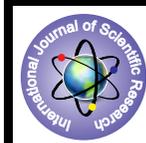


The Ethnic Dimension of Rural-Cultural Tourism in the Geographical-Administrative Space of Rodna



Geography

KEYWORDS : Rodna, multiculturalism, Hungarians, rural tourism.

Murieșianu Mircea

Associate Professor, Faculty of Geography, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

ABSTRACT

While the internal (national) tourist flows remain below possibilities, rural tourism in the geographic space of Rodna in the County of Bistrița-Năsăud is marked, after the year 1990, by a relatively constant and relatively consistent presence of Hungarian tourists coming from Romania, Hungary and other countries; their motivation for visiting Rodna comprises their interest in knowing the local Hungarians, cultural changes, anthroponomastic realities specific to Rodna's Hungarians, routes and studies in the Rodnei Mountains National Park, etc. Tourist flows realised by Hungarians from Romania and abroad registered an ascending trend after 1990, showing a doubling in numbers after 2004, when the Rodnei Mountains National Park Administration was established and the Reményik Sandor Memorial House from Valea Vinului was opened for tourists, but also due to the establishment of a Friendship Association between Rodna (Romania) and Salgótarján (Hungary).

THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The concept of rural tourism is characterised by a remarkable complexity, as it deals with a touristic activity which is organised and performed in a rural environment, where the ambience, nature, and man are essential elements of the successful equation. Thus, rural tourism utilises local touristic resources from the countryside (natural, cultural, and human ones), at a higher, more complex level, including touristic facilities and equipment (ranging from leisure and knowledge facilities, to boarding houses and agricultural farms).

Cultural rural tourism finds in the countryside a most favourable "playground", thanks to both an authentic popular culture, with well-preserved traditions which are continuously enriched through the experience of its own creators, and the presence of a multi-ethnic milieu characterised by ethno-linguistic and confessional-religious specificities of some minority groups that draw the attention of co-ethnics from within the country or from abroad.

Rodna is a well-known such an example, where the Hungarians, settled here for centuries, managed to preserve a part of their traditions, in addition to a special, interesting onomastic, and a 150 years old (in the year 2010) miner's brass band, attracting annually a substantial flow of Hungarian tourists from Romania and abroad, conferring an ethnic dimension to Rodna's cultural rural tourism.

Our research is based on a series of statistical data that were collected throughout more than two decades (after 1990), observing that, despite the fact that from the perspective of the natural and anthropogenic resources rural tourism should be a living and dynamic reality that could bring significant financial resources to the local public administration of Rodna, the internal tourist flows are, unfortunately, still relatively scarce. Hence, the attention was directed towards an element that kept its coherence and stability in time: the permanently increasing presence of the Hungarian ethnicities in the rural space of Rodna.

The tight connections with all those who quantify and own data (see Sources, below Table 1) as well as the personal investigations, dialogues and surveys, allowed us to render a relatively accurate image of the Hungarians' implication in the development of rural tourism and especially in the rural-cultural tourism of the Rodna commune (with its composing villages, Rodna and Valea Vinului).

RODNA - A MULTI-ETHNIC, MULTI-CONFESSIONAL, AND MULTICULTURAL GEOGRAPHICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE TERRITORY

Situated at the geological and geomorphological border between the Rodnei and the Bărgăului Mts., on the upper valley of the Someșul Mare River, in the north-eastern part of the county of Bistrița-Năsăud, and northern part of Romania, Rodna holds an exceptional morphological and landscape touristic potential, as well as an ethno-cultural one, the latter based on a sum of traditions and rituals characteristic to both the Romania major-

ity and the Hungarian minority (Mureșianu, 1997).

Being a true "Mini-Transylvania" in respect to the ethnic structure of its population, Rodna manifests a major touristic interest for Hungarians from Romania, Hungary, and the rest of the world, through the presence of the Hungarian population, which, beginning with the 20th century until now, represented between 25% (1910) and 7% (nowadays) of the entire population.

With respect to religion, the Hungarians from Rodna actively take part in the life of the Roman-Catholic church, which gained the name of "the Hungarian Church".

Throughout the history of Rodna, the Hungarians played a constructive role in economy (they were settled here by the Arpadian kings in order to contribute, together with the Saxons, colonised here since the 12th century, to the revitalisation of mining and to defend the Carpathian passes) and culture (by enriching the local ethnic heritage with characteristic elements). Another interesting aspect is represented by the history of the cohabitation with the Romanian majority, with permanent positive relations. Throughout time, mixed families were a bright and generous reality, with only sporadic occurring conflicts, triggered by political, administrative, or military elites promoting intolerance (Mureșianu et al., 1996).

