

The Tourism Resources of Transylvania in the Context of Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT: We are talking about Transylvania as an ex-province of Romania and a current geographical and historical region which encompasses maximum 10 counties: Alba, Bistrița, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Mureș, Harghita, Hunedoara, Sălaj, Sibiu. Because of the multitude and variety of tourist resources, complementarity stands out as a specific attribute of the tourist attractiveness of this multicultural region, which bear the mark of the 3 great cohabitant ethnic groups: Romanians, Hungarians and Germans. The natural tourist resources assure the background for the anthropic ones. A sustainable and unitary development of Transylvania for tourism could not be carried out without an enterprise of shaping a new and unique destination image, prior to the development itself, according to the mental individualisation through geographical and historic landmarks and based on the natural and anthropic tourism resources of the area. As a conceptual frameworks for this paper, we specify the geography and tourism literature.

KEY WORDS: Transylvania, natural tourism resources, anthropic tourism resources, sustainable development.

1. Introduction

This work is an inventory of Transylvania's tourism resources. Many of them are represented by those of anthropic origin, which bear the personal mark of the three great cohabiting ethnicities: Romanians, Hungarians and Germans. Not in the least inferior, the natural tourism resources confer a legitimate and natural background to the former. As a result of this high diversity and large number of sight, complementarity stands out as the attribute of the organic relationship between the two types of tourist attractions.

Transylvania means *multiculturalism*, this organic attribute which is so specific to the region under scrutiny exhibiting itself in the guise of admirably complex and varied mosaicking landscapes.

Sustainable development is one of the most circulated and frequently used postmodern concepts designating all forms and methods of socio-economic development, focusing primarily on ensuring a balance between social, economic and environmental and natural capital elements.

Sustainability starts from the idea that human activities are dependent on the environment and resources. Sustainable development aims and tries to find a stable theoretical framework for decision making in situations where it is about in cases where it is about the human-environment interactions, be it the environment, the economic and social environment. Although sustainable development was originally meant to be a solution to the ecological crisis caused by intense industrial exploitation of resources and the continuous degradation of the environment, thus seeking to preserve its quality first, nowadays the concept was expanded on the quality of life in its complexity, economically and socially.

Tourism and sustainable development are linked by a biunivocal relationship. Tourism, in its sustainable, ecological version, constitute a guarantee of sustainable development, and sustainable development provides a favorable framework to the development of healthy, „clean”, principles-based tourism, fundamentally oriented to nature, willing to preserve and safeguard the natural environment, with all its myriad components - many are tourism resources -, but also anthropic resources involving tourist significance.

2. Territorial framing

The privileged location of Transylvania in the center of national territory – rightly called “the Heart of the Country” – taking advantage of the presence of Carpathians which surround its territory, this historical/geographical region looks on the map of Romania like being „embraced” around its entire circumference by the so-called „the Carpathian Ring” or „the Carpathian Arch”. Transylvania is also figuratively called „The Citadel of Mountains” (Vâlsan, G., 1940), being wellknown the decisive role held by Carpathians in its whole history. We consider the aforementioned argument entitle us to call and define Transylvania as a „mountain macroregion”. The status of structural and functional core of the region is held by The Transylvanian Plateau, a relief unit around which gravitates the entire morfology of the national macro-territory.

2.1. Defining Transylvania spatially

The first variant of the regionym *Transylvania* refers to the macroregion which, during the Middle Ages, was branded as „The Voivodeship of Transylvania” or „The Transylvanian Voivodeship” (etymologically speaking, „the land across the forests”), its surface adding up to approximately 57,000 km². Closely related to this opinion is the view that the term *Transylvania* can also convey a narrower meaning, pertaining strictly to the area flanked by the Carpathians (ie the similarly named Transylvanian Plateau), thus delimited by the Eastern Carpathians („Orientali”), the Southern ones („Meridionali”) and the Western ones („Apuseni”).

The second variant of the term is a more widely encompassing one, also including, at a much greater extent, Crișana, Sătmar, and Maramureș, i.e., the „Western Lands”, or „Partium”, which were added to the historical inner Carpathian nucleus after mid 15th century, together forming the Principality of Transylvania.

Sometimes the name “Transylvania” is postulated with an even wider meaning, being equated with those parts of Romania west of the Eastern Carpathians and north of the Southern Carpathians, thus including Banat as well.



