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Alternatives for the Development of Tourism in Romania

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UNIVERSITY OF WROCLAW
INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY
DEPARTMENT OF REGIONAL AND TOURISM GEOGRAPHY

CONDITIONS OF THE FOREIGN
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

VOLUME 7

PROBLEMS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON MOUNTAIN AREAS



WROCLAW 2002

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Alexandru ILIEȘ, Olivier DEHOORNE

Alternatives for the Development of Tourism in Romania

The tourist activity, by its international character and as a constantly expanding economic sector emerges as a means of obtaining international recognition being meanwhile an important economic sector of the national economy. In Romania case it appears as an "air breath" for an economic system in crisis and an extremely prolonged period of transition. By the dynamics, human and financial flow which it triggers, through the multiple forms which it covers, through the ability by which some thresholds (i.e. ideological or political) can impose an evolving path, tourism represents an economic sector for the countries in transition which can re-launch or re-direct the subsequent evolution of a national economy. In order to reach to these parameters a re-definition and a re-discovery of the real tourist potential is required in Romania case.

The Romanian tourist approach is entangled in a world trend of a fast development aiming to generate some monetary flows that would rescue the whole economy.

The typology of the Romanian tourist area determined according to "their tourist past" present areas of a maximum interest such as: Black Sea coast, Brașov region, big cities and especially thermal spas. All these benefited from the State great financial and material support during the Communist period. Presently these are tourist areas having a great tourist infrastructure, internationally renowned not only within the Communist Block but also in the West. In the new international and regional context, mostly determined by the disappearance of the East-European Communist Block, for the Romanian tourist areas hierarchisation and definition there are a series of elements that were forbidden until 1990. On one hand ethno-cultural customs, cross-border tourism, rural patrimony was taken into account and on the other hand some

other elements were neglected (especially cultural values).

Despite all these, the qualities of landscape and people are important enough to attract tourists: cities that display a concentration of either eastern or western Socialist architectural influences, Danube Delta represents a natural world patrimony, the high mountains with a virgin and wild landscape. The low and the mean-altitude rural mountains, customs and lifestyle are all in perfect harmony with the environment. These particularities refer to a generally varied potential and a particular rural area and especially to its multiple specificity.

Naturally, the tourist activity is expansion emerges as a highly important necessity, but it shouldn't impede a careful analysis of perspective concerning the feedback process that appeared in the countries submitted to an intense tourist activity. There is a real fear for the future deprived of an explicit management for the areas destined to the tourist activity.

New ways and directions for the development of the Romanian tourism

Besides the already renowned tourist areas, the complementarities or alternatives of this important economic sector emerged in Romania after 1990. In this sense we can point out a few of the resources and forms of perspective for the re-launch of the Romanian tourism. We can mention here: rural tourism-beneficiary of an impressive tourist patrimony, cross-border and ethno-cultural tourism (music, popular costume, traditional architecture) specific to the Romanian ethnographic regions – “lands” with an unprecedented and unique patrimony; cultural tourism and its thematic parks. We deem that besides these a fore-mentioned elements the symbols and elements specific to the Communist period and those linked to Ceausescu's dictatorship can fall in the category of tourist resources.

1. Rural areas

The rural area of Romania witnessed after 1989 “the peasant's return” changing the usual demographic data and placing them in a majoritary position. The Romanian rural area is searching for a new identity, tourism being an alternative because here pregnant nuclei of rural tourism, already existed depending upon rural lifestyle and its inherent factors. Yet we must mention here

that they represent some fragile areas, the balance between nature and man is accomplished here very subtly and these areas are worth being protected by tourist whims.

The variety of elements and the proportionality of the relief major forms (35% mountain areas, 30% hilly areas and 35% plain area) trigger a great structural and functional variety of the Romanian village. After an unpropitious period (1980-1989) when the policy of systematising the rural area aimed to the disappearance of a great number of rural settlements (by amalgamation and displacements of settlements in the communal centres), after 1990 the Romanian rural area characterised through its uniqueness and a high degree of preserving the traditional cultural and artistic patrimony can revive through tourism. The rural tourism can resuscitate through agri-tourism, cultural tourism and it gradually imposes itself in the economic and everyday life of a greater part of Romania. With the support of two non-governmental organizations: The Operation-Romanian Villages and The National Agency for Rural and Ecological Tourism two networks of rural tourism were presently created holding a great number of pensions in Maramureş, Bucovina, Apuseni Mountains, Braşov Depression, Southern Transylvania, Land of Haţeg, etc. Thus opposite of Romania traditional regionalisation rural tourism due its elements emerges as a new trend within the hierarchisation of tourist areas.