The 18th and 19th centuries represent a most interesting period, as some ethnic groups settled in Rodna: Czechs and Slovaks (Holicsek, Koblicska, Koniciska, Kotlar, Nemasozski, Popicska, Sutak, Svoboda, etc.), Poles (Cervenszki, Gurszki, Ostrowszki, Tersanszki, Viliszki, Zavaszi, etc.), and Germans (Bauer, Ernst, Fintscher, Griober, Gross, Kellner, Schneider, Schuller, Steixner, Stentzel, Waldthütter, etc.); the members of these groups, joining the Roman-Catholic church (to which they belonged in their home territories, and which in Rodna was the "Hungarian" church), or marrying Hungarian people, entered a gradual process of Magyarisation, contributing to the numerical increase of these ethnic group and bringing a spot of light and colour to it (Mureșianu, 2010).



Figure 1. Geographical location of Rodna at county and national level

The pure Magyar onomastic (Debreceni, Felföldi, Fillofer, Forray, Geza, Karacsony, Miskolci, Nagy, Suhanyi, Szabo, Szentleben, etc.), in regress following the numerical decrease of the ethnic group, is indicating either a oiconimic origin, or the occupations of their ancestors, as well as other, less known or non-translatable elements.

This is another cause why the Hungarian group from Rodna raises a high interest among Hungarians worldwide.

THE NUMERICAL EVOLUTION OF HUNGARIAN TOURISTS AND THE MOTIVATIONAL BACKGROUNDS OF THEIR TRIPS TO RODNA

A difficult problem in realising such a study is that of quantifying tourist flows, as their recording is not done by a special institution, and the gathering of data by those writing the material is done by contacting a number of entities and persons interested in this matter. Thus, we had to count on all those expecting or accommodating Hungarian tourists, benefitting from their understanding and generosity: the Roman-Catholic Parish from Rodna, the Rodnei Mountains National Park Administration, the Tourist Information Centre in Rodna, the boarding house *Suzzy* from Valea Vinului, Strâmbu Erzsebet and Szabo Lehel from the Rodna - Salgótárján Friendship Association. In the timeframe 1990 - 2013, the number of Hungarians from Romania, Hungary and other parts of the World visiting Rodna increased steadily, ranging from 315 arrivals in 1990 to over 1000 in 2013.

Table 1. The evolution of Hungarian tourists in Rodna between 1990 and 2013

Yr.	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Nr.	315	388	395	412	431	462
Yr.	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Nr.	553	581	542	601	618	720
1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	
469	522	529	587	517	570	
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
793	885	904	1011	1323	1402	

(Sources: the Roman-Catholic Parish from Rodna, the Rodnei Mountains National Park Administration, the Tourist Information Centre in Rodna, the boarding house *Suzzy* from Valea Vinului, Strâmbu Erzsebet and Szabo Lehel from the Rodna - Salgótárján Friendship Association)

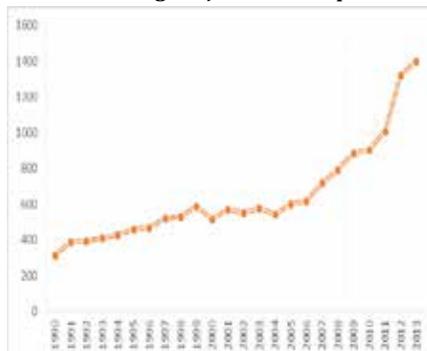


Figure 2. The evolution of Hungarian tourist arrivals in Rodna between 1990-2013

From the data collected from the above-mentioned institutions and persons, we managed to draw a circular diagram showing the motivational backgrounds of the Hungarian tourists visiting Rodna in the peak year 2013 (fig. 3). According to this analysis, the majority of them (67%) were seeking the discovery of the morphological landscapes in the Ineu - Lala Lake mountain area, as well as those in the Rodnei Mountains National Park

(RMNP) (Iuşan, 2013) (fig. 4), along with the wish to know the onomastic, the living, or the life of the Roman-Catholic (Hungarian) church. Recreation and leisure (walking, culinary tourism, visiting the Ethnographic Museum or the Museum of Mining in Rodna, the Reményik Sandor Memorial House in Valea Vinului, and the historic site represented by the ruins of the 13th century Dominican basilica) motivated 19% of the tourists, while 14% of the tourists looked for a complex touristic experience in Rodna's geographical environment (without a specific target).

After the year 1990, perspectives emerged in the direction of a strong cultural-confessional collaboration between Hungarians in Rodna and other regions, materialised in the establishment of cultural associations and societies promoting intense tourist exchanges.