Figure 1 Delimitation of Transylvania based on geographical/historical criteria. *Source: Adaptation after Pop, P. Gr., 1997.*

2.2. Administrative organisation

As stated above (Figure 1), it has been agreed, conforming to most points of view, that Transylvania includes 9 whole counties (Alba, Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Mureș and 24 local administrative units in the county of Sălaj). These 9 and almost half counties are further divided into 682 local administrative units, with an overall population of cca. 4,300,000 inhabitants. Out of the 76 urban settlements, 23 are cities.

3. Transylvania's tourism resources and the attribute of complementarity

The complementarity of resources has in all historic periods been a sine qua non condition for human communities to become well-established in the midst of the territory occupied by them. Thus, restricting this fact to sphere of interest of tourism, we can affirm that one of the key factors of the progress and of the sustainable and durable development of a tourist destination is represented by this very attribute, that of the complementarity of the resources with an inclination for tourism, i.e., the coexistence of a multitude of varied resources, both natural, and anthropic, which are to condition and complete one another in what concerns the attractiveness of a destination, magnifying it and generating the development of a balanced offer of tourism products and services, which should cover an array of tourists as wide as possible, given the vastness of the range of motivational factors and of practically innumerable preferences and tastes. Transylvania, as a geographical/historical region which manifests itself as a central territorial unit strongly individualised at a national level, was abundantly endowed by nature with considerable and varied natural resources and with the equally considerable anthropic resources.

The complexity and variety of the patrimony with a potential for tourism, both natural and anthropic, corresponds to the heavily fragmented and exuberantly complex general landscape of Transylvania, which is territorially circumscribed and bordered by the “citadel” of the Carpathians and has its character potentiated by it, which establishes the frame of the geographical overall image, sketched mainly on a morphostructural framework.

Surrounded by the Carpathian crown, Transylvania appears as an unconquerable territory, the role of this Romanian region with the semblance of a “mega-fortress” – the cradle of the Romanian nation, for that matter - having been, throughout history, that of a protector par excellence of the human community it hosted, which enjoyed its natural “guardianship” both against natural phenomena, and against the vicissitudes of history.

Transylvania, as a regional spatial entity (of the 3rd rank), is centred on the homonymous Transylvanian Plateau, which, from the point of view of tourism and geography is an autonomous functional unit. The Transylvanian Plateau is surrounded on all four sides by tall massifs and connects itself peripherally, through the distribution and redistribution of the factors of its own system, with those of the surrounding areas (Cocean, P., 2010). Through its geographical position, the landscape unit under scrutiny fulfils its role as “central place” in the country, in the mechanism of the national territory’s morphological dynamics.

The unitary whole of the available territory, constituted by the totality of the natural resources, is backed by the anthropic ones, the two intertwining components having the potential to lead to ample development in tourism, under the condition of sustained interest and firm enterprise, rigorously orchestrated for this purpose.

The tourism patrimony of the Transylvanian Plateau, as the central unit of the region, is disproportionate, tipping the scales towards anthropogenic attractions. This aspect is as natural as can be if one is to consider the age of the settlements and the succession of cultures in the inner area of the Carpathians. The tourism imagery of this unit is therefore based mostly on anthropogenic attractions.

This section represents an abstract of the undertaking of structuring the arguments concerning the complementarity of tourism resources in the Transylvanian geographical region in shaping an image with an unique, syncretic and unmistakable personality, of remarkable compositional eclecticism, a mirror portrait of the complexity and variety of tourism resources in the territory.

Making the inventory of Transylvania’s tourist resources is a complex and problematic task due to their remarkable multitude and variety. For this reason and because of the space limitation, we only perform an overview of the actual situation in territory. Thus, instead of an exhaustive analysis, we only effectuate a brief review of the most significant tourism resources located throughout the region’s territory.

The objective established for this section is that of offering an veridical image of the natural and anthropic patrimony of a geographical/historical region renowned for the complexity of its attractive resources.

3.1. The natural tourism resources

The resources of this typology are associated with the natural tourism potential, including the natural frame and all the components belonging to it, in a territory. The natural frame assembly, including elements circumscribed by it, is attracting a segment of real or potential tourists (Ciangă, N., 2007).

