

CULTURAL HERITAGE, IDENTITY AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MARAMURES LAND

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ABSTRACT. – *Cultural heritage, identity and tourism development in Maramures Land. Social and economic fast transformations of the last two decades marked the evolution of all ethnographic regions of Romania, gradually shaping a new behavior, negatively influencing their cultural heritage by introducing modern components in economic and social activities of the population. Attention to the traditional elements of the new generation began to decline gradually including Maramures, due to a number of factors (political changes, economic and social transition of the country, learning migration, emigration and contact with new cultures, unemployment). However, Maramureş County, a region with a rich history and impressive cultural heritage, he managed to keep the elements that given identity and authenticity to the region. An important factor in this respect tourism has developed in this region. Through rural tourism traditional elements have been promoted and known worldwide. The region is considered as a „living museum” (Dancus, M., Cristea, G., 2000) preferred by modern tourists who looking authentic cultural destinations. This was understood by the local population began to slowly develop small entrepreneurial business based on cultural heritage from Maramures. The material presented aims to highlight the role that tourism plays in perpetuating or authenticity of the items that make up the cultural heritage of Maramures History.*

Keywords: cultural heritage, identity, rural tourism development, Maramures Land

1. Introduction

Tourism has been practised for a long time in our country. Its most recent form is represented by rural tourism which is developing rapidly on the whole Romanian territory. This is due to the importance of agriculture as the main activity from rural areas even long after the political changes of 1990. The governmental programmes from 1994 (Law no. 145/31.12.1994) and 1997 (OG no. 63/1997) triggered the emergence of tourism in rural areas, initially in a modest form. This was visible in Maramureş County as well. (Fig. 1)

Tourism, through its various forms and activities, can significantly contribute to the development of rural areas. Here, tourism requires

relatively low costs and the tourist's preference for rural areas relies on both the contrast to urban areas and the wish to discover the most authentic things. Following the evolution of tourism in rural areas can express the impact of tourism on the rural environment and the communities, both from an economical and a social point of view. In most of the regions where a self-aware and sustainable development has been implemented, the impact on the rural environment is a positive one at the level of all its components. The most visible effect is in the evolution and development of rural accommodation units.

The National Institute Statistics shows an ascendant evolution in the last two decades at the level of the county, but field research data show a larger number of accommodation units than offi-

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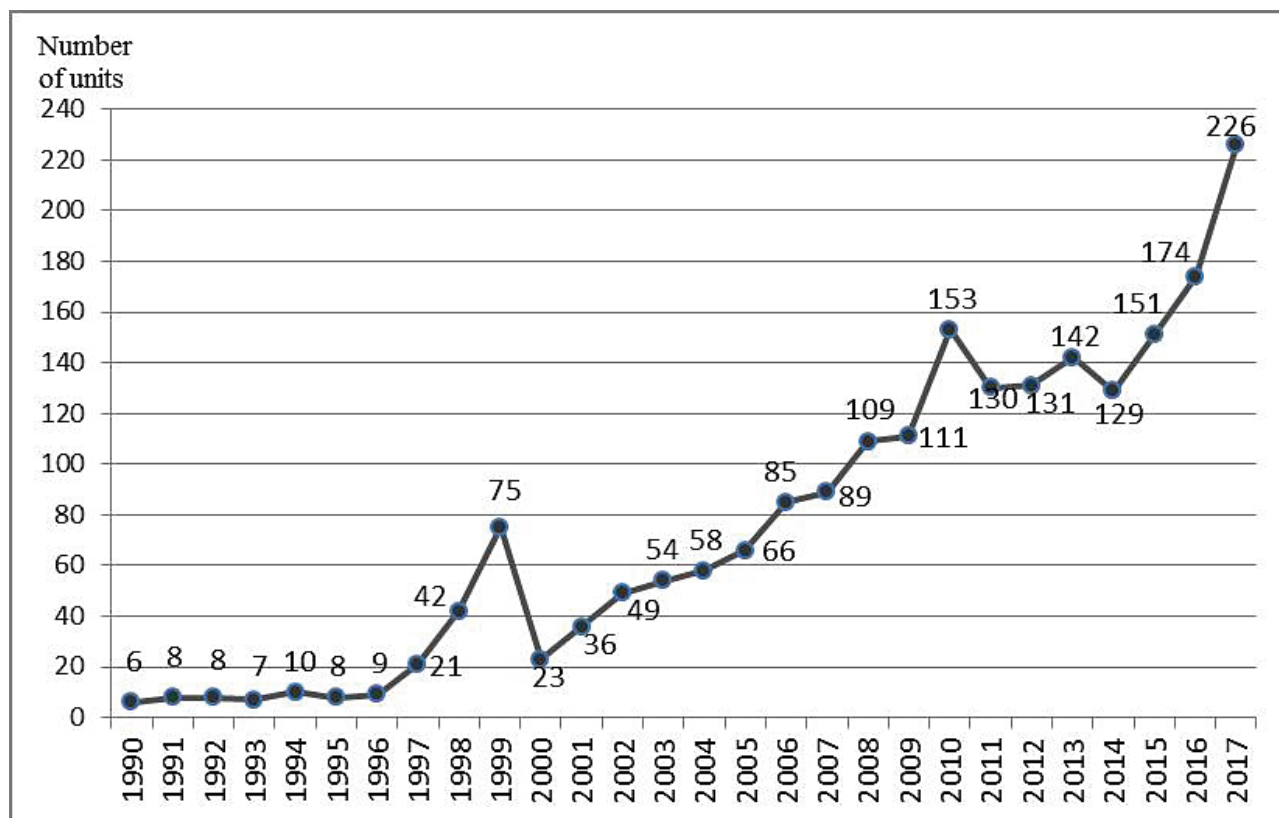


