THE CULTURAL POTENTIAL OF THE LAND OF BÂRSA AS A RESOURCE FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Ana-Maria POP
Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University

Abstract. By maintaining and respecting the specific identity of every ethnic group, multiculturalism has the meaning of protecting and promoting the cultural rights and also represents the liaison between cultural diversity, dialogue (among local authorities, representatives of different cultural institutions, representatives of ethnic communities, etc.) and implementation of local development strategies. In this context, questions like: „What is the cultural potential of the Land of Barsa?” , „How are the elements of the cultural patrimony dispersed in the territory?” , „What is the degree of accessibility of the local community to the organized cultural manifestations?” , „Are there local policies to preserve traditions and promote the cultural patrimony?” will find answer within this study. Access to cultural practices and experiences for all the citizens, regardless of nationality, enriches their identity, which motivates the local actors’ intercessions.

Rezumat. Potenţialul cultural al Țării Bârsei – resursă a dezvoltării locale. Multiculturalismul, prin păstrarea şi respectarea identităţii specifice fiecărei etnii, are menirea de a proteja şi promova drepturile culturale şi reprezintă punctul de legătură între diversitate culturală, dialog (între autorităţile locale, reprezentaţi ai diferitelor instituţii culturale, reprezentaţi ai comunităţilor etnice, etc.) și implementarea unor strategii de dezvoltare locală. In acest context, întrebări precum: „Care este potenţialul cultural al sistemului regional Țara Bârsei?”, „Cum se manifestă dispersia elementelor patrimoniului cultural la nivel teritorial?”, „Care este gradul de accesibilitate a comunităţii locale la manifestările culturale organizate?” sau „Există politici locale de prezervare a tradiţiilor şi de promovare a patrimoniului cultural?” îşi vor găsi răspunsul în acest studiu. Accesul la practicile şi experienţele culturale pentru toţi cetăţenii, indiferent de naţionalitate, le îmbogăţeşte identitatea, ceea ce motivează demersurile întreprinse de actorii locali.

Key words: cultural potential, Land of Barsa, local actors, local development
Cuvinte cheie: potenţial cultural, Țara Bârsei, actori locali, dezvoltare locală

1. PRELIMINARY

We helplessly assist today, like simple spectators, to a degradation and an inadequate development of cultural objectives that undergo before our eyes, to a real „war” to promote non-values, disregarding authentic cultural aspects. As a means of expressing the spiritual, material, intellectual or emotional features of a community, culture is the „business card” of a territory. The Land of Barsa, overlapping the Brasov Hollow and the contact area with the mountains surrounding it, does not make an exception. More, consolidated on an authentic Romanian ground, it „received” the contribution of all ethnic groups within the territory, the most obvious being the German, the Hungarian (with a local variant – ciangai) and the Szekler communities.

In the context of the local development notion and the initiation of projects with the same final purpose, multiculturalism comes to respond to society’s needs, through
recognition, promotion and development of local cultures and minorities, protection of institutes and cultural possessions, protection of the idiom, traditions and customs, of the way of life of the community, protection of the diversity of contents and means of artistic expression, diversity of training and initiation programmes or access of individuals and community to their own culture, as well as direct participation to cultural life.

On the other side, initiatives concerning development by means of cultural acts, like the present case, were and are influenced by coercive factors, very easy to get over. Among these we mention: instability of the legislation, the land and building property law (several being in action of ejectment by former owners), illicit traffic of cultural possessions, invasion of foreign traditions and customs, limited access to the values of the ethnic minorities, disappearance of bearers of cultural values (especially members of the German community), degradation of certain cultural objects or lack of public education and information.

First of all, the cultural inheritance of the Barsa community has all the necessary features to name the region as a territory with a great cultural potential. To follow its evolution much more easily, two coordinates will be approached, by referring to the inventory of goods in the cultural material patrimony and the immaterial one. Another advantage of the analyzed region is that given by the large number of objects on the national cultural patrimony list.

2. CULTURAL MATERIAL PATRIMONY

The cultural material patrimony, with its two aspects, mobile and immobile, brings in front all the local creations, regardless of the fact that it is made in the household or in the middle of the community, by hands of Romanian craftsmen or by any other nationality.

