends or family, the transit tourists and the urban stay tourists. Taking into account that traveling is more a desire than a need, "the motivation must be a strong one" (Law, 2002, p. 15).

If during the 19th century the City Hall used to represent the symbol of the city, situated in the most important part of the city, nowadays it is the hotel that dictates great part of the urban architecture. There is a close relation between the economic growth of a city and the hotels in that city. These two elements depend on each other because without trade there would not be any need to build hotels, just as without these accommodation units the trade would not be profitable (Law, 2002). Once with the globalization, the investors turned towards the developing potential markets. Hence, there appeared the transnational corporations. More and more international corporations locate their headquarters in the main capitals worldwide, and the business travels register an amazing evolution. The business tourist tries to combine useful and pleasure and he will not choose a hotel just because he finds it cheaper or because he wants to spend his holidays; on the contrary, he will stay at that hotel because he has to. This is why the business hotels afford to establish higher rates than the leisure hotels. To overcome these needs and desires of the tourists, the proprietors constantly renew the image of their hotels and improve the services they offer. The competition on this market has influenced the

hoteliers to consider even the tiniest details in the attempt to stand out. Realizing the importance of the cultural and architectural heritage, there begins to appear projects that involve the restoration of old buildings, of palaces, of old bank establishments, and turn all these establishments into hotels that tell their own story, and they are also known as *boutique hotels*. The hotel, as accommodation establishment, can either be part of a tourist sights ensemble, either it can represent itself a tourist sight. Building a real image, but focusing on its positive aspects and making it appealing, can attract a great number of tourists, as well as investors that could bring their contribution to the city's development. The hotels no longer answer only to the need of accommodation; the guest expects nowadays to find besides the accommodation services, also first class restaurants, conference rooms, the chance to spend his spare time, fitness, gyms, spas and wellness services to heal his body and spirit.

"The hotel becomes a combination of a landmark building and a rich man's house, and provides an experience for the visitor" (Law, 2002, p. 161).

There are a lot of trends imposing on the urban hotel sector, (Rutes et. al., 2001) mainly:

- employing non-toxic construction material and sustainable systems for the environment in order to show its care and respect towards the future generations;
- market and services fragmentation so to make it possible to supply a large scale of various services within the same accommodation establishment;
- thanks to the technological development, more and more hotel chains prefer to organize their services on separate regions, saving thus on the back office spaces;
- adopting mixed-use developments;
- adapting the services and facilities to the needs of their guests;
- extended stay hotel;
- super-luxury accommodation;
- urban resort.

Study area

The hotel establishment appears in the urban region of Transylvania since the 18th century and it evolves at the same time with the country's economic development. The hotel stands as an important benchmark for the economical evolution of a given area or region. Among the most visible county towns remarkable for their tourist sites,

history and architecture, there are to be mentioned Alba-Iulia, Brașov, Bistrița, Cluj-Napoca, Sfântu Gheorghe, Deva, Miercurea-Ciuc, Zalău, Sibiu and Tg. Mureș.

Material and methods

The present study follows the history of the individualization of the hotel as a tourist development with accommodation function in the urban area of Transylvania. Inventorying these tourist establishments highlighted their geographical distribution within the county seats of the studied tourist region. The study focuses on the relationship that exists between the tourism development in general and the urban tourism in particular and the development of the tourist establishment with hotels as case study. The map of the settlements of Transylvania with hotel infrastructure has the role to highlight the differences that exist between the urban accommodation capacity of the hotels from the counties of the studied region.

Results

Investing in hotel projects is closely related to the economic situation and to the perspective of its future development, as in the case of a hotel the investment redemption and the profit are uncertain. The map of the settlements of Transylvania showing hotel infrastructure (Fig. 1.) highlights the differences between the accommodation capacity of the counties individually and within them. When referring to the accommodation places that the Transylvanian hotels provide, four towns are notable (Cluj-Napoca, Covasna, Brașov and Poiana Brașov) because they owe the most extended hotel infrastructure and every one provides over 2000 accommodation places. This is a result of the considerable tourist function importance in the town of Brașov and in the mountain climate resort of Poiana Brașov; it is a result of the economic development level and also of the status of academic town in the case of Cluj-Napoca what concerns Covasna, the extended hotel infrastructure is the result of the great capacity that the "mammoth" hotels have since the 6th and 7th decade of the 19th century. The towns of Sibiu, Tg. Mureș, Sângeorz-Băi and Predeal offer between 1001 and 2000 accommodation places per town and in the category

of 501-1000 accommodation places we have the towns of Alba-Iulia, Băile Tuşnad, Sovata and Bistriţa. However, most settlements offer less than 100 accommodation places.

