THE MARAMURES TOURISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN A CROSSBORDER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. The paper deals with a few aspects referring to Maramures tourism analysed from a crossborder perspective. Maramures, a depressional region situated in the superior basin of Tisa, in the northern sector of the Romanian Carpathians, shows today a series of touristic attraction elements that can be intensive capitalised. Besides the natural dowry of the touristic elements, the man-made dowry is added (churches and wooden gates, the beauty of traditional costumes, the tradition archaism, the traditional kitchen, etc.). In order to have a real image upon the Maramures touristic phenomenon, we considered that a S.W.O.T. analyse could show the best, the present condition and its direction of evolution.

Key words: crosborborder perspective , natural dowry, men-made dowry, Maramures, tourism.

Maramures is a depressional region overlapped the superior basin of the Tisa River, in the northern sector of the south-eastern Carpathians. After the First World War this place has been separated in two entities, with a distinct evolution, Tisa becoming border-line between the two sectors on 62 km.

The southern sector, with Romanian majority, together with Transilvania to which it was connected geographically, historically and ethnically, united to Romania according to the inhabitants wish, making up the north-western part of Maramures county.

The northern sector, with Ukrainian majority, felt directly the historic events of the 20th century, through its statal affiliation. Thus, between 1920-1939 it was part of Czechoslovakia and between 1939-1945 it belonged together with the southern sector of Maramures and northern Transilvania, to Hungary. After 1945, U.S.S.R. lied in the north of Tisa and after its separation the northern sector of Maramures belonged to Ukraina, the Zakarpatia region.

Before the period of divisation from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in Maramures the first touristic amenities took place, especially in the curative tourism, based on mineral
water, whose existence is connected to the mophetic aureole of the volcanic mountains. That was the period when the mineral water started to be bottled and used for external cure.

The real development registered after the Second World War, when there are built up the touristic complexes with large accommodation capacity in both Maramures sectors.

In the Romanian sector of Maramures, touristic complexes for mountain tourism were built at: Borsa, Mogosa, Izvoare, and for curative tourism the resort from Ocna Sugatag, based on the use of salty water coming from the former salt mine from there. Other amenities of local importance were built at Costiui, Botiza, Dragomiresti, Criciunesti, Viseu de Sus, Breb, etc., one of them being still operative, others being abandoned. If at Costiui there were used the waters of the former salt mine, in the other amenities there was used the local mineral spring.

In the Ukrainian sector of Maramures the touristic capitalisation of the existent potential was more important, Zakarpattia becoming the second touristic region of Ukraina after Crimea. For curative tourism there have been arranged the sanatorium from Saian, Kvasa, Soimi, using mineral water and at the salt mine from Solotvino an allergological sanatorium has been arranged in the third and fourth horizons of the mine. For mountain tourism there have been built touristic basis at Miigirea, Hust, Rahiv, Iasima, Kobiletska, Polyana, Ust, Ciorna and Sinevir Ski Polyana, all huge with hundreds of accommodations each, with means of transportation on cable and other arrangements. Some little amenities are added belonging to the Minister of Economy, of Cooperation or Education, such as those from Bustina, Apsa de Jos, Bogdan, Kolociava, Svidovet, etc.

Touristic resorts and touristic grounds both from Romania and Ukraina were used as basis for tourism organised through unions, with tickets where there was no such problem as attracting tourists, as the tourists were provided through the unionships’ gear.

After 1990, the old structures from unions and from OJT (Regional Touristic Offices)-TB(Turesticine Biuro) collapsed and as a result only 5 to 10 percents from the capacity of those units could be covered.

The crisis became more severe, as the lack of proper experience of the old managers made them react through decreasing services provided for tourists when the number of tourists decreased. Some units were closed (Izvoare), other were taken over by Health Department, some succeeded to reach normality again. We have to make specification that things have moved faster in Romania, where the process of transition towards a free market economy is more advanced than in Ukraina. Signs of privatisation in Ukraina have barely appeared and the major part of the accommodation places still belong to the state.

In order to have a more realistic image on the Maramures touristic phenomenon in a cross-border vision, we considered that a S.W.O.T. analysis could foresee the best possibility of development and advance.

**a) Strong Points of Maramures Tourism**

Relief is for itself an exceptional touristic heritage. The Cristalline-Mezozoical mountain area is evidenced through heights which culminate with the Pietrosu Rodnei Peak (2,303 meters) and the Goverla Peak (2,061 meters) from Ukrainian side of Maramures. Here the Glacial and Periglacial relief and the presence on certain sectors of Carstic relief motivates the trip. In the western sector, the volcanic mountains are remarkable through their conic shapes and through some spectacular elements, results of a differentiated erosion, such as Creasta Cocosului (The Cock’s Ridge).
The soliciting-tonifying mountain climate is important, especially taking into account the quantity and duration of the snow coat on the ground. This particular resource has not passed by unnoticed: it has been exploited by building means of transportation by cable and teleski at Borsa, Mogosa (Romania), Iasina, Kobbleasca Polyana, Ust Ciorna, Mijigirea, etc.(Ukraina). In addition we can mention the therapeutical use given to the salt mine climate in the sanatoriums developed on the superior horizons of the salt mine from Slatina (Ukraina).