We mention here the specific resources of the rural milieu: the popular costume, popular songs and dances, traditional architecture (houses, households, churches, technical equipment, etc.). The specific landscape of the village is differentiated according to the relief unit on whose surface it is laid upon. Thus we can differentiate plain, hilly and mountainous villages each being individualised and with a great structural and functional variety.

The geographical conditions had an impact on dimension, structure and functionality of the plain rural settlements and settlements can be found even at 1,400 m altitude (the maximum limit of the permanent settlements from the Carpathian Mountains of Romania). Thus in Banat and Transylvania those with a compact or amassed structure are predominant being specific for the plain areas in depressions or along the valleys, the mean ones in the hilly area and the small and scattered settlements are predominant in the mountainous areas (The Occidental Carpathians).

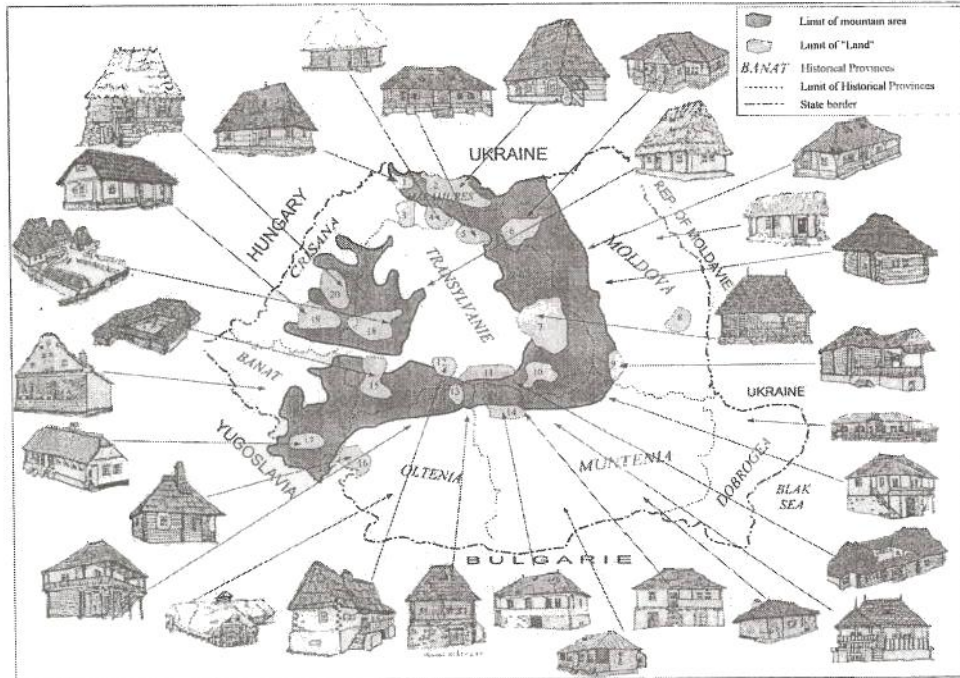


Fig. 1. Ethnographic areas and household particular architectural styles in Romania

1. Oaș; 2. Maramureș; 3. Chioar; 4. Lăpuș; 5. Năsăud; 6. Dorna; 7. Secuilor; 8. Bârladului; 9. Vrancei; 10. Bârsei; 11. Făgărașului; 12. Amlășului; 13. Loviștei; 14. Muscelului; 15. Hațeg; 16. Severin; 17. Bozovici; 18. Țara Moșilor; 19. Zarand; 20. Beiuș.

The Carpathians culture and civilisation is pushed forward thanks to fairs and annual holidays deeply permeated in the popular costumes; the mountainous area becoming a real ethnographical archive. Furthermore, the popular costume in all its variants reflects the main professions, the specificity of the popular dances and the particularities of the geographical milieu. Similar to the popular costume the popular architecture represented by households and Romanian houses stand out in the complex landscape of the Romanian rural area.

By these attributions the Romanian rural area emerges through its uniqueness, attractiveness here and there, being rendered not as a past forsaken in the west but rather as a present time where human beings live in harmony with the environment. Within these rural areas, there are a great number of initiatives which make it possible for the numerous traditional ac-

tivities to be proposed for development: the activity in the farms, handicraft activities, learning of the popular dances and songs. A remarkable example in this sense and which was created within the programme of developing the rural tourism of Maramureş is the festival of traditional popular music "Maramuzical" which takes place in the village of Vadu Izei in mid-August and which has a large audience from within and outside Romania borders.