Fig. 1 Evolution of accommodation units (touristic boarding houses and agroturistic boarding houses) from rural areas in Maramures County

Source: INSSE/TEMPO-online

cial ones, because not all are approved for operation. In Maramures Land are 238 accommodation units (touristic boarding houses and agroturistic boarding houses).

The development of rural tourism in Maramureş relies both on the natural environment and on a diversified cultural heritage, which are in their turn influenced by tourism. Empirical research points to the fact that rural areas with an attractive natural potential associated with cultural and architectural elements are the most preferred

by tourists (Rid, W., Ezeuduji, I. O., & Pröbstl-Haider, U., 2014, Pesonen, J. A. 2012). Starting from these observations and analysing the tourists' movement through Maramureş over the last years (tab. 1.) one can state that tourism in Maramureş finds itself on an ascending trend based on its diversified capitalization of its potential.

The Maramureş region is renowned for its authentic cultural heritage, which includes its brands - wooden gates and traditional wooden churches- together with traditional clothing, re-

Table 1 Arrivals in accommodation units from rural areas in Maramures County

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Touristic boarding houses	11235	13185	16374	19578	20921	28094	30294	32692
Agroturistic boarding houses	7785	10114	12324	12519	13458	17961	32683	44403

Source: INSSE/TEMPO-online

gional traditions and customs. The entire Maramureş County is being associated with these elements of cultural heritage, however, only the Maramureş Land has preserved its fundamental characteristics for a long time, which has endowed it with a special identity at national level and has contributed to the development of tourism in the region.

As the title suggests, the present study aims at analysing the impact of the identity and cultural heritage of region on the development of tourism from the Maramureş Land.

2. Data and methods

In order to highlight the influence of tourism from a specific region, observation on a long period of time must be applied. In this case, the period of observation has been of 7 years, between 2010-2017. Observations were made in the field and were eventually completed with statistical data analyses. The official databases from the regional and national level are changeable and sometimes inconsistent with reality, therefore they were used together with data from interviews and field investigations.

Each component under analysis requires specific methods of data acquirement and analysis, individual or combined. Thus, in order to obtain the data for the accommodation units we used the sources provided by the Ministry of Tourism, by the Maramureş County Department of Statistics, the National Institute of Statistics, national censuses, correlated with the data acquired through questionnaires and unofficial sources (specialized web sites). As a result many discrepancies were identified. However, databases analysing elements of cultural heritage and including information about the impact of tourism upon them do not exist at an official level, only through empirical research and analyses, as done in the present study.

