RURAL TOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITY IN TRANSCARPATHIA

S. BERGHAUER
Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute, Department of Geography, Kossuth Square 6. Beregszász, Ukraine
berghauer@gmail.hu

A. BOGNÁR
University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Doctoral School, Ifjúság Str. 6. Pécs, Hungary
angi3@gamma.ttk.pte.hu

L. GYURICZA
University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Institute of Geography, Department of Regional Geography, Ifjúság Str. 6. Pécs, Hungary
gyuricza@gamma.ttk.pte.hu

Abstract
The area of Transcarpathia is a peripheral region in Ukraine as a result of historical and natural attributes. It borders four countries and in the Soviet period it suffered from isolation but nowadays the region’s location can be definitely fortunate. Despite this, the economic, social inheritance and the extremely low-level of urbanization (37%) set back development in Transcarpathia. Based on the natural and cultural-historical attributes which were not damaged by the isolation are the best development possibilities in the region’s tourism. The sustainable utilization of values can be realized by developing rural tourism which already has some unique features in Transcarpathia. On the one hand the goal of this publication is to examine the attributes useful from the aspect of tourism, uncover the local characteristics of rural tourism and analyze the possible directions for development. On the other hand the authors would like to examine the differences between the two types of rural tourism in the mountains and on the plains. These attributes are based on the differences in the natural conditions and the ethnic composition and have a special effect on the settlements.

Keywords: rural tourism, tourism development, ethnographic groups and traditions, natural values

1. INTRODUCTION
The Transcarpathia region, examined in the study, is the westernmost county of Ukraine with a unique location, which is favourable but peripheral. This opposition lies in the fact that if the area is approached from the direction of its four bordering countries (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia), members of the European Union, the area is seen as a multicultural region, merging the traditions and cultures of several ethnic groups. In Ukraine, however, it counts as a peripheral county isolated from the central areas by the ranges of the Carpathian Mountains.

Based on Ukraine’s official touristic regions, Transcarpathia is a part of the Carpathian touristic region. It is located southeast from the dividing range of the
Northeastern Carpathians in the northeastern corner of the Carpathian Basin. It is 12.8 km$^2$ and makes up 2.1% of Ukraine’s total land area (Figure 1) and in the aspect of relief it is the most diverse section of the country.

![Figure 1: The relief map of the Carpathians in the Transcarpathia region. Source: Göncz, S. 2009; Vavilin 2005; Ed.: Berghauer, S. 2010](image)

2. ANTECEDENTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN TRANSCARPATHTIA

In Ukraine tourism development has been hindered by numerous factors. In the Soviet era there was a centrally controlled and supervised system in tourism, which did not allow qualitative improvement because of the emphasis on quantity. In the independent Ukraine, after the political system change, the alteration of the old frames and methods has been a highly complex task for the sake of effective tourism development and management. The strong recession evolving after the system change affected both inland- and international tourism. The typical travel motivations of the Soviet era, relaxation, recreation, and holiday, were substituted by entirely different kinds of activities like shopping tourism and subsistence tourism.

The formerly established three foremost enterprises got substituted by several smaller ones, many of which had a bottom-up construction and possessed no professional and infrastructural basis. Their number was 16 000 in 1993 and got reduced to 4800 today. Nowadays, carrying out the tasks of tourism politics belongs to the State Tourism and Resort Service of Ukraine (Головна Державна служба туризму і курортів), established in 2005 and forming part of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. On a regional level in the frames of county administration, a separate unit dealing with tourism was established.
Besides this, it is also positive that several touristic priorities are prescribed by the Ukrainian law (A TURIZMUSRÓL 15.09.1995 № 324/95-BP; 18.11.2003 № 1282-IV). The most important tasks in the official strategy are the followings:

- development of a competitive national tourism product; conscious and wide-ranging utilization of touristic potentials;
- construction and improvement of the tourist information network;
- development of a standardized tourism marketing, increase in the marketability of national and regional touristic products;
- strengthening of international cooperation for the sake of long-term tourism development;
- decrease of the regional differences in Ukraine’s tourism;
- improvement of current touristic products through international- and inland tourism;
- standardization and unified interpretation of touristic concepts;
- updating of statistical methods according to international criteria.