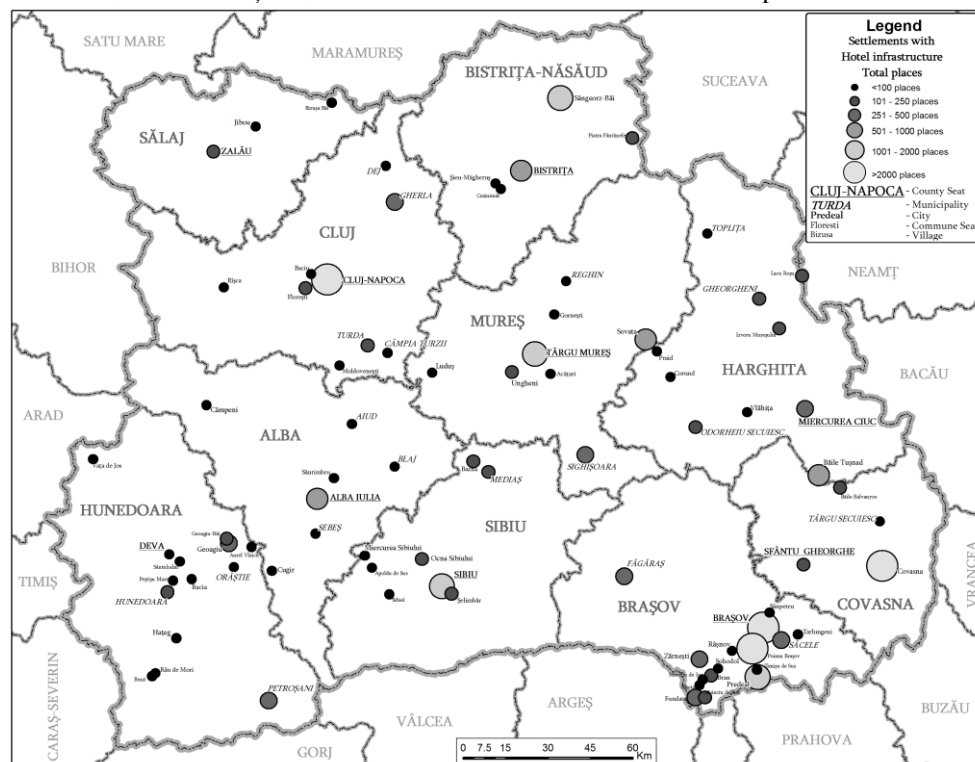


Fig. 1: Settlements of Transylvania with hotel infrastructure in 2011

(Data source: <http://www.mdrt.ro/turism/unitati-clasificate.html>)

Figure 2 represents the distribution of the accommodation establishment such as hotels within the region of Transylvania, according to different destinations. The highest percentage (45%) is registered in ten county seats, the same ones that

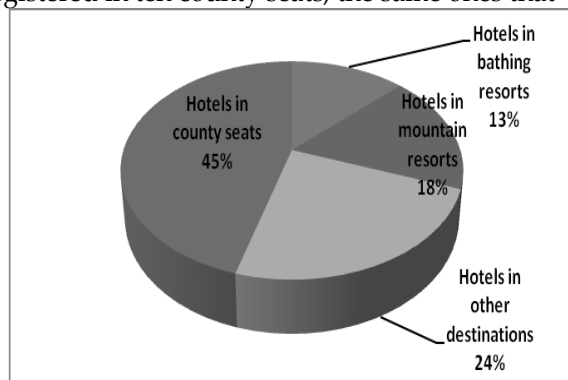


Fig. 2: Distribution of the hotels from Transylvania on destinations, in 2011

(Data source: <http://www.mdrt.ro/turism/unitati-clasificate.html>)

concentrate the most significant number of hotels, followed by the hotels located within other destinations; the latter includes those hotels situated in towns that do not have the status of mountain or bathing resorts, nor county seats (24%), then

followed by the mountain resorts (18%) and bathing resorts (13%).