The graphical and cartographical method is used in this study in order to statistically and spatially highlight the role of the elements which form the cultural heritage of Maramureş.

3. Results and discussions

In order to better understand the elements of cultural heritage from this area, a diachronic analysis is required, following the historical events which have laid their print on the Maramureş society. Beside these events, the natural environment also plays a predominant role in the construction of identity.

In both historical and bibliographical sources, Maramureş is known as “the land of wood”, due to its large forested areas and the woodcraft. The most renowned products of the latter are the traditional wooden gates and churches, which also became the brand elements of the region. The identity of the region is complemented by the architecture of the wooden houses.

3.1. Traditional wooden gates

The wooden gates initially appeared as a privilege endowed upon the owner by the state leadership, when the former has proved bravery and patriotism. They used to show the social and economical status of the citizen in the community. Progressively, the phenomenon of “cellular multiplication” occurred in the communities and the number of gates increased significantly (Fig. 2), as well as the number of craftsmen.

A change of the types and ornaments of the wooden gates also occurred progressively. The oldest gates, the most numerous in the rural environment of Maramureş, are built on three poles (Francisc Nistor 1977) and have few ornamental symbolic elements carved upon them, in comparison to the more recent ones which vary between 4-8 sustaining poles and are ornamented with an abundance of elements.

The most recent traditional wooden gates crafted after 2000 introduced other carved ornaments like the national coat of arms, verses or symbolic images.

After the field research performed in the analysed period, an increase in the number of gates was recorded, more prominently in the settlements with a more developed rural tourism. Many of the new gates are crafted by local inhabitants who also own an accommodation facil-

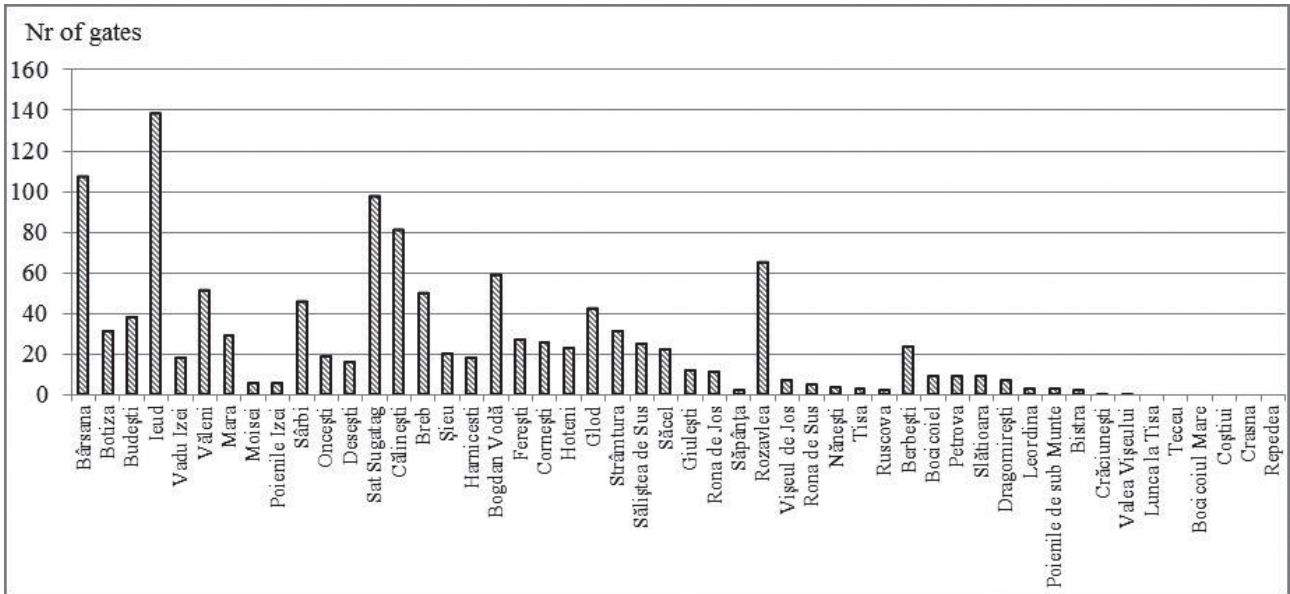


Fig. 2 Number of traditional wood gates in Maramures Land (Source:field research)