Hydrography completes the touristic heritage through quick mountain waters with twists and falls in both sectors. Mineral waters are therapeutically exploited at Piatra, Sapanta, Onecesti, Breb, Glod, Botiza, Kvasi, Goverla, Kolociava, Bila Terkva, etc.as well as salty waters which are valued at Ocnă Sugatag and Costiui (Romania), Slatina (Ukraina).

Flora and fauna are other strong points in the tourism of Maramures. In order to protect rare elements, there are 19 reservations in the Romanian side of Maramures and 6 reservations in the Ukrainian Maramures. In Farcau-Miharlea area, there is a project to erect a “Biosphere” Reservation with PHARE funds, which is going to be the first cross-border reservation in the sector. Fauna is evidenced through exceptional samples that provide valuable hunting trophies, through fish of prey which includes fish of prey which weights 20 kg.

Anthropic heritage weight be more valuable for tourism than natural heritage. The civilization of wood has given edifices of a remarkable aesthetical taste, such as the wooden churches and the wooden gates from Maramures. In addition we can mention the good preservation of the traditional costume, of the folklore, folk music and dances, specific customs connected to the winter holiday, of certain customs connected to annual cycle of farming work-“tanjaua”, “sambra”, “martisorul”-. Other unique touristic units are: “The Memorial of Communism and of the Anticomunist Resistance”, the “Merry Cemetery” where the main characteristic features of the deceased make the object of short merry poems accompanied by a representative scene; “mocanita”, the train on narrow rail with steam locomotive on the Vaser Valley.

The anthropic heritage is completed by the traditional Maramures kitchen: “sarmale” (minced meat in cabbage leaves), “mamaliga cu branza” (hominy with cheese), “tuica” (plum brandy), offered by the people’s hospitality.

To all these we can add the benefits of privatization process which is more developed in the Romanian side of Maramures. There are here new hotels, but mostly motels and touristic pensions organized into two touristic network that are continuously developing. In the Ukrainian side of Maramures, the first private agencies and accommodation places have just appeared.

b) Weak Points

Unfortunately, these points still exist and might be a real obstacle in the touristic development, whether they are not taking care of.

Nowadays, in both Maramures compartments prevail the accommodation units built in the socialist period for the union networks which required a lower level of confort and services. Accommodation places are large, with problems in supplying confort during winters. Some of these units went through some modernizing programmes (Ocnă Sugatag) as they were object to some instruments, but in the Ukrainian sector, the major part of the units remained untouched by modernization.
The new private touristic accommodation places offer proper comfort but most of them have a reduced number of places (20-30 places). Thus, a large group of tourists rises the problem of suitable accommodation, which, at the moment is salved either through the acceptance of a lower standard accommodation in modest old fashioned hotels, or by dividing the group and accommodate the tourists in new units or in familial touristic
pensions. The problem of accommodation includes also the lack of chalets in the mountain area, accommodation is possible only at the foot of the hill or in tents.

Another weak point is the different quality of the roads. If the roads parallel to the Tisa river, of the national or international importance are generally in good condition, the secondary roads have different degrees of maintenance, including sectors of an inferior quality. On certain sectors also the road marks and sings need to be rebuilt and completed.

The former state organizational structure (Regional Touristic Office in Romania, Turesticine Biuro in Ukraina) has succumbed. A new generation of Touristic Agencies has appeared, agencies that function on private basis, without being organized in networks. Only in the rural tourism network like OVR and ANTREC were founded. In the Ukrainian sector, the formation of private agencies itself is at the beginning, thus the intermediating between tourists and touristic services performers is missing.

In this context, it is obvious that touristic promotion of the Maramures space is far away from the existing possibilities. The first sites have appeared yet; promotion through leaflets persists, while the participation to the large international tourism fairs is still insignificant.

Other aspect that still mean weak points of Maramures tourism refers to the yet reduced accommodation capacity of the new privat units, to the still insufficient member of the modern means of transportation (coaches) speed unreduced comfort of the railway transportation. The lack of an airport in the area is compensated to the airports in the Baia Mare and Ujgorod (administrative residencies)

A weak point of the Maramures tourism is the lack of an international cross-border point in this space. The reduced crossing of the state frontier is, for the moment, possible just for the stable population of the area.

c) Opportunities

The general development of tourism, especially in the cross-border view, benefits in the actual stage of a series of opportunities.