As a short overview, we shall enumerate the most significant categories of *natural tourism resources* in Transylvania, as follows:

a) *landscape with a scenic value:* *glacial or volcanic landscapes, landscapes based on limestone or conglomerates, Carpathian valleys, salt karst;*

b) *climatic and bioclimatic resources:* *bioclimatic indices, aeroionisation as a physiotherapy factor, climatotherapy, the biological effect of climate, bioclimate;*

c) *hydrogeographical resources:* *hydrochemical types (carbonated water, salty or chlorosodic water, alkaline water, alkaline earth water, iodinated water, thermomineral water, hydromineral ores), peloids, surface waters, the hydrographical network;*

d) *biogeographical resources:* *phytogeographical (vegetation) and zoogeographical (fauna, including game and fishes).*

3.2. The anthropic tourism resources

The anthropic heritage tourism function is complementary to that of the natural heritage or derived from this, and it may become dominant in order of capitalization, with multiple beneficial effects for transylvanian communities and environment. As a defining identity attribute, which marks the studied area, multiculturalism is highly visible in the multiple cultural and ethnographic interferences.

The most noteworthy anthropic tourism resources are the ***cultural/historical resources***¹, of which we briefly mention further.

In the following, we proceed to an stage enumeration, according to the diachronic (historical and chronological) criterion, which refers to the historical periods during which occurred the touristly important resources in the Transylvanian landscape.

The touristly attractive Transylvania's anthropic resources have features and specific meanings according to this geographical location. Therefore, the resources serving as tourist attractions from this geospace meet various specificities that define and share them depending on the historical periods and consisting in their belonging to a period of time or another.

3.2.1. *Archaeological vestiges pertaining to prehistory and the Dacian and Roman civilisations* are relatively poorly represented in Romania, and in Transylvania's case as well, but they have a symbolic value reflected in the collective consciousness.

a. Traces of prehistoric habitation: in southeastern Transylvania, at Ariușd (dating from the Neolithic) and in Sălaj county, through the cave paintings of Cuciulat Cave.

b. The geto-dacian civilization belongs to La Tene Culture (5th century B.C.–1st century A.D.). The most important remains of this typology are concentrated in Transylvania. We only mention *Sarmizegetusa*, the capital of the Dacian kingdom, meeting multiple functions – administrative, defensive, religious center;

¹These are included in the cultural/historic patrimony with a tourist value foreseen by the specialised legislation, law 41/1995 (in force since September 30 1995), issued by Romanian Parliament for the approval of Government Ordinance no. 68/August 26 1994 on the Protection of National Cultural Patrimony, which establishes the following categories: archaeological monuments and sites; architectural monuments and ensembles; reservations of architecture and urbanism; memorial buildings, monuments and ensembles; monuments of fine art and commemorative monuments; technical monuments; historic places, parks and gardens.

c. *Vestiges belonging to roman culture and civilization*: the most important and the largest ones were *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa Regia, Apulum, Potaissa, Napoca, and Porolissum*;

3.2.2. Mediaeval historical/cultural sights are highly numerous, but we only give few examples.

a. *Medieval fortified citadels*: Dăbâca, Cetatea Colț, Deva, Rupea, Vurpăr, Sibiușel, Colțești, Bologa, Ciceu. Among fortified citadels, we also want to mention those ones from Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Sighișoara, Bistrița, Mediaș, Aiud, Făgăraș, Târgu-Mureș. Another ones (built by saxons in Transylvania – «Siebenbürgen») are Brașov, Sebeș, and Reghin.

- *the peasant citadels* are typical for southern Transylvania: Biertan, Axente Sever, Cristian, Cislăoara, Prejmer, Râșnov, etc. The most noteworthy and famous *fortified castles* are Huniazilor (Corvineștilor) Castle, and Bran Castle.

- the „*vauban*” *citadels*: Alba Iulia, Cluj-Napoca.

Palaces, aristocratic residences (18–19th century): Wesselény (Jibou), Bonțida (Cluj-Napoca county), Arcalia, Crs (lângă Sighișoara), Banffy (Cluj), Palatul Principilor (the Princes’ Palace – Alba Iulia), the residence of Transylvania’s governor, Samuel von Brukenthal (Sibiu), Casa Zapolya (Sebeș). A very particular subtype is *the hunting castles* (20th century) – Gurghiu, and Lăpușna (Mureș county).

b. *Religious sights*: the very old transylvanian churches are incorporated in this category: The Densus Church, Basilica of Cârțișoara (the oldest in Transylvania), the Roman Catholic cathedral from Alba Iulia (12th century), Herina Church (Bistrița Năsăud county).