All the cultural archaeological, historical, artistically, ethnographic, scientific or technical goods are what we call mobile cultural patrimony.

Among the owners of mobile goods who earned their precedence and the inclusion in the national cultural patrimony we notice the Bran Museum (by pieces of traditional clothing), the St. George Museum of Eastern Carpathians (archaeological goods), Brasov Art Museum (works of art), Brasov Ethnographic Museum (pieces of traditional, popular clothing), Brasov County History Museum (archaeological and historical goods) or the Brafor Company (with its wonderful steam engines).

There are always proof in the inventory of the mobile cultural goods to offer information on the evolution of man, environment, and their relationship. As a consequence, there are five types of mobile goods, separated by their specific:

- archaeological and historic documentary goods: archaeological discoveries, coins, weapons, certain literary works (manuscripts and printings), etc.;
- artistic goods: works of art, ceramics (Targu Secuiesc, Zarnesti, Tohan), religious icons (Scheii Brasovului), pieces of furniture, cloth, flags (those of the Brasov Youngsters);
- ethnographic goods: ethnographic ensembles, traditional houses, doors (Romanian, Szekler, and Transylvanian Saxon), musical instruments, etc.;
- scientific goods;
- technical goods: mills (in the tourist area Bran, in Cernat), backsaws, fulling mills.

The immobile cultural patrimony is represented by two categories: archaeological sites and historical monuments. Among the historical monuments, the most important are
the peasant cities and the old fortified (walled) churches (Transylvanian Saxon and Hungarian). Besides, several years ago, the city of Prejmer was included on the list of monuments of UNESCO patrimony. The Bran Castle, or those of Budila and Arcus, mansions of old Hungarian families (like the Mikes), point out the cultural potential of the region.

A series of Romanian monuments were not included in the national cultural patrimony, especially in the hungarised territory, in this case a preservation or restauration was not possible (see the cemeteries and churches on the eastern side of the Land of Barsa\(^1\)).

### 3. THE CULTURAL IMATERIAL PATRIMONY

In the general acceptance of the word, by cultural immaterial patrimony, we understand the ensemble of practices, representations, expressions and knowledge that communities, social groups and individuals admit as part of their cultural inheritance, transmitted from generation to generation and in continuous transformation. A classification of goods in this category was made by Law no. 26/2008 referring to protection of the cultural immaterial patrimony (published in the Official Monitor no. 168/5th of March, 2008) and include five typologies: traditions and verbal expressions, entertainment arts (music and traditional dance), social practices, rituals and different traditional events, knowledge about nature and universe and traditional handicrafts techniques.

With their own complex language, customs have their specific forms of expression. Some of the customs reflect the basic occupation of some villages, such as shepherding, occasioned by the taking of the sheep herds to the mountain pastures, like: Milk Measure (Masura Laptelui) or Cluttering of Sheep (Ravasitul Oilor, Bran), Santilia (Sacele), Nedeia (Voinesti).

Among the events that refer to different holidays according to the calendar, an unwonted place is held by St Peter’s Fire (Moieciu), to renew the year and cleanse the sheep herds and their owners. Another Romanian custom that combines pre-Christian and Christian elements is held in Schei Brasovului, the oldest neighborhood of the city, with the name of **Holiday of the Brasov Youngsters**.

Dancing and singing attracted all the villagers every Sunday or holiday in the church yard or the village yard. From the youngest to the oldest, they all gathered and started the hora (with local variants – Calusari Dance or Youngsters Sarba\(^2\)). The using of past tense is, unfortunately, a reality that came around all the rural communities, young people easily borrowing all that is new and against the archaic. The dance fever also contaminated the Hungarian ethnics (the so-called ciangai), their dance, „Borita”, has numerous elements taken from the Romanian dance: jingles on the knees, the presence of a master and his leading of the dance.

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Aside the customs transmitted from generation to generation, with a local initiative, there were introduced some cultural programmes to promote and preserve the traditions, by introducing them into the tourist’s tours. Celebrating some places (Tarlungeni Days, Codlea Days, Arcus Days, Ilieni Days, Turia Days, etc.), more recent events, makes the most out of the community artistic expressions, but also becomes a parade place for traditional clothing.