The musical art is equally unexploited, in the context in which Romania has great composers and valuable singers which distinguished themselves in the international classical music. The variety of musical styles and especially the originality of the Romanian folklore cannot be neglected. Their emergence at an international level requires the creation of an equally favourable frame and in situ in order to enhance some regions' activity.

The ethnographical regions of Romania territory that gradually emerged through originality and local specificity represent a special place in the category of the rural area. In order to exemplify some of these values of the Romanian cultural patrimony we mention here: the value of patrimony of the songs, dances and popular costumes of the Romanian "lands" (Oaş, Maramureş, Năsăud, Chioar, Dorna, Beiuş, Zarand, Amlaş, Țara Moşilor, etc.) or at a larger scale those that are specific to the ethnographic areas of Moldavia, Dobrogea, Oltenia, Muntenia, Banat, Transylvania or Crişana (Fig. 1). The tourist can be attracted by the charm of the traditional music sang by renowned or anonymous singers, inhabitants of the a fore-mentioned villages.

The rural essence of Romania is kindled through music, songs, architecture, everyday life, landscape making it resemble to a more rural Europe but which in the West disappeared leaving free rein for progress.

Thematic parks

The thematic parks are recent in the development strategy of tourism in Romania. One of these which delineates itself in Romania, is inspired from fiction but it attempts to find a real identity in the field is the myth of Dracula. "The Vampire of the Carpathians" appeared in one of Bram Stoker's short story, an Anglo-Irish writer. The story was called *Dracula* and it was published in 1897. Since it appeared first it became a source of inspiration for more movies which promoted fiction. The action takes place in Transylvania

(where Stoker never was) and is inspired by a 15th century character, Vlad the Prince of Valachia. His life was related to some castles of Transylvania (Tihuța, Sighișoara, Bran, Târgoviște, etc.). On this direction the Ministry of Tourism from Romania aims to promote this idea (already renowned on an international level) and it started the construction of a fun park called *Dracula Land* whose location is established near Sighisoara in Central-Eastern Transylvania. Actually nowadays another castle from the southern Transylvania promotes the myth of Dracula, a thing which determined an international tourist flow towards this site situated near Brasov and Poiana Brasov tourist resort.

Socialist-totalitarian patrimony

The effects of this difficult period of the Romanian population lifestyle display a significant emotional charge. They represent 50 years of a nation life and a generation life time. Many of these vestiges specific to this period remain unyielded, ignored; the idea of rejecting everything that belonged to this period being prevalent. Notwithstanding, Romania has a Socialist particular history from which two aspects stand out conspicuously: a permanent opposition towards Moscow and the creation and promotion of the cult of Ceausescu's personality.

This period impacted upon some important buildings erected during that time and which due to their uniqueness should be exploited from a tourist point of view. We mention here: The House of the People from Bucharest – the second building as dimension in the world, the Danube-Black Sea Channel, Scornicesti village – Nicolae Ceausescu's birth place and a series of other sites scattered across all the country; these landmarks should not be neglected as far as the international tourism is concerned. Thus, we reckon that the inclusion of such sites within the tourist circuits would not affect Romania image negatively but on the contrary such an enterprise should be perceived as the valorisation of a patrimony and some situations which the history can't ignore at any rate.

Cross-border tourism

The fall of the Communist regime and the passage to the market economy in a democratic regime had an impact upon the Romanian tourism through ma-

major changes: freedom of cross-border circulation and the transformation of cross-border areas, from divergent and restrictive areas for the tourist activity into convergent areas highly important from an economic and tourist point of view. Foreign tourists and especially those from Romania neighbouring countries aren't less indifferent to the choice of the destination places, an exemplification in this sense is provided by the values in Fig. 3. Thus, from intra-communist tourists coming from the East-European Communist block we can presently talk about the peripheral tourists which belong to some independent countries and are ideologically unengaged after the deep political and economic mutations that existed in this area.