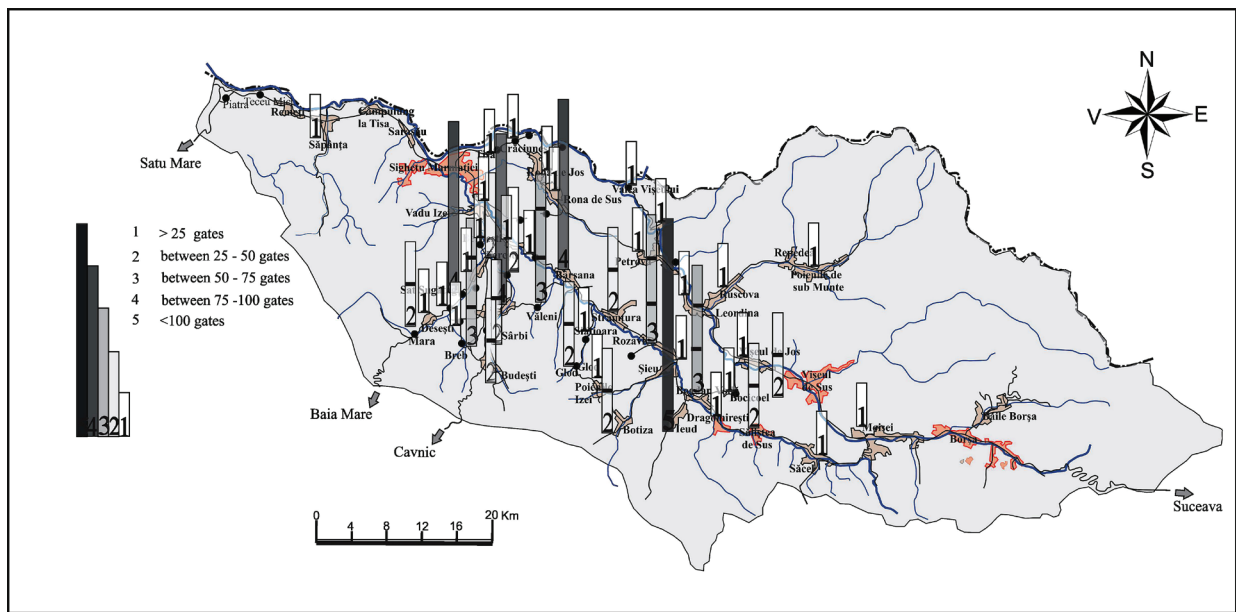


Fig. 3 Repartition of traditional wooden gates in Maramures Land

ity. Our research has highlighted the awareness of the rural population, both pension owners and simple inhabitants, that the authentic traditional elements increase the attractiveness of the region and therefore they wish to preserve them in order to preserve the local identity. One can state that the preservation of this representative element from Maramureș is also a contribution of tourism. Another reason for crafting traditional

wooden gates is the fact that, at a mental level, the grand traditional gates are being associated even today with the owner's social and economical status.

The rural guesthouse owners who built new gates mentioned that the number of tourists has increased since the construction of the gates. All new pensions own traditional gates, including the pensions outside Maramureș Land as the

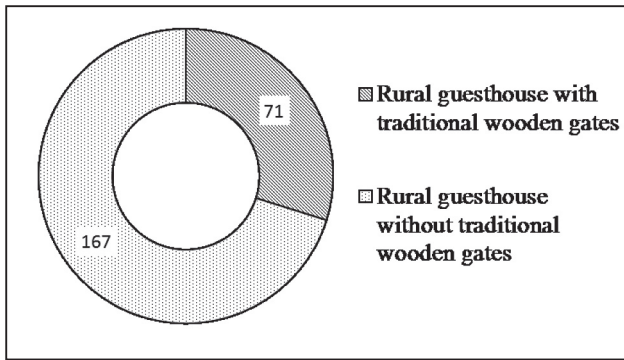


Fig. 4 Traditional architecture supporting by rural guesthouse (databases from field research)

owners have become aware that this is an element of regional identity, a cultural component of great attractiveness.