In contrast to this, in Hungary for instance, the discussion of the tourism law has been impeded for years and until this day there is no unified proposal in the matter. The final priority is not closely linked to product- and destination development, although its realization would be extremely important. In Ukraine, tourism research is very much hindered by the fact that “nothing is the way it seems to be”. This is primarily true to statistical data, which in itself is also extremely difficult to obtain. Data is not stored according to international criteria, the dissimilar interpretation of touristic products and concepts and also the lack of information result in great difficulties in uncovering the country’s and in this case Transcarpathia’s actual tourism. In many cases the unclear legal and proprietary matters cause additional complications. However, both in Ukraine and in the studied region the natural and social attributes required for a developed tourism are present. In order to eliminate these problems and also in this study, emphasis was placed on primary research and field survey.

3. THE CARPATHIAN TOURISM REGION

The region includes the westernmost areas of Ukraine: Transcarpathia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi and Lemberg (Lviv). It possesses one-third of the country’s recreational resources. The natural appeals are mainly linked to the ranges of the Carpathians and are concentrated in Transcarpathia (80 % of the area is made up of low and medium mountains). The four connected national parks (Synevyr, Carpathian, Vyzhnytsia, Yavoriv) and the Unesco Carpathian Biosphere Reserve boast considerable eco-touristic potentials. The primary treasures of the region, however, are the 800 healing mineral water sources, an excellent basis for health tourism (MALJSZKA, M. – HUDO, V. 2007).

In tourism special appeals such as a particular area’s “highest”, “biggest”, “longest”, etc. have an important role as well. The Hoverla mountain (2061 m), Ukraine’s highest peak is located in the region, which is a popular appeal in the circles of hikers. Besides this, the highland serves as a great basis for the establishment of climatic health resorts. Regarding water tourism, Transcarpathia also possesses excellent qualities because more than 150 of its rivers are longer than 10 km and four of these are even longer than 100 km (Tisza, Latorica, Uzh, Borzhava).
Attributed to the mountain nature of Transcarpathia’s rivers, their scenic value due to the surface forms is high, which is further enhanced by the waterfalls and gorges of the county. There are numerous waterfalls in the mountains, out of which the Trufanec, the Sipot, the Pliska and the Lumsor waterfalls are the most spectacular ones.

Additional defining elements of the scenic value are the lakes. Out of the 137 lakes of Transcarpathia 32 were formed naturally. Most of these are tarn lakes formed by glaciers of the ice age and are to be found in a height of 1500-1800 metres in impressive surroundings. The Brebeneskul lake, which is located at the highest altitude (1801 m) in Ukraine, is one of these. The biggest and most famous of Transcarpathia’s natural lakes is Lake Synevyr (pearl of the Synevyr National Park), which belongs to the type of dammed lakes because it was formed as a result of a landslide.

The Transcarpathian relief is also suitable for the development of ski tourism and it currently serves as the most important ski touristic area of the country.

In terms of cultural attributes, due to the favourable location, surviving customs and traditions of several ethnic groups are to be found as well. The ethnical variety and the multiculturalism are both considerable appeals besides the diverse natural attributes. The major ethnic groups are the followings: Hungarian, Lemko, Boyko, Hutsul, Rusyn and Romanian. The dissimilar building styles, land use, customs, costumes and gastronomy result in an authentic folk culture in Transcarpathia and also in other areas of the touristic region. Important and internationally recognized appeals are the wooden churches of the Carpathians. Two of these (Užok/ Uzsok, Jaszinya/ Körösméző) are potential candidates to become parts of the Unesco World Heritage. The cultural attributes and the gastronomy are also advantageous for rural tourism. The traditions and the varied folk culture are perfect foundations for rural tourism and accommodation and could be a significant supplementary element of special events (HORVÁTH Z. – KOVÁCS S. 2002; WWW.UNWTO.ORG).