The main tourists' and visitors' origin is relevant for these changes and for the subsequent evolution of the East-Communist Block dismantling. Before these elections it is conspicuous that the great number of tourists since 1990 actually represent the outcome of a short-lived trend, related to a new curiosity motivated by the recent freedom and circulation facility. If the opening of the frontier allows new tourists to enter the country, this situation changes for the goings out. The decrease in the number of tourists of the old Communist Block is characterised by this tendency witnessing a decrease of 50% less than 1989. The attraction exerted by the western countries is at the origin of this overturn, being strongly influenced by their new circulation freedom, the population of the western part of Romania having thus the opportunity to discover the West. Thus, by comparison to 1989, Romania lost 87% of the Polish tourists' number, 55.6% of the German tourists and 62% of the Czech and Slovakian tourists.

It is a fact that tourism is not the sole motivation of this cross-border flow, the economy, policy and history are equally determining factors. Thus, there is a great increase in the number of tourists coming from the countries of the northern and eastern Romania, whose proportion varied between 30-40% for the estimated period, they came especially from the Moldavian Republic and Ukraine. The similar historical events connect these two regions to Romania; the fact that the Romanian population is present in Basarabia, Bucovina and Transcarpathia is decisive.

The countries in the south are equally drawn to Romania as the figures indicate that the number of Turks is higher and the number of Bulgarians is more reduced (33%). Furthermore, the regions in the eastern part of the country, i.e. Hungary and Yugoslavia take a profit in their geographical prox-

imity and registered a high flow towards Romania, i.e. from 180,000 persons to 290,000 persons.

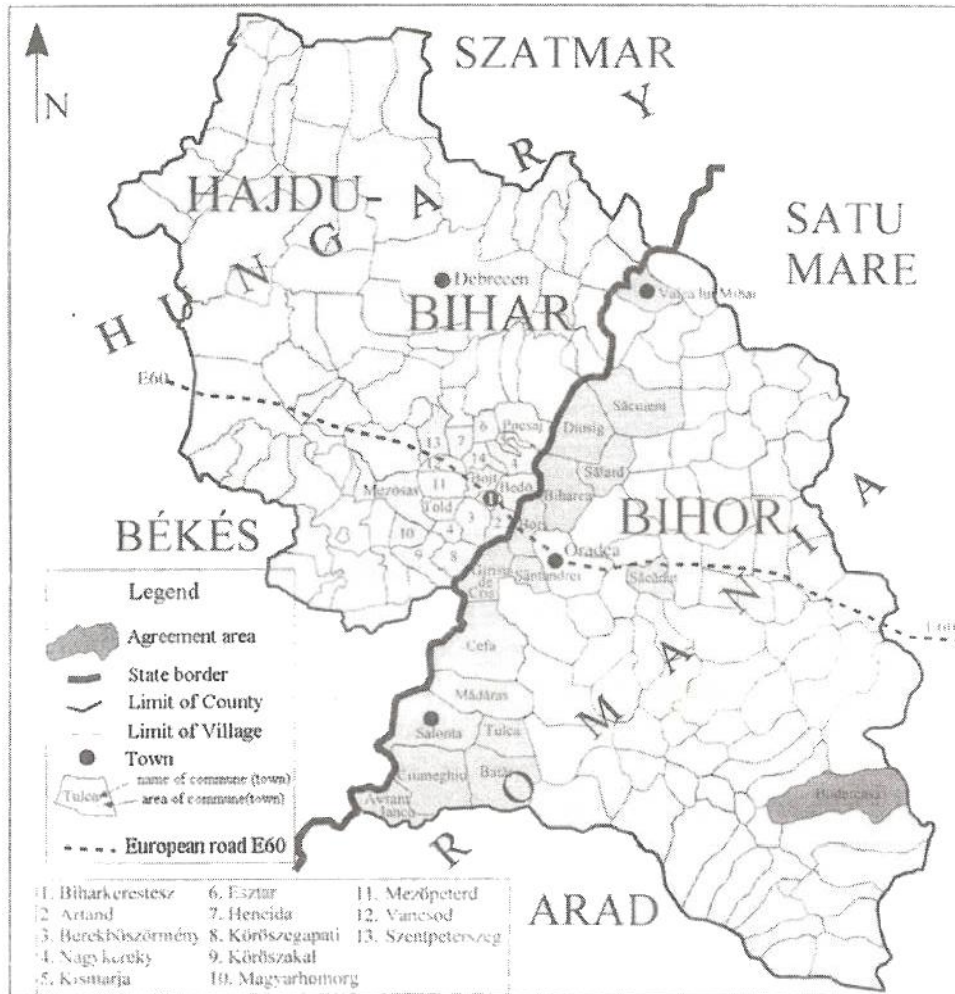


Fig. 2. Romanian-Hungarian cross-border area and area for agreement

From the plain neighbourhood and the facilities of passing the frontier, the motivations arisen by these flow differences towards Romania are multiple: familial, economic or simply tourist.