Balls and carnivals on the Eastern side of the analyzed territory (Belin, Estelnic, etc.) or agrarian parties (Crops Ball of Bretcu, Feldioara, Reci), are meant to be meeting places for the local community, trying to set a print on the locals belonging to the space where they were born and they lived. Still with a healing part against evil spirits, there is a custom called Farsang, borrowed by the Hungarian community in Apata from the Saxon neighbors. On the other side, although time has set its mark by the disappearance of some customs, at the initiative of Prejmer locals, there was an attempt to bring back in the ethnographic landscape of a custom (Fasching – Pancakes festival) that symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness.

Not least of all, traditional fairs, to sell and promote the local products, are another form of perpetuating ethnographic creations. During any traditional manifestations, more or less commercial, there are presented to be sold different handicrafts (made of wood, willow or even tinder), local food products (different varieties of cheese, smoked cheese, salt meat, twist bread\(^3\)) or craftsmanship objects.

All the elders’ faith manifested like law in the village, being orally transmitted, and resumed to weather predictions, superstitions, healing with quackery, incantations and calculating time for different agrarian works. The classical clock was replaced by astronomical signs: summer and winter solstices, vernal and autumnal equinox, moon stages but also different parts of the day.

Closely related to shepherding and wood crafting there appeared several technical installations (mills, fulling mills, whirlpools, saw mills), now meant to disappear, few of them being preserved in local ethnographic museums (Brasov, Cernat, Bran). Social, political or economical changes produce effects on peasants’ installations, slowly replaced by modern techniques.

But, things must be „pushed” much further than a simple inventory or organizing some traditional manifestations. The deficiency comes from the fact that there is an insufficient or punctual promotion of these manifestations and the Romanian ethnographic past is not taken into consideration. Ethnographic areas like Bretcu-Covasna are limited to a single Romanian traditional display, while other rural places are well managed, promoting their traditions in a multi-ethnic context.

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On the other side, according to the calendar of display of traditional fairs in Brasov County, foreseen for all the events in 2008, at the citizens’ disposal by the County Council of Brasov, for the city of Brasov there is no fair or any other event (these are mentioned in other documents), although they exist (The Holiday of Brasov Youngsters, The Handicraft Fair, etc.). According to the same source, there is no difference between the types of traditional cultural events – all of them [spring or autumn fairs, celebrations of some villages, folk customs] being considered „traditional fairs”, while for the same information, the County Council Covasna structures the events in a more explicit way to help the public.

4. FROM PROJECTS OF „LOCAL ACTORS” TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1. Legislative framework, for or against cultural development?

Not at random, at the beginning of the study there was a mention about the unstable character of the legislation regarding the cultural aspects. For five years there was an attempt to approach the Romanian legislation to the European one with the help of nine legislative decrees. The first ratification after the European treaties, and those of the European Convention, were initiated in 1997, by Law no. 157/1997 (published in the Official Monitor no. 274/13th of October, 1997) for the protection of the architectural patrimony and by Law no. 150 on the 24th of July 1997 (published in the Official Monitor no. 175/29th of July, 1997) for the protection of the archaeological patrimony (reviewed).

Classification of goods in the protected areas was made by Law no. 5/6th of March, 2000 (published in the Official Monitor no. 152/12th of April, 2000), section III.

While some laws or government decrees come to enforce the protection of historical monuments (Government Decree no. 47/2000, approved with annotations by Law 564/2001
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4.2. The role of museums and other cultural institutions

Starting from the hypothesis that everything begins from the „top”, then the main actors to whom is left the job of promoting and preserving the cultural goods, no matter their nature, will be those of the politics and also of the private business. Either talking about museums, theatres, opera houses, cultural houses or about non-governmental organizations, they all have in common the dialogue between community and culture. To these, we may add different local authorities, research institutions, educational institutions, leaders of these or companies that want to contribute to the development of culture.