Connections between the two Maramures sectors are going to be easier in a short time. Through a PHARE – CREDO program in Sighetu Marmatiei (Romania) and Solotvino (Ukraina), the road bridge between the two banks of Tisa has been rebuilt and this year the simplified cross-border point from here is going to be transformed into an international custom point, facilitating tourists transit.

Between the leaderships of the Maramures county (Romania) and the Zakarpatia region (Ukraina) there are good collaboration relationships and mutual projects for touristic development, such as: “Touristic Development in the Cross-Border Area at the Salty Lakes from Ocna Sugatag, Costiui, Solotvino”, “Multicultural Centers in the Mirror to Costiui and Solotvino”, as well as projects connected to the infrastructure (Rebuilding of the Historical Bridge over Tisa, Building of the Reinforced Concrete Bridge over the Tisa River, “Reopening of an Old Commercial Road-for Salt and Thick Cloth”).

The project “Touristic Development in the Cross- Border area at the Salty Lakes from Ocna Sugatag, Costiui, Solotvyno” envisages the promotion of a tight collaboration between The Romanian and Ukrainian countries situated on the both banks of Tisa river as well as the capitalization on international standards of the existing touristic potential.

The Carpatic Euroregion which includes the both administrative regions here
mentioned, has its own touristic development projects, and the presidency of Euroregion, owned now by the Romanian side, creates the premises for concrete initiatives.

Another opportunity comes from a certain saturation of tourists coming from Western Europe towards the traditional directions of the leisure tourism and from the desire to see new touristic spaces, new cultures and human civilization. If the Romanian Maramures space started to be caught in Western touristic flow and already benefits annually by certain number of foreign tourists, the same opportunity could be profitable also for the Ukrainian sector of Maramures after the international cross-border point had opened between Sighetu Marmatiei and Solotvino.

d) Risks

A realistic approach of Maramures touristic development from a cross-border perspective must foresee also the possible or predictable risks.

One of the risks could be the number of the much rigorous border (the visas) considering that new border between EU and non EU countries is going to be on Tisa river.

Undesired entrance prevention through this sector might harden the checkings and diminish the traffic possibilities.

Another possible risks might come from an undesired political evolution between Romania and Ukraine and most likely from the expansion of outlaws net through the Maramures – Ukrainian space. The “racheti” are well known, their income being increased by blackmailing the private entreprisers.

It is not less important the negative effect for the hole tourism in Mramures, due to the entrance of some unprofessional persons through the touristic providers, without a perspective vision for the touristic phenomenon. Quick earning money might encourage this tendency of earning lots of money, especially from foreign tourists groups but not being calculated the late effect, a bad one, for the rest of touristic activities providers.

We consider that decisive for the dynamic development of the contemporan tourism in Maramures was the foundation in September 1998, in Sighetu Marmatiei of the “Colegiul Universitar de Geografia Turismului” (Tourism Geography University College) with specialization in “Activitati Turistice ” (Touristic Activities). The academic unit with short period of studies (3 years) belonging to Babes Bolyai University from Cluj Napoca, prepares a part of Maramuresean youth to become touristic agents, job which is an indispensable part for the new tendencies.

The fact that by the north of the Tisa river is a large Romanian minority evolved in the first steps of private tourism.

For a better binding of theoretical knowledge with practic activities, under the lead of some didactic staff from the college it was founded in Sighetu Marmatiei the “Pangeea Project Turism”, a practical base for teachers and students from the college.

A new specialization for our college and agency is scientific motivated tourism. The process was begun at the 18th Geomorphologic Symposium held in Romania, between the 28th -30th of September 2000 in our college. Further on, in Maramures there took place some practical activities with the students from the Geography colleges exploiting the touristic potential of Maramures and of an existing material base (large classrooms, tools, maps, scientific explanations) provided by our college. Geography Faculty from Cluj Napoca, Oradea and Timisoara began to develop some field applications with direct contact with our college. This time, those activities became international involving some students from
Leipzig Geography Institute, Gdansky University (Poland) and Szeged University (Hungary) in Maramures tours.

Another proof of the rising role for our entity played in Maramurean tourism developing is that we are involved in two projects, earned by the City Hall of Sighetu Marmatia I tourism field. As project partners we ensure the training of the staff which will activate in this domain. Besides, in our college there were elaborated five touristic maps of Sighetu Marmatiei and the connected territory.

We can conclude that the perspective of the Maramurean tourism are favorable. When other factors especially political factors will stimulate the cross board collaboration in this area, Maramures, might become a high rank area of European tourism.

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