No matter the reason underlying the crafting of new traditional gates, the appearance of the Maramureş village is a magical one, due to the presence of these grand constructions along the roads, and the tourist, even just passing through, is marked by this image of the traditional village.

3.2. Traditional wooden churches

The most valuable component of the Maramureş cultural heritage, both from a historical and social point of view, is the church. The traditional church is also made of wood, specifically of oak, a hard fessence which lasts for a long time, usually used for the wooden gates as well.

The wooden church from Maramureş has been endowed with a high value especially after 8 churches were included in the UNESCO world heritage and also due to its history in the Maramureş area. The wooden church is present in almost all the settlements of the region with the exception of ethnic minority settlements (Teceu, Remeţi, Câmpulung la Tisa, Bocicoi, Lunca la Tisa, etc.)

A longer period of time is necessary in the building of a wooden church, therefore the present study has also considered the churches which were completed or began in the period of analysis. Some settlements which had one wooden church built one or more in addition, for example Ieud, where there are 7 wooden churches, or Budeşti, with 3 wooden churches. The main reason in building a new wooden church is the

preservation of tourist attractiveness as well as the regional identity. Another reason is that the local population is numerous and a large number of churches are necessary to accommodate them. In addition to these, both the local population and the church representatives prefer the traditional wooden construction.

Keeping the traditional architecture in the region has direct effects on the local economy. For example, the development of the building complex from Bârsana monastery triggered a multiplying effect in the whole settlement by increasing the number of accommodation facilities and leading to the construction of a carving craft museum. At the same time small craftsmen sell souvenirs and local products. Such a multiplying effect determined by the development of the cultural heritage can also be identified in Săpânţa, Vadu Izei, Mara and other settlements.

3.3. Architecture of traditional houses

By analysing the architecture of the houses from rural Maramureş one can easily state that there is a decay of traditional architecture due to a variety of factors. The first and the most obvious factor is the use of architectural models brought from the countries where the local population has migrated for work, namely the process of acculturation. Another reason is the necessity of a larger space in a house, due to the progress of the daily life.

Similarly to the wooden gates and churches, the traditional houses from Maramureş were built with timber but of softer essence which degrades rather quickly in time. The development of more effective building materials determined the beginning of a new period in the building practice and architecture of the Maramureş houses.

Currently, the houses with traditional architecture which can still be found in Maramureş Land are inhabited by elder persons.

Through the various programs of rural development there has been an attempt at making the local population aware of the importance of saving the traditional houses, an attempt which was partially successful. Some houses have been restored and transformed into pensions or holi-

day houses, others in small museums or souvenir shops. The new dwellings preserve nothing from the regional characteristics. However, the architecture of the traditional houses is not endangered. Most of the new guesthouses built in the rural environment keep this essential element of the regional culture.

Among all, wood carving has reached the peak of national and international notoriety through the creation of the majestic wooden churches and the symbol-rich wooden gates. As tourism developed, these crafts have adapted to the tourists' requirements and diversified themselves by making souvenirs with local specificity. This has