Museums, keepers of a very valuable ethnographic, literary, historical or of any other cultural nature material, fact which defines their activity profile, lead scientific research forward, trying to leave the following generations future essential coordinates of culture. Among the most important museums, there are the ethnographic units in Brasov, Sacele, the historical in Brasov (Mures House Museum), Bran (Bran Castle), Saint George (Museum of the Eastern Carpathians), Targu Secuiesc (The Trade Museum), the art museums (Brasov Art Museum). Museums that harbour creations of the ethnic minorities can be found around places like Cernat (Hasszman Pall Museum), Brasov, Targu Secuiesc. Encouraged in difficult times by the patronage of some associations like Astra, theatres and opera made their presence felt until today, presently being limited to the two county capitals: Brasov (4) and Saint George (3, of which one is Romanian). In the rural space, cultural houses were forgotten, and few of them had the advantage of restauration, partial or total, making serious efforts to partially capitalize some ancient folk customs. Of course, there are other cultural institutions, under the aspect of non-governmental associations (Alliance for Romanian Spirit, Sons and Friends of Bran Association, Society of Rosiori Youngsters, the National Foundation „Romanian People”, branch of Covasna, etc.), folk dancing ensembles, cultural centers (Brasov, Saint George) or even publishing houses and book shops, that help.

All these fundamental institutions had and have a prominent part in affirming the ethnic identity and the local development. Cohabitation and understanding imply the existence of a permanent dialogue among the members of the same community, of different communities and, the most important, among their leading authorities, where all the political strings are pulled.

4.3. Cultural development – between project and fact

The largest part of local development projects, having in sight capitalization of the cultural potential, is almost ready. There is a rather small amount of finished projects. Their distribution is grouped around some urban centers, Brasov being the most important this time, too. With the support from the County Council, respectively the County Directorate for Culture, Cults and National Cultural Patrimony Brasov, and with the help of national
and international organizations, works with an important cultural impact were finished. Two of these (projects „A Beautiful Romania” and „Renovation of the Wall in the South-Eastern Part of Brasov City and the Functional Rehabilitation of the Related Urban Area”) stood on preservation and restauration of some parts of the city’s wall, including restauration of some historic monuments (Graft Bastion, White Tower), nocturnal illumination of the objectives and urban rehabilitation of the area. Still in the Brasov urban space, but, this time at the „entrance gate” to the oldest neighborhood at the bottom of Tampa, Scheii Brasovului, the project „Repairs and Rehabilitation at Ecaterina Gate” was finished, with its successful reintroduction in the tourist’s circuit. In the other county capital of the Land of Barsa, Saint George, there is a strong activity supported by the Museum of Eastern Carpathians through archaeological research.

Of course, smaller or bigger steps were made by other similar institutions, like the Brasov County Centre for Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture or the Cultural Centre of Covasna County, different local associations (Youngsters societies, for example) or even different representatives of the community (see V. Oltean), etc.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The harmony of the intercultural diversity was not easy to maintain, especially if we take into consideration the political disturbances to which this regional space was submitted. The representatives of every ethnic group tried to impose their own cultural inheritance, to promote their own values. The interest of ethnic communities for introducing spiritual values was established through some objectives like: affirmation or preservation of the cultural identity (met at the level of every ethnic group) or economical and cultural development (in the case of Transylvanian Saxons).

This way, even if this ethnical multiculturalism is less visible nowadays, it has different forms of manifestation. There are discrepancies in what regards the significance of the urban and rural space, the rural space being less in advantage, in comparison with the urban centers. A first step that should be taken in all rural communities is the rehabilitation of cultural houses, real cultural institutions, where locals can express ancient customs.

For a better continuity of existing cultural values, a direct implication of the local actors is required and also a high level of participation from the locals.

What are the target points to „work” with? Some of them have already been reached by the objectives of some programmes and we hope others will be put in practice in development strategies. One of the objectives, already fulfilled, was that of promoting the cultural tourism that must be ethical, participative, qualitative, educational and with a lot of creativity and originality.

Among the cultural development objectives that refer to culture, we mention:
- diversity of cultural expressions;
- organizing cultural events, traditional fairs, some festivals;
- partnerships between cultural institutions and tourism agencies;
- rehabilitation by co-financing of cultural houses and centers;
- stimulation of activities that use local cultural resources;

- encouraging local cultural institutions with the purpose of covering the cultural need of the local community;
- participation of the community members to the cultural life;
- signing of international contracts by local institutions;
- identifying of new tracks to include monuments and traditional craftsmanship centers;
- marking of cultural objectives.

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