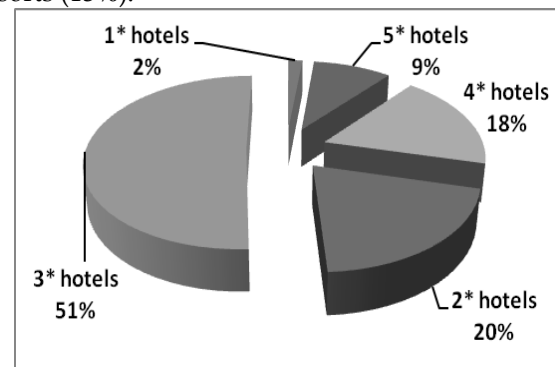


Fig. 3: Distribution of the hotel accommodation places from the cities of Transylvania, depending on degree of comfort

(Data source: <http://www.mdrt.ro/turism/unitati-clasificate.html>)

Figure 3 shows that in the towns of Transylvania the 3 stars hotels account for more than half of the accommodation capacity (51%), followed by the 2 stars hotels (20%), 4 stars hotels (18%), 5 stars hotels (9%) and one star hotels (2%).

Therefore, hotels from the studied region are mainly meant for the economy hotel (2-3 stars)

target, while the 4 stars and the luxury (5 stars) target register lower percentages.

Conclusions

Even though apparently the urban hotel seems to be a basic concept, it has to consider various aspects, most of the times contradictory, as previously mentioned. The hotel establishments in the urban area are frequented by the tourists that are in the city to spend their vacation (stay tourists) and also by the transit tourists. Consequently, the hoteliers must take into account that the two tourist categories will have different needs and expectations. On one hand the hoteliers have to assure the proper infrastructure for leisure – especially in the case of the stay tourists – and on the other hand they will pay attention to the needs of the transit tourists, such as business tourists that need spaces for conferences, business centers, but also the need to relax after a long working day. The hotel, with its defined presence in the urban environment, since the 18th century, becomes a significant part of the city, contributing to its tourist feature.

The geographical repartition of the hotels within the studied region highlights their substantial number (45%) in the county seats. Regarding the structure of offer within the Transylvanian hotels according to the comfort level, the most representative section is the 3 stars hotels (51%), while the 5 stars hotels only represent 9%. It is also obvious (fig.1) that in the case of Transylvania, the majority of settlements have less than 100 accommodation places in hotels per settlement. There are remarkable differences between the counties, the county seats and between the towns with an important tourist function. The 21st century hotels intend to keep up with the technological evolution in order to satisfy the needs of their customers that depend more and more on the technology. The hotel in the urban environment tries to answer to the desire of the guest: to escape the daily routine and at the same time to feel, at a certain extent, like home.

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The Natural Tourism Potential of Galați City and Its Sustainable Capitalization

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Abstract

This study analyzes the natural tourism potential of Galați Town within the context of sustainable development, starting from the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the natural tourist patrimony, with the purpose of highlighting the elements of attractiveness, as well as the local factors that encourage or hinder tourist functionality. The qualitative assessment of the tourist potential, undertaken by quantifying the tourist sights, which were grouped into several types, has allowed the identification of the tourist attractions. A particular attention has been paid to the natural vegetation, which has not been seriously impacted by the human society and which has been protected and preserved within the framework of the Natura 2000 European Programme. The analyses undertaken and the bioclimatic indicators computed based on the existing data prove that in this area the local climate is favorable for the tourist activities. Our interest on this topic stems from the desire to highlight the tourism potential of this geographical space and to promote it at the national level.

Keywords: *natural tourism potential, tourist sights, geosites, protected natural areas, climate favourability*

Rezumat. Potențialul turistic al orașului Galați și valorificarea sa durabilă

Acest studiu analizează potențialul turistic natural al orașului Galați în contextul dezvoltării durabile, pornind de la evaluarea cantitativă și calitativă a patrimoniului turistic natural, cu scopul de a evidenția elementele de atractivitate, precum și factorii locali care încurajează sau împiedică funcționalitate turistică. Evaluarea calitativă a potențialului turistic, realizat prin cuantificarea atracțiilor turistice, care au fost grupate în mai multe tipuri, a permis identificarea atracțiilor turistice. O atenție deosebită a fost acordată vegetației naturale, care nu a fost foarte afectată de societatea umană și care a fost protejată și păstrată în cadrul Programului european Natura 2000. Analizele întreprinse și indicatorii bioclimatici calculați pe baza datelor existente dovedesc că în această zonă climatul local este favorabil pentru activitățile turistice. Interesul nostru pentru această temă provine din dorința de a evidenția potențialul turistic al acestui spațiu geografic și de a-l promova la nivel național.

Cuvinte-cheie: *potențial turistic natural, atracții turistice, geosituri, arii naturale protejate, favorabilitatea climatului*

Basic notions

Tourism, as a form of capitalizing the natural resources, has become an economic branch with major impact on the contemporary society.