Such a revealing example concerning the development of cross-border

tourism is that of the Romanian-Hungarian area. The complementarity is fully emphasized by the fact that at the level of the Assembly of the Border Localities established between the County Hajdu-Bihar (Hungary) and Bihor (Romania) an important role was played by the identification of a leisure area within the Romanian mountainous area and sustained materially by the Hungarian side. Thus, under these circumstances, the locality of Budureasa (Fig. 2), situated in the mountainous area of the Apuseni Mountains expands its functional structure by developing the catering sector, that is the one destined to tourism and its catering activities.

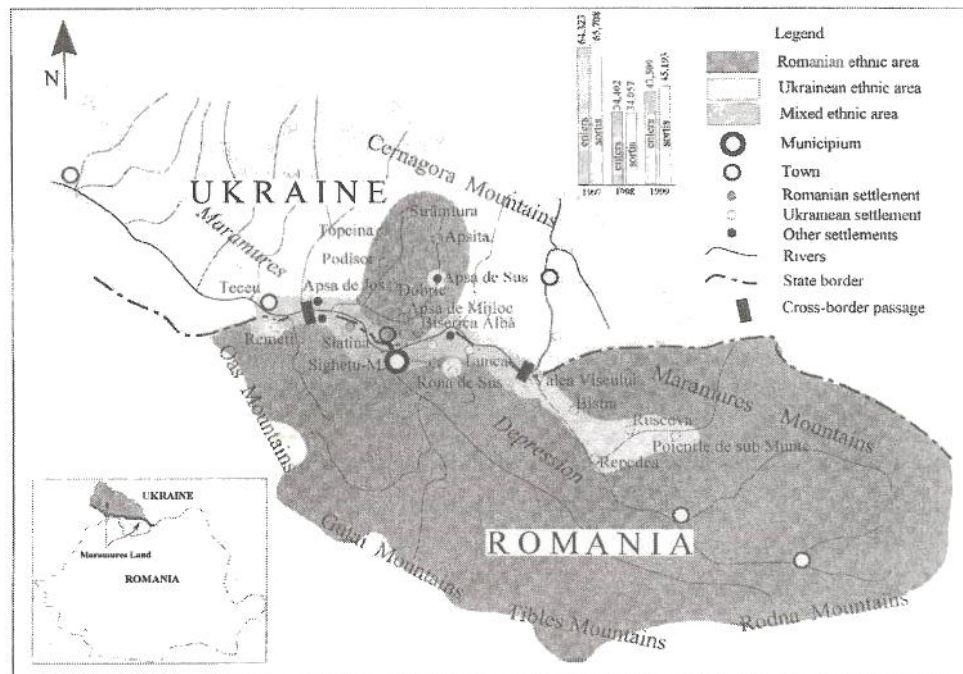


Fig. 3. Cross-border area in Maramureș Land (Romanian and Ukrainian area)

Another example of developing cross-border tourism is characteristic for the historical province of Maramureș which spans over Romania and Ukraine territory (Figures 3 and 4). The increase of the cross-border tourist circulation after 1990 is also related to a rich tourist potential which exists in this area. The fact that today's Maramureș is more renowned internationally, the cross-border co-operation is a means of attracting the Ukrainian side within the

international tourist circuit. Both areas are included in the Carpathian Euroregion whose programme of developing the cross-border tourism holds an important place. Among other motivations of the passage of the border which can be “exploited” for tourist aims we can refer here to the cultural exchanges, the relatives’ visits (there are numerous Romanian and Ukrainian families divided between the two States), there are very ample commercial exchanges, i.e. the small border traffic. The data comprised in the following table and figure concerning Maramureş cross-border circulation is relevant in this sense.



Fig. 4. The new “historical bridge” upon Tisa river between Romania and Ukraine in area of Maramureş Land

The identification of some new forms of tourism is based on the existing resources and especially on a better knowledge of the Romanian and foreign tourists’ demands. Furthermore, the approach for the development of the Romanian tourism is entangled in a world trend of fast development of this activity aiming to generate new monetary flows reviving for the whole economy. Within the new political and social-economic context we reckon that rural tourism, cross-border and cultural tourism are viable and very profitable alternatives in the future for the economy and especially for the re-launch of the Romanian tourism. Meanwhile a reconsideration of the regionalisation and hierachisation of the tourist regions of Romania is required.

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