Most improvements in Transcarpathia happened for the advancement of health tourism, just like in the bordering Hungary, and is the key sector in the area. Table 1 presents the institutes linked to recreation and health tourism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of tourism institution</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sanatorium</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prophylactic sanatorium</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guesthouse</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holiday home</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children’s summer camp</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children’s winter camp</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Maljszka, M. – Hudo, V. 2007; Szerk.: Berghauer, S.

4. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL TOURISM IN TRANSCARPATHIA
The low standards of commercial accommodation supplies after the political system change had a decisive role in the emergence of Transcarpathian rural tourism. At this time lots of tourists gave their trust to rural hosts instead of the neglected commercial accommodations of unfavourable prices. Due to this, the emerging rural tourism of Transcarpathia’s
Hungarian settlements had a pioneering function in Ukraine. Despite the fact that lately the
offers and the reliability of commercial accommodations significantly improved, the
prosperousness of rural tourism has been going on thanks to the favourable prices, local
traditions and the hospitality characterizing the region (BERGHAUER, S. 2009A).

The development of Transcarpathia’s rural tourism has also been supported centrally
(however, not really financially), because it affects rural areas, which are undeveloped parts
of the settlement network. Although, surveying its condition is extremely difficult due to
local legal regulations and official statistical features. Tourist traffic can only be estimated
on the basis of primary research because in Ukraine rural hosts are only obliged to report
their touristic activities if they have more than nine guests. Therefore, most rural tourists
are “invisible”, distorting the data.

The number of currently known rural guesthouses is estimated to a maximum of 500
by the National Tourist Office. Research based on internet adverts confirms the existence of
approximately 300 rural lodgings (GÖNCZY, S. ET AL. 2011), however the total capacity
of the county’s rural tourism could easily be improved to the concurrent accommodation of
10 000 tourists.

In Transcarpathia, rural tourism is basically not yet a mature touristic product,
although its attributes would qualify its improvement and expansion. In the county it
primarily means rural lodging, which in some places is completed by catering. The majority
of guests are not attracted by the Transcarpathian rural lifestyle and traditions but by the
beautiful, untouched nature, historical sites and spend most of their time on different hikes,
instead of the settlement of their accommodation.

In Transcarpathia rural tourism developed into two well separable types: that of the
plains and that of the mountains. These emerged as a result of the dissimilar relief
conditions, land use, ethnic differences and the unlike characteristics of their touristic traffic
(BERGHAUER S. 2010).

Major characteristics of rural tourism of the plains:
• characteristic to settlements inhabited mostly by Hungarians,
• most guests are Hungarian tourists,
• relatively concentrated at the Hungarian border (15-25 km belt),
• settlements and guesthouses suitable for the reception of bigger groups (30-45
  people)
• travel coordinated by travel organizer
• cooperation and experience exchange between hosts
• 10 % of guests travel with the purpose of rural tourism, most of them participate in
  bus excursions in the county, purely using their lodgings as a basis.

Major characteristics of rural tourism of the mountains:
• developed in the villages of the Carpathians mostly inhabited by Ukrainians,
• most guests are inland tourists,
• major appeals are the rural lifestyle, the ski tracks, the sanatoriums and the natural
  values,
• tourists use their lodgings as a starting point for their hikes and excursions,
• advantageous bi-seasonal operation: hiking, mountain recreation and visit of the
  spas in the summer and skiing in the winter,
there is no coordinating person among the hosts and the cooperation between the suppliers is not as serious as in the plains.