According to Ielenicz and Comănescu (2009), the tourism potential is “the aggregate of the natural and anthropogenic elements lying on a certain territory, which arouse the interest of tourists and lead to the development of tourist activities”. P. Cocean defines the tourist potential in a more synthetic manner as being “the result of the spatial association of the tourist patrimony with the

corresponding material and technical base”. The narrowness of these definitions can be explained by the fact that the respective authors refer only to a part of the tourist sights, more exactly to the known elements. M. Ielenicz (2011) completes the definitions starting from the necessity to separate two groups of components within the tourist potential: the known and capitalized ones, on the one hand, and the less known and still scarcely visited, or dormant, so to speak, on the other hand. Therefore, depending on the degree of recognition, one can speak of a dormant tourist potential (consisting of less known elements) and a known tourist potential (formed of those elements that are

known and promoted, which boost the development of tourist activities).

The natural tourist potential that can be taken into account by tourist activities includes the natural tourist attractions, i.e. those elements of the natural setting having a touristic value (Ielenicz, Comănescu, 2009).

The geographical environment with its components, topography, climate, hydrography and vegetation, is not only the supplier of natural tourist sights, but it also represents the background and the origin of the tourist phenomenon, which groups into a whole the multitude of elements that bring their contribution to the development of tourist activities.

Of the elements that form the geographical environment, the most widespread in the area of Galați Town are those belonging to the vegetation. In other words, besides its economic and protection functions the vegetation has an obvious tourist potential expressed by the beauty of the landscape, as well as by its aesthetic and scientific value. At the same time, the vegetation has always offered spots for rest, recreation and leisure activities. But the vegetal cover is the most sensitive element of the geographical landscape, as it suffers the impact of both the natural controls (topography, climate, hydrography, soil) and the human pressure (Cocerhan, Fluțar, Spănu, 2012).

Raised issues

The natural tourist potential of Galați Town

The natural tourist potential of Galați Town is given by its geographical location, which makes it a transit zone to other regions with more diversified tourist potential, such as the Danube Delta and the Black Sea Coast. The natural tourist potential includes the beautiful scenery that can be seen when looking down from the Brateș cliff to the floodplains of the Siret and Prut, as well as the reserves protected by law. We can also add to these the improved cliff promenade of the Danube (3 km long) and the Public Gardens.

The bio-geographical component, although known to a certain extent, is poorly capitalized. The most important attractions included in this category are the following: the Gârboavele Forest, located in the outskirts of the city, visited mostly at the end of the week for recreation; the Botanical Garden, a scientifically designed park having also a leisure

function; the parks used for resting and recreation; and last, but not least, the natural reserves (fig. 1).

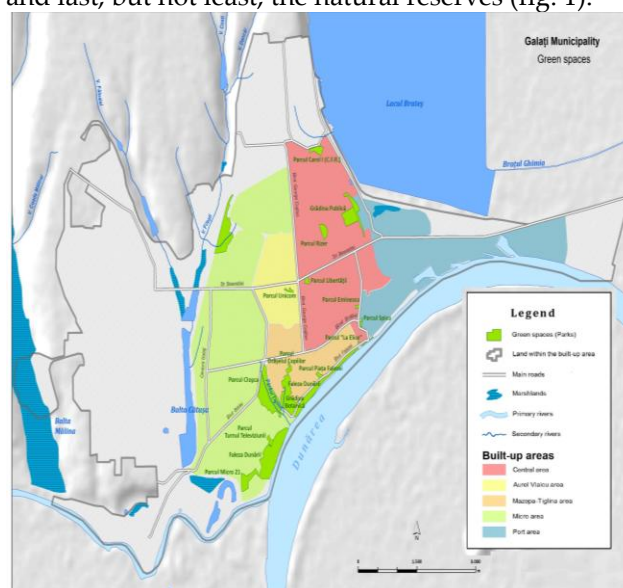


Fig. 1: The green areas of Galați Town

The protected natural areas of national interest and the nature monuments are important both from the aesthetic point of view, as elements of tourist attraction, and from the scientific and educational standpoint, as a basis for ecotourism and scientific school travel. Sometimes, these stand as distinct tourist attractions, but usually they are associated with other landscape components (fig. 2).

The situation of the protected natural areas on the territory of Galați County was assessed based on the data posted by the Ministry of Environment and Water Management on its internet page. The gathered information highlights the fact that there are two sites of community interest (SCI), namely the Lower Prut floodplain and the Prut River Island, and one site of avifauna protection (SAP), represented by the Brateș Lake (fig. 3). The special protection areas of the "The Lower Prut Floodplain" Natural Park are the following: Lake Brateș, including the fish hatchery in the south, as well as the reed and swamp vegetation areas; the Prut River Island; and the dammed stretch of the Prut River, between Punct Vama Giurgiulești and Vlădești.