- *gothic churches and cathedrals*: Biserica Neagră (The Black Church), Brașov, (the largest gothic edifice in Transylvania), The Saint Bartolomeu Church, and Saint Nicolae Church (Șchei), The Saint Mihail Church (14–15th century, the church having the highest tower in Transylvania, and in Romania) , and the “No Tower” Church (both in Cluj-Napoca). Another important and attractive gothic church are in Sibiu, Sighișoara, Târgu-Mureș, Miercurea-Ciuc, Șumuleu, Sibiu.

- *monasteries* (less numerous in Transylvania): Rohia, Râmeț, Nicula, and Sâmbăta de Sus. The tourists can also visit *hermitages*, for exemple Păltiniș.

- *Pilgrimage centres* (for catholic believers): Rohia, Sâmbăta and Șumuleu (close to Miercurea-Ciuc).

- *wooden churches*: Fildu de Sus, Agrij, Creaca, Hida, Ileanda, Domnin (Maramureș-like built, the only one in this county), Bulgari, Zimbora, Sâmnișiu Almașului, Poarta Sălajului, etc. (Sălaj County); Apuseni Mountains area – The Land of Stone: Vidra, Lușă, Gârda de Sus (Alba County). We can talk about a *wooden gothic* in Transylvania.

- *orthodox and catholic cathedrals*: they are valuable as symbols: The Roman Catholic Cathedral from Alba Iulia, The Orthodox Cathedral from Cluj-Napoca, The Orthodox Cathedral from Alba Iulia, The Orthodox Cathedral from Sibiu, The Orthodox Cathedral from Târgu Mureș (all built in the interwar period).

- *fortified churches – Kirchenbürgen* – were built by saxons in Transylvania: Biertan, Sighișoara, Mediaș, Axente Sever, Saschiz, Alma, Șeica Mare, Codlea, Hărman, Ilieni, Ghelintă; *jewish synagogues* (Cluj-Napoca).

c. *Urban architectonic complexes* (in the very old cities): Brașov, Sibiu, Sebeș, Sighișoara, Mediaș, Bistrița, Cluj-Napoca.

3.2.3. Cultural sights with tourism functions

Museums and collections:

- *art museums:* Brukenthal Museum (Sibiu), Art Museum of Cluj-Napoca (hosted by Banffy Palace).

- *history and archaeology museums:* the National History Museum of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca), the National Museum of Unification (Alba Iulia), which incorporates an archaeology section.

- *ethnographic museums:* (two of them having open air sections) the Ethnography Museum of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca) having an open air section entitled The "Romulus Vuia" National Ethnographic Park, the "ASTRA" National Museum Complex (Sibiu), Lupşa Ethnographic Museum (Lupşa), the first rural museum of ethnography in Romania, one of dozens of existing ones in the country nowadays.

- *the History of Pharmacy Collection* (Cluj-Napoca): occupies a special place within this category, being the only of its kind in Transylvania.

- *science museums* – Zoological Museums (Vivarium) and Museum of Mineralogy (Both in Cluj-Napoca).

- *botanical gardens:* the "Vasile Fati" Botanical Garden (Jibou, Sălaj county), the „Alexandru Borza" Botanical Garden (Cluj-Napoca, being considered the most important in the country), both part of the "Babeş-Bolyai" University's patrimony.

- *zoological gardens:* Sibiu, Turda, and Târgu-Mureş.

- *memorial houses:* the "George Coşbuc" Memorial House (Coşbuc, Bistriţa county), the „Lucian Blaga" Memorial House (Lancrăm, Alba county), etc.

- *libraries:* the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library (Cluj-Napoca, comprising 4,000,000 volumes), Bathyanem Library (Alba Iulia), Bibliotheca Telekiana (the municipal library of Târgu-Mureş), "ASTRA" Library (Sibiu), etc.

- *historical monuments:* very important to mention as sight are the *statues* and *equestrian assemblies* integrated to urban architectonic complexes and dedicated to transylvanian and romanian personalities: Mihai Viteazul (ClujNapoca, Alba Iulia), Avram Iancu (Târgu-Mureş, Cluj-Napoca, Câmpeni), Matei Corvin (Cluj-Napoca), etc.

- *parks:* the Great/Central Park of Cluj-Napoca, the Municipal Park of Târgu-Mureş, etc.