Relying on the above mentioned factors it can be ascertained that in Transcarpathia both types have their own, definite groups of guests and that the lodgings are popular and operable. The capacities however, would be able to satisfy a much higher demand both in the plains and in the mountains. Currently, the concentration of guesthouses is typical to the districts of Beregszász and Huszt (Figure 2). Although, there are several lodgings in the districts of Szolyva and Volóc as well.

![Figure 2: The number of guesthouses in the districts of Transcarpathia. Source: S, Berghauer](image)

It would be practical to advance rural tourism in both parts besides “mingling” the guests, which could multiply the number of guests in the two areas. The attributes both in the plains and in the mountains are suitable for the extension of rural tourism. The traditions, gastronomical specialties, folk architecture of the numerous ethnic groups highly enhance the region’s image. It would be crucial to preserve and consciously incorporate these into tourism (BAZSIKA E. – GYURICZA L. 2011). In a relatively small area, even in the borderland territories of Hungary and Romania, one can find regions with an authentic folk culture, unfortunately not yet integrated into tourism not only in Ukraine but also in Hungary. These appeals however, in addition to the aesthetic natural landscape, make the area unique and increase its scenic value.

The unique features of the traditional agricultural production in the villages also contribute to this. It is usual in Transcarpathia that villagers own acreages, meadows and animals. Traditional lifestyle is especially important in the mountains where nearly all villages possess a cattle, sheep and local products (butter, curd, cheese, brinza, bread). It is an important way of preserving the traditions besides ensuring subsistence for the locals (BERGHAUER S. 2012). Today, more and more tourist are interested in the local,
traditional and unique products in contrast with the uniform Chinese mass souvenirs, which can be bought almost anywhere in Central Europe. Traditional goods deriving from local, supervised farms (especially if the marketing takes place locally) can preserve several kinds of traditional professions.

Traditional dishes, both in the plains and in the mountains, have to be included into rural catering and local festivities, events have to be further places for the trade of these products. Accommodations have to be completed by catering and various programmes based on local customs and traditions.

Settlements/ parts of settlements with valuable folk architecture, just like Alsókalocsa and Felsőszinevér have to strive for the inclusion into the list of Unesco World Heritage and unique elements of folk architecture have to be declared parts of the Spiritual and Cultural Heritage. It is not only applicable to Transcarpathia but also to the values of the neighbouring Hungary, Poland and Romania, because without sufficient attention these values can disappear fast from the national culture.

5. TOURISTIC MICROREGIONS OF TRANSCARPATIA

In Transcarpathian tourism there are great dissimilarities not only in rural tourism but also in other product types. Based on a complex study the county can be divided into touristic microregions, which possess a well-separable facade, products and attributes. In tourism development it is practical to develop the strategies according to the microregions because in all areas the solution of different problems and tasks in justified. The introduction of the western European TGM model would be timely and these microregions could also serve as an ideal basis for the formation of the organizations.

In specific microregions based on the touristic index numbers, evaluation and comparison of appeals the leading products can be determined, the image of the region can be shaped and a regional marketing can be developed. Based on the research Transcarpathia’s micro-regions are the followings (BERGHAUER S. 2012) (Figure 3):

- Southern tourism microregion: rural tourism is one of the most important products in the area. Most village lodgings can be found in the Beregszász district. This type of accommodation has serious traditions and a strong cooperation developed between travel agencies and local hosts and also between the suppliers themselves. The most significant task of the region is to expand its offers with various programmes, festivities in order to increase the duration of guests’ stay and to efficiently include local products and traditions in touristic offers. At the river Tisza the number of hosts can also be increased. It would be practical to deepen relations with travel organizers on the other side of the border (Szatmár-Bereg) and a more dominant appearance on the Hungarian market could be useful since the majority of guests come from there. In addition to this, the inland connections should also be strengthened in order to raise the attention of Ukrainian and Russian guests.
Eastern tourism microregion: the most important touristic products of the microregion including the Técső and Rahó districts are linked to the vast, untouched landscape. Hiking and ski tourism can be completed by the increase of volume in rural tourism. The folk architecture of the settlements, the traditional farming, especially animal keeping, and its products and the hutsul folk group’s unique culture and traditions provide a useful basis for the product. The most profit can be expected from ski tourism, to which relief and climatic conditions are given, although its touristic infrastructure is not yet suitable for the service of a great number of guests. The improvement is crucial, since in contrast with the expensive western European ski resorts, for Hungarian, Romanian, Polish and inland tourists the untouched nature and the friendly prices are indisputably charming. This product can be perfectly completed by eco-tourism in the summer, hiking, water tourism and cultural tourism linked to folk heritage.