The capitalization of the natural tourist potential

Galați Town benefits from a valuable natural capital, characterized especially by a high variety of bio-geographical resources, including unique elements (species and habitats), although the areas

occupied by the natural and semi-natural ecological systems are small (only 19.8% of the entire area).

Methods for estimating the value of the natural tourist potential

The attractiveness of the tourist potential may be assessed based on the following elements: accessibility (location, transportation infrastructure),

terrain conditions (hypsothetic steps), rivers, lakes, nature monuments, reserves and parks, climate conditions (weather parameters, seasonal features, air purity, the frequency of sunny days, snow cover depth and duration), microclimate and topoclimate, the beauty of natural landscape and the cultural-historical heritage.

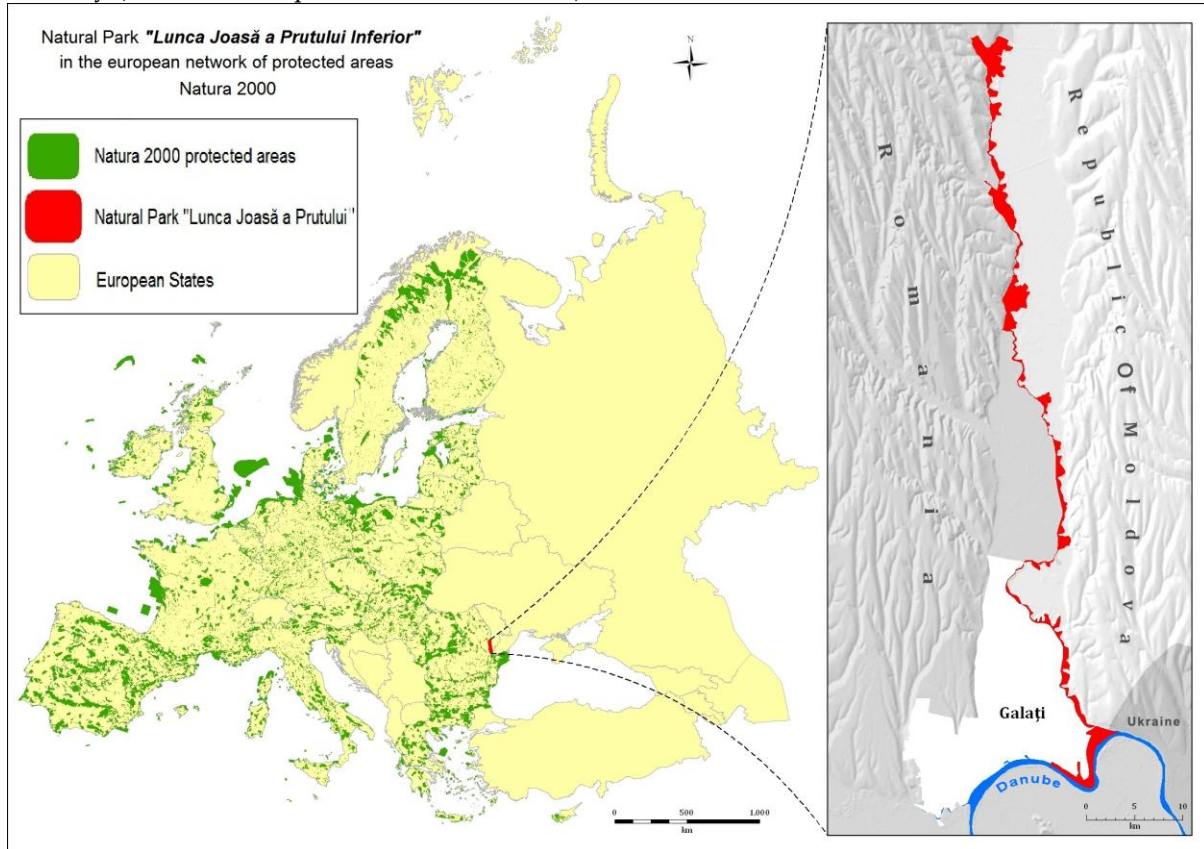


Fig. 2: "The Lower Prut floodplain" Natural Park and Natura 2000 network

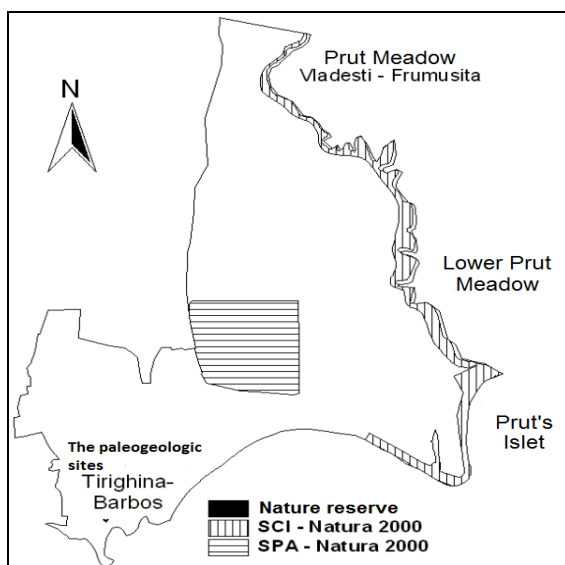


Fig. 3: Types of protected natural areas in Galați Town (source: Petrișor Al., 2009)

Clearer criteria associated with some well-defined features for assessing the value of the tourist sights were first introduced in 2009, then in 2011, by Ielenicz M., who considered the geosites and anthropogenic sites as elements of the tourist potential, which in their turn were classified into sub-types. The topic of this paper centers on the geosites, which have been classified by M. Ielenicz into geological and geographical geosites. In Galați Town, the geological geosites are represented by the paleogeologic sites, like the fossiliferous point at Tighina-Barboși.

Of the geographical geosites, better represented are the coastal sub-type geomorphosites, as is the case of the Danube cliff. The geomorphosite is a type of geosite that differs from the other categories either by topography or by the geomorphological processes that act within it. On Galați territory, the ecosites

include the following areas: “The Lower Prut Floodplain” Natural Park, the “Prut River Island” natural reserve and the protected natural areas of county interest created in 1994. The last ones consist of the Botanical Garden (22.2 ha), the Public Gardens (16 ha), the Railway Park (2.9 ha), the Mihai Eminescu Park (0.8 ha) and the TV Tower Park (6 ha).

The hydrosites are represented in this area by the Brateș Lake and the Mălina and Cătușa fluvial limans. As natural attractions, the lakes have manifold tourist features, which turn them into recreation or resting places. During weekends, people use to come on their banks for fishing, boating, swimming etc.