- *universities:* the central building of „Babeş-Bolyai" University (eclectic style, built between 1839 and 1903).

3.2.4. Economic sights dating from the modern and contemporary age, with tourism functions

- *hydrotechnical complexes (dam–artificial lake–hydrocentral):* BelişFântânele, Tarniţa, Gilău (Someşul Cald River), Floroiu (Drăganului Valley), etc.

- *viaducts:* Măgura Ilvei (Bistriţa-Năsăud county), Salva-Vişeu section (Sălăuţei Valley).

3.2.5. Resources belonging to traditional rural culture and civilisation

- *mental spaces (lands):* the Stone Land, the Land of Năsăud, the Land of Sylvania, The Land of Bârsa, the Land of Pădureni, The Land of Secui, etc.

- *traditional activities* (a broad spectrum): *the traditional ceramics manufacturing* (Corund–Harghita county, Săscior–Alba county); *wood manufacturing – Carpathians Wood Civilization; traditional techniques* – the exclusive usage of wood; *textile fibres manufacturing* (Bistrița–Năsăud county, Bran area, Făgăraș area, Târnavelor area); *glass painting* – Nicula (Cluj county), Laz (Alba county), Sibiel (Sibiu county), Arpaș, Cincu, Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery (Brașov county); *shepherding* – having the *sheepfold* as the main component (Rodnei Mountains, Bârsei Mountains, Northern Făgăraș Mountains, Căndrel Mountains, Sebeș Mountains); *traditional gastronomy* – including meat products (Covasna area, Brașov mountains area, the area known as "Mărginimea Sibiului"). The transylvanian rural area of Carpathians might be considered a veritable synthesis of the romanian traditional culture.

- *traditional manifestations: fairs* – the Girls' Fair on the Găina Mountain (annually held on July 20th); *festivals and "nedei"* (a traditional pastoral festival usually held on the top of a mountain) – the Boylike Dans (Sibiu), the Olden Dans (Târgu-Mureș), the "Junii Brașovului" Festival and Parade, Nedeia of the Mountains (Fundata, Brașov county), the Shepherd's Nedeia (Covasna), etc.

- *transylvanian ethnographic areas*: endowed with attractive tangible and intangible attributes: Transylvania's Plain, Târnave, Sălaj, Nădăud, Mărginimea Sibiului (characterised by predominantly pastoral occupations – Rășinari, Săliște), the Land of Pădureni, the Land of Secui, etc.

- *the Authentic Transylvanian Village* – quintessence of the multicultural culture and civilisation of this geographical and historical region, in which we have illustrated the very interesting situation of a still existing rural atmosphere created by the harmonious cohabitation of the three major ethnicities – romanians, hungarians and saxons –, exemplifying the century-old multiculturalism of this geospace, with fruitful results for tourism.

5. Preliminary conclusions

The ensemble of tourism resources of this area shows an exceptional variety and complementarity, endowing Transylvania with the privileged status of a complex, yet unitary tourist region, conferred with an indisputable individuality concerning imagery and representation, profoundly inoculated in the collective conscience of tourists.

The richness of the existing patrimony is the supreme argument pleading for the holistic development of cultural tourism in Transylvania. In a Transylvania in which globalisation is starting to become (if it hasn't already) a constant, acknowledging the universal character of this phenomenon, tourism is bestowed with the duty of restoring it from the point of view of identity, of reverting it to its origins, of bringing its cultural roots back in the spotlight and of underscoring the authenticity of its underlying cultural structure. This essential role has to be passed on to rural and cultural tourism, and the first step ought to be the sketching of a distinct tourist-oriented image, which should have the ethnic patrimony and the folklore patrimony of the Transylvanian village at its basis, with everything that is authentic about it.

In the tourism development process, in a durable and ecological way, the first step should be the creation of an unique, clear, authentic, representative, veridical, viable, and widely encompassing image of Transylvania to reunite and symbolise this highly particular quality of a tourism puzzle, which could lead to the definition of a sharp and strongly particularised image and inoculation of it into the collective mindset and imaginary.

A sustainable and unitary development of Transylvania for tourism could not be carried out without an enterprise of shaping a new destination image, prior to the development itself. In the enterprise of defining a new tourist image of Transylvania, one needs to follow up on the mental individualisation through geographical and historic landmarks, and, moreover, on the natural and anthropic tourism resources of the area.

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