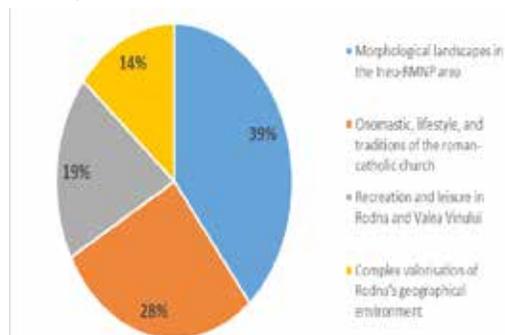


Figure 3. Motivational backgrounds of Hungarian tourists visiting Rodna

Moreover, the motivational backgrounds drawing the attention of Hungarian tourists toward Rodna are of interest, affecting numerous trips to this geographical area, such as:

- Authentic folklore preserved by the ethnic group of Hungarians in Rodna;
- Hungarian onomastic, along with that including magyarised surnames of other nations living in Rodna (Germans, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, etc.);
- Lifestyle and material status of Hungarians in Rodna;
- Local traditional cuisine (culinary tourism);
- Religious feasts and the life of the roman-catholic (Hungarian) church;
- Mineral water in the "Rodna Basin";
- The Rodnei Mountains, with its exceptional morphological landscapes, the Ineu Peak and the Lala Mare glacier lake;
- The Rodnei Mountains National Park;
- Original flora and fauna elements (observation and research activities);
- The *Reményik Sandor* Memorial House from Valea Vinului;
- Cultural exchanges (especially between the brass bands from Rodna, Romania and those from Salgótárján and Debrecen, Hungary).



Figure 4. Young Hungarian tourists in the Rodnei Mts. National Park (Lake Lala area)



Figure 5. A part of the brass band from Rodna (left) and the representatives of the authorities from Salgótarján, Hungary (right)

A particular case is represented by the tight relations with the mining town of Salgótarján, twin town of Rodna, effecting yearly intense touristic exchanges between the representatives of the two towns.

The most intense, frequent, and looked for exchanges between the two parts take place at the meetings of the miner's brass bands from the two localities, joined by the Debrecen brass band in 2010 (which distinguished itself by an impressive repertoire), when Rodna's brass band reached the age of 150 years.

The 2010 festival also represented a landmark regarding multi-ethnic and multicultural contacts, due to the participation of Hungarians from Salgótarján and Debrecen, of the country-brass bands from Stamate (Suceava County) and Telciu (Bistrița-Năsăud County), and the brass band of the German Forum from Bistrița.

Rodna encountered then, in 2010, during the 3-day "Brass Band Festival" (July 30 – August 1) the largest tourist concentration – over one thousand per day, counting the guests from neighbouring villages, with all lodging facilities (hotel *Ineul* and the guesthouse *La Americanu'* from Rodna, the guesthouses *Bradul*, *Suzzy*, *Casa Scriitorilor*, *Casa Tompa*, *Casa Bindea*, *La Basu*, *Floarea de Colț*, etc. from Valea Vinului) being booked out.



Figure 6. The brass band from Rodna



Figure 7. The brass band from Debrecen (Hungary) at Rodna (Romania)

The festival, which takes place yearly since 2005, impresses and touches the public from Rodna and the neighbouring villages through both the marching of the brass bands at the civic centre of Rodna, around the beautiful western-looking square in front of the town hall, and the special repertoire of every band (the "mega"-brass band from Debrecen, with a complex and various repertoire ranging from jazz and symphonic to *czardas*, while the country brass bands from Stamate and Telciu add originality through the invigorating folk music they perform).

Being, thus, characterised by multiculturalism, Rodna encountered a revitalisation and dynamisation of tourism thanks to the constant and sustained visits of Hungarian tourists from Romania and abroad to their co-ethnics in Rodna, giving the local rural tourism a clear *ethnic dimension*.

CONCLUSIONS

Even if the natural and anthropogenic touristic potential is an exceptional one (morphopeisagistic, hydropeisagistic, biogeographic, ethnic-cultural, cultural-historic, cultural-religious, anthroponomastic etc.) the internal Romanian tourist flows remain somehow scarce, with a significant contrast between wishfulness and reality.

Our observations and investigations throughout more than two decades allowed us to appreciate that the multiethnicity of the geographic-administrative space of Rodna, with an obvious Romanian dominant and with a second important minority group –the Hungarians - generate significantly increasing tourist flows through the growing presence of these ethnic representatives from Hungary and other countries of the world. They revitalize and support the local rural-cultural tourism, therefore granting the region an ethnic dimension.

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