According to Ielenicz (2011), there must be assigned a value from 0 to 2 to each criterion used for the analysis; all the values are then added together for each type of geosite and finally for the entire geosite. In order to highlight the value of each type of geosite the individual values must be

expressed as percentages of the total value of the geosite. (Ielenicz, Săftoiu, 2011)

Applying the criteria to the most representative geosites of Galați City, we have come out with the conclusion that the Brateș Lake is a hydrosite, the Lower Prut Floodplain is an ecosite, while the Danube cliff is a geomorphosite. Although the Danube cliff is the most accessible and the most important for the citizens, from the touristic point of view it comes after the Brateș Lake and the Lower Prut Floodplain, as the last ones are capable of supporting more activities. And this happens despite the fact that they are lying outside the city and the modern transportation and tourist infrastructure are lacking. The Brateș Lake, which has a particular character in relation with the large areas of the local landscape, has a higher tourist value in comparison with the Lower Prut Floodplain (table 1), although greater attention has been paid to the latter through the Natura 2000 network (fig. 2).

Table 1 The criteria for selecting the valuable tourist sights (according to Ielenicz, 2011)

Feature			Criteria	Score	The Danube cliff geomorphosite	The Brateș Lake hydrosite	The Lower Prut Floodplain Ecosite
Aspect			ordinary	0			
			strange	1			
			unusual	2	2	2	2
Frequency			high in the local environment	0			
			unique in the local environment	1	1		1
			unique on large areas	2		2	
Relationship with other geosites			support	1	1		
			association	2		2	2
Accessibility	Transport infrastructure	lacking	within the city	0			
			outside the city				
		unmodernized	within the city	0.5			
			outside the city			0.5	0.5
		modernized	within the city	0.5	0.5		
			outside the city	1			
Tourist facilities			lacking	0			
			scarce	1	1	1	1
			good	2			
Types of tourist activities			trekking	0.5		0.5	0.5
			resting, recreation		0.5	0.5	0.5
			education			0.5	0.5
			investigation			0.5	0.5
Importance for the regional development			no importance	0			
			weak for the present	0.5			
			significant for the future	1	1	1	1
Total				10 p	7 p	10.5 p	9.5 p

Factors that hinder the capitalization of the natural tourist potential

The capitalization of the natural potential of Galați Town through specific tourist activities depends to a certain extent by the thermal comfort induced by the weather parameters of the local climate. The climate favorability or restrictivity for tourism and the degree of thermal comfort of the tourists can be assessed based on the bioclimatic indices (Voicu). In order to establish the thermal comfort or discomfort for Galați Town we have used the datasets recorded at the Galați weather station over the period 1990-2010.