Northern tourism microregion: the area has a relatively poor infrastructure, which is a serious disadvantage in the development of tourism. However, the natural attributes enable the improvement of health tourism and eco-tourism. The availability of the climatic healing places, mountain sanatoriums and mineral water sources of the Szovlya district have to be improved and the existing health centres would have to be bettered in the fitness-wellness direction besides traditional health tourism. Outstanding natural appeals of the area are linked to the Ung/Uzh and the Synevir National Parks, which are not yet developed for eco-tourism. In the future, in addition to the protection of natural values, their touristic utilization and the educational role also have to be emphasized. Besides these, the area is also appropriate for the development of the products of active tourism (hiking, mountain biking, rafting, ski
tourism, etc.). Apart from the natural appeals the Lemko and Boyko folk culture fit well in the environment with their gastronomical specialties, wooden churches and traditions, providing a basis for rural tourism of the mountains as well.

- Central tourism microregion: contains three districts, out of which the districts of Munkács and Ungvár are the ones with the most developed infrastructure in Transcarpathia. The most important product of the area is cultural tourism, which is primarily linked to the two big cities of Munkács and Ungvár, the castles (Beregszentmiklós, Dolha) and the museums. The improvement of the quality of the two cities’ events, the expansion of entertainment and shopping opportunities would be inevitable in the development of urban tourism in the region. These cities and the castles could be proper places for conferences and business tourism.

6. SUMMARY

Transcarpathia’s man-made appeals and natural attributes are perfect from the aspect of tourism, however the utilization of these today, in the county developing on the peripheries, is only moderately realized. The unique developmental frames and existing attributes of the region, similarly to the entire Carpathian tourism area, provide distinctive opportunities for the advancement of rural tourism. The exceptional function of rural tourism in Transcarpathia is enhanced by the rural nature of the county itself (67 % of its inhabitants live in villages), in addition to the religious, ethnic variety and authentic culture of the area.

There have been significant changes in the region in the last two decades, positively affecting Transcarpathian tourism. However, lots of deficiencies hinder the expansion of the area’s tourism. Such problems are the lack of conscious product development, the ignorance of aligned plans and the poor cooperative willingness of the members of the touristic market. There is also a huge potential in cross-border relations because Transcarpathia borders four European Union member countries, which are more developed in all aspects. However, the county’s infrastructure, especially the problems deriving from the complicated border crossing, hinder this and act as negative factors in the area’s active joining to international tourism.

An additional step in the development of Transcarpathia’s tourism might be the introduction of the microregions, the demarcation of which takes the peculiarities and problems of appeals into consideration and handles their opportunities in a differentiated way. The introduction of tourism microregions enables the microregions to appear in the touristic market with a uniform facade and marketing and to enhance the efficiency of the system and provide the touristic actors with an opportunity for a broader cooperation. In the long run all these might be the foundation for a system similar to the Hungarian TDM, which could highly contribute to the suppression of the county’s spontaneous improvement experienced today.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY
2. **BAZSIKA E. – GYURICZA L. 2011:** A néprajzi tájak lehetséges szerepe a turizmusban.


9. **GYURICZA L. 2009:** A természeti adottságok meghatározó szerepe a turizmusban.