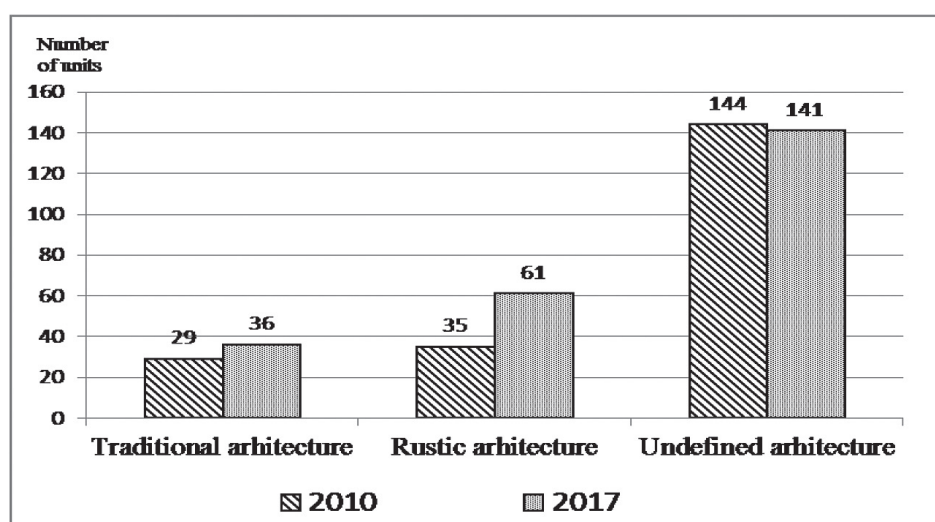


Fig. 5 Architecture of rural accommodation units in Maramures County
Source: field research

In order to save the traditional household architecture from Maramureş a group of architects has created a catalogue of dwelling models which would respect the traditional style and include enough space for the necessities of a family (Enache, C., Enache, M., 2009).

The cultural heritage of buildings is completed by technical peasant appliances which were also preserved through the rural pensions which developed complexes of technical appliances in order to differentiate themselves from the competition.

3.4. Diversification of traditional crafts

Activities and crafts represent the way by which the populations earns its existence but also an important attraction of rural tourism. For centuries, the people of Maramureş have proved their skills in carving wood, making pottery, weaving, making ornaments for the traditional clothing, making straw hats and allegorical masks.

triggered an increase in the number of craftsmen from the rural settlements and special workshops were built for tourists to have the possibility of watching the crafting of a product or to become directly involved in the process.

3.5. Traditional clothing

The most frequent crafts from Maramureş Land are carving and weaving. The traditional clothing includes several elements of originality which were inherited from the Dacians who lived on these territories, which demonstrates the long-lasting preservation of the Romanian population in Maramureş. However, the clothes have suffered several transformations over the years at the level of the materials being used, the way in which they are created and the ornaments being used. Nevertheless, the traditional method, the manual one, is still used, but requires a longer period for making the pieces of traditional clothing. The traditional clothes are proudly worn by the

younger generations especially around Christian holidays or on the occasion of specific customs and traditions from rural life. Tourists from the area also manifest the wish to wear the traditional clothes during their holiday stay, in various circumstances. Some tourists even buy pieces of traditional clothing as souvenirs.

However, the traditional clothing is preserved due to the conservative mentality of the population and less due to the tourism from the region.

4. Conclusions

Tourism is an activity which can have a significant impact on the economical, social, functional and physiognomic structure of rural areas, but there is also a growing need for research into the impacts of globalization. Understanding the meaning of authenticity and cultural heritage is important for the management of tourism in a region.

Rural tourism has become a flourishing business for the contemporary Romania due to the fact that in the strategy of developing the Romanian tourism, the rural tourism occupies a central position, as it determines the economical and social development of the rural area, an obvious aspect in the Maramureş Land as well.

All the components of the cultural heritage represent tourist attractions. In this respect there is a wish of the community to preserve local values. The cultural value has a correspondent in the financial value. Depending on the availability of financial resource, the local population becomes more or less involved in the preservation of cultural elements. The easiest way is through the preservation of the traditional clothing, the costs and the time required for it being reduced in comparison to the making of a church or a traditional gate. The most important factors in the preservation of the cultural heritage are the accommodation facilities and the religious institutions which have the most consistent financial resources and the capacity to invest in major cultural elements.

Sustaining the development of the cultural heritage contributes to the economical devel-

opment of the local and regional community. In the region called Maramureş Land, the future of tourism looks promising. The authentic cultural values are not endangered and this is due partly to the development of tourism and partly to the conservatory character of the community.

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