The thermal comfort indices most employed for our bioclimatic research take into account the correlation between air temperature, atmospheric humidity and wind speed. One of these indices is the **Missenard index**, computed based on the following formula (Missenard, 1937; Kravczik, 1975; Ciangă N., 1998; Cheval S., 2003; Elena Teodoreanu, 2003, quoted by Voicu M., 2011):

$$T_{ee} = 37 - \frac{37 - t}{0,68 + 0,00014 f + \frac{1}{1,76 + 1,4 v^{0,75}}} - 0,29 t \left(1 - \frac{f}{100}\right)$$

where t = air temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$); f = relative humidity (%); v = wind speed (m/s).

The obtained values suggest a thermal discomfort for most of the year, the equivalent effective temperature being less than $16,8^{\circ}\text{EET}$ (fig. 4).

Another index taken into account was the **temperature-humidity index (THI)**, which is calculated based on the air temperature and the relative humidity, according to the following formula, which was developed in Romania by the National Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology (I.N.M.H.):

$$\text{THI} = (T \cdot 1,8 + 32) - (0,55 - 0,0055 \cdot U) \cdot [(T \cdot 1,8 + 32) - 58],$$

where THI – the temperature-humidity index; T – air temperature; U – the relative humidity of air.

The air is pleasant and the breathing is easy when the index values are less than 75%. Beyond 80%, the people start to feel a discomfort, as the high temperatures and the relative humidity values make the air unbreathable.

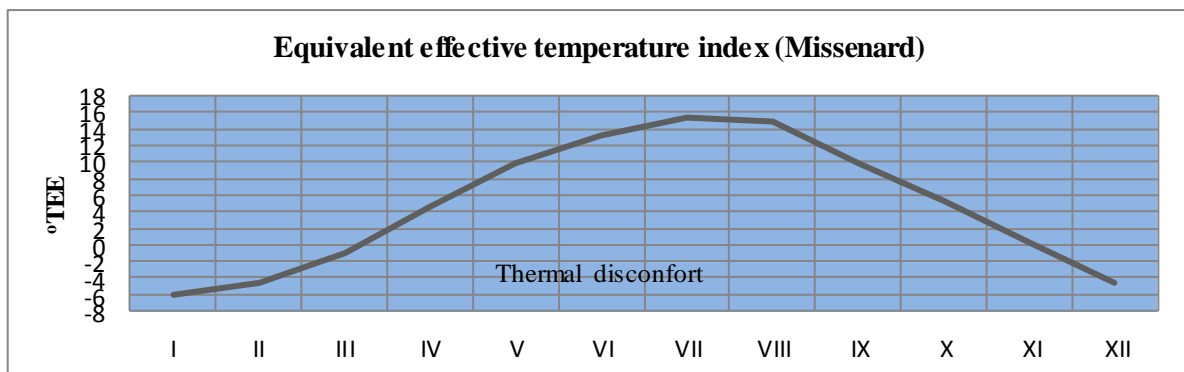


Fig. 4: The Missenard index for Galați Town over the period 1990 – 2010

If the humidity is very high, such situations may occur even at lower temperatures. The drier air, even though is very hot, is better tolerated by the people. When the values of the THI range from 40 to 85, they “mirror the physiological sensations of thermal comfort felt by the human nature” (Sorocovschi, 2008).

Depending on the computed values for the THI, there are several states of comfort: ≤ 65 – comfort state; 66-79 – alert state; ≥ 80 – discomfort state. The values of this index suggest that on the investigated territory the periods when tourist activities can benefit from thermal comfort are spring and autumn. In summertime, and especially in July and August, the human body is on the alert state, as the temperature-humidity index values exceed the threshold of 69 units (fig. 5).

In conclusion, on the whole the climate of Galați Town is less favourable for the tourist activities, as the values of the THI are high during the summer, which induces a risk of thermal discomfort.

Opportunities for a sustainable capitalization of the natural tourist potential

From the sustainable development perspective, the natural tourist potential is a valuable resource; when it is improved and capitalized in the same way as in other countries it may ensure the long-term development of the region to the benefit of the present and future generations (Cocerhan, Năstase, 2011). The sustainable development is a course of action that has been established through European,

national, regional and local policies and strategies (Cocerhan, Fluțăr, Spânu, Matei, 2012), (Mazilu, 2010). The implementation of these strategies will support the sustainable tourism in Galați Town, thus ensuring an optimum capitalization of the resources, which will bring benefits to the host communities (Mazilu, Marinescu, 2008).

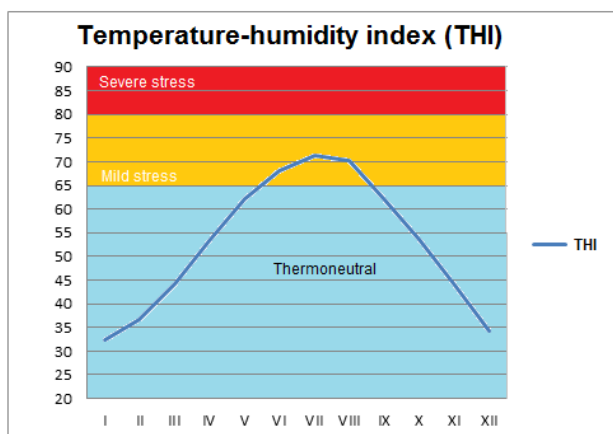


Fig. 5: The thermal-humidity index for Galați Town over the period 1990-2010

The "Lower Prut Floodplain" Natural Park (8.247 ha) was created by the Government Decision (GD) number 2151/2004. But the ecological importance of this area is recognized even at international level. Thus, following the regional study funded by the RAMSAR Bureau and carried out between 1999 and 2001, the Lower Prut area was proposed to be included in the program called the Danube Green Corridor.. On 5 June 2000 the agreement on this program was signed by Romania, Bulgaria, Moldavia and Ukraine, countries that emphasized the need and the responsibility of preserving and manage sustainably one of the regions of the world that still has a large biodiversity. The site called "The Lower Prut Floodplain" Natural Park (fig. 2) was classified by the Government Decision (GD) 2151/2004 in the category of national parks, being considered a "Site of Community Importance" (ROSCI0105) and a component of the Natura 2000 European ecological network.

The Natura 2000 European Program targets the preservation, in harmony with the human activities, of the natural ecosystems by the following measures: the restoration of biotopes, the reintroduction of native species and the development of research and education activities. Declaring a region a Natura 2000 site does not mean to condemn it to isolation. On the contrary, such an approach takes into account the economic, cultural and social interests of the people in the area by

allowing them to carry out those types of economic activities that do not harm the respective site.

Conclusions

In order to ensure the sustainable capitalization of the natural potential of Galați Town, it is necessary not only to preserve a diverse and balanced structure of the natural capital but also to use its resources and the services it produces within the endurance capacity of its components. The natural parks are a viable solution for the local decision makers with regard to their promotion and development in accordance with the principles of preserving and protecting the environment. "The Lower Prut Floodplain" Natural Park is a geographical space with a significant tourist potential, given by the existence of a number of natural attractions. However, the distance from the residential area, the present border regulations and the poor transport infrastructure are responsible for the slow development of tourism.

Acknowledgements

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Din cuprins:

Mirela MAZILU, Daniela DUMITRESCU - Identity and Sustainable Development in Rural Tourism	7
Georgică GHEORGHE, Puiu NISTOREANU - An Empirical Approach to Traditional Products from Europe Compared to the Traditional ones from Romania	12
Tamara SIMON, Alina CARLOGEA, Victor TIMOTIN - Opportunities for the Development of Tourism in Letea River Levee of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve	16
Cătălina ANCUȚA, Elena CIOROGARIU, Martin OLARU - Aspects Concerning Tourism-Related Communication. Case Study: Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Romania)	24
Cipriana SAVA - The Possibility of Developing a Tourist Ethno-Folkloric Route in the West Region, Romania	32
Elena BOGAN - Rural Tourism as a Strategic Option for Social and Economic Development in the Rural Area in Romania	37
Anamaria Sidonia RĂVAR - Cultural Identity and Tourist Destination Development. A Case Study of the Land of Bârsa (Romania)	44
Amalia BĂDIȚĂ - Residents and Non-Residents' Perception Towards the Touristic Image of Craiova municipality, Romania	52
Armela-Linda RAHOVAN - The Individualization of the Hotel as Tourist Attraction in the Urban Area of Transylvania	59
Monica FLUȚĂR, Constantin COCERHAN - The Natural Tourism Potential of Galați City and Its Sustainable Capitalization	66