

IDENTIFYING WAYS IN WHICH RURAL TOURISM CAN PRESERVE TRADITIONAL MARAMUREȘ ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

Maramureș, due to its rich cultural and natural heritage, is a well-known region in Romania for thriving rural tourism. The connection between humans and nature has always been exceptional in Maramureș, which is reflected in the existing crafts and traditions. This connection has materialized in the villages of Maramureș through the presence of traditional elements such as wooden gates, wooden churches, and wooden houses. The opinion regarding the importance of these elements varies among the local population, and significant changes in Romanian society in terms of politics, social issues, and economics in recent years pose a threat to traditional Maramureș architecture in all its aspects.

The objective of this study is to identify ways in which rural tourism can contribute to the preservation and awareness of the value of traditional architecture in Maramureș. We conducted an online survey to collect information from young people in various areas of the county. We initially analyzed the obtained results directly on the platform, and then we generated decision trees using SAS Enterprise Miner. The interpretations were made from the perspective of the characteristics identified as the most relevant, based on the perception of the younger generation regarding the analyzed subject.

Key words: *traditional Maramures architecture, individual perceptions, rural tourism, decision trees*

JEL Classification: *C83, L83, M15*

I. INTRODUCTION

The traditional architecture is a key component of the national cultural patrimony for any country, because it is a visual representation of some characteristics of the identity of the local population. The physical-geographic and ethno-cultural variety of the romanian territory require a heterogeneity, a diversity on the traditional romanian architecture, which determines a richness of the national and regional cultural heritage.

The traditional romanian architecture has different features depending on the cultural and geographical regions and areas, being the expression of the local population traditions and beliefs.

The most known areas which kept till this very moment a specific architectonic in situ are Maramureș Land, Moșilor Land, Bucovina, The Danube's Delta and the south of Transilvania. Each area has a distinct characteristic of its architecture, but there are some features which they have in common: the usage of the local natural materials, the balance of the proportions, the simple and effective ways for the constructions and the well-adjusted resilience with the environment (Ilieș, Ilieș, & Hotea, Studii asupra zonei Grupul de Acțiune Locală Mara-Gutâi, Maramureș, 2014). It can

be synthesized that the traditional architecture represents a mark over time and over a community and its activities in a territory.

The economic context and the freedom of the migrations has required a properly transformation to the rural romanian environment, but this transformation is also dangerous, because the traditional values are left aside and are replaced with modern elements in the rural space, which have already been introduced. The results of the phenomena of metamorphosis of the rural space is visible via the continuing vanishing of the component elements of the traditional rural architecture.

In the last two decades, the traditional romanian village has known deep transformations, functionally and especially physiognomy. The visual modifications in the rural space are due to an import of architecture styles from the countries in which the romanian population has migrated, but they also come from the need of modernization of the every-day life in the rural environment. The changes are supported by the law, which is meant to protect the cultural patrimony, but it is also deficient and has multiple interpretations. In this context the traditional rural architecture has suffered irremediable losses. Less and less rural towns in Romania own elements of typical local traditional architecture, and the number of these is in a continuing

decrease at the national level, but also at regional level. In many regions of Romania the traditional architecture has disappeared due to political and historic national transformations, some forced, which have considerably changed the physiognomy of the rural environment, and the traditional architecture of these can be found only in museums.

For the salvation of the traditional architecture we consider that it is crucial that the young generation be aware of the value of this architecture and identify the ways through which they can save and preserve the traditional architecture.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the value perceived by the young generation of Maramures residents on traditional local architectural elements and aims at the ways in which rural tourism can help to save and raise awareness of the value of traditional Maramures architecture.

The content of the article is structured according to the objective, with a brief presentation of the traditional architecture of Maramures in the second section, a description of the research methodology and the data source in the third section and the presentation of the results obtained in the third fourth section. The work ends with the interpretation of the obtained results and the conclusions.

II. THE TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF MARAMUREȘ

The Romanian traditional rural architecture has evolved continuously, adapting to the people's needs (Vijulie, și alții, 2021), but at the same time keeping the cultural characteristics of the areas (MADR, 2015). The first stage of transformation in the Romanian rural physiognomy made its debut in 20th century and it particularized through replacing the local natural building supplies with modern construction materials (concrete, bricks) in order to create new households. At the same time, buildings with traditional architecture and new buildings without a defined architecture coexisted in the countryside. The Romanian political context which overlapped this stage has spurred through aggressive politics a new stage of transformation of the rural space. In this stage, the second, the physiognomy of the rural space has suffered even more transformations. There had been attempts to force an urbanization in the rural towns. In some cases, „the success” was complete. In Maramureș Land the implementation of this project had only been sporadic in the rural environment. As a result, the traditional architecture of Maramureș survived and perpetuated more than in other regions of the country.

Only the third stage, conducted at the beginning of the 21st century, has transformed the physiognomy of the villages in Maramureș, like in the rest of the rural environment in Romania. The causes were the same the whole country: massive migrations abroad, adopting an

urbanized lifestyle, the import of construction projects from abroad, especially from the western and southern countries in Europe. But the extent of the transformation of rural space in Maramureș County was also influenced by the exodus of wooden houses and gates in the form of recycled wood material for restaurant and pub furniture in various European countries. The only traditional architectural and cultural element which had never been in danger of extinction was the wooden church (Ilieș A. , Rural Churches, „Pearls” of Rural Architecture in Crișana and Maramureș, 2013).

Tradition in architecture if associated with the vernacular architecture (Baca & López, 2018), which means an architecture specific to the place and specific to the local culture. Vernacular architecture is made by local craftsmen, is based on local techniques and materials, developed over time, and transmitted from one generation to another, continuously adapted to the needs of the inhabitants of the rural environment, always reflecting the local culture.

Most of the traditional architecture of Maramures is a vernacular architecture, being the expression of a very well-preserved rural culture in certain areas of the territory (Dăncuș, Arhitectura vernaculară a Maramureșului, 2010), (Bilțiu, 2010), (Dăncuș & Cristea, Maramureș - un muzeu viu in centrul Europei, 2000), which, through its beauty and its cultural value, has become a supporting element in the development of local and general rural tourism.

In Maramureș Land, when the terms of “traditional architecture” are mentioned, these are associated with constructions from wooden materials, and the mentioned area the prevailing wooden items are the wooden gates, the wooden churches and the wooden houses. These elements are the result of a historical, socio-economic, and cultural evolution of the rural communities in the analyzed territory. The wooden gate, the wooden church and the wooden house are local cultural identity expressions (Ilieș A. , Wendt, Ilieș, Josan, & Herman, 2011), products of knowledge and experiences of rural life in conjunction with the environment, transmitted and enriched from one generation to another.

The traditional rural architecture of Maramureș is vulnerable in the actual economic and social context (the change in population's economic concerns, the pace of the daily life, modern social needs, the import of urbanized architecture etc), although it is one of the advantages of the region for the development and support of tourism. The value of traditional architecture is underestimated by the younger generations for personal, domestic, daily use, but it is given importance in its use to support and develop of tourism, which is a little bit contradictory, because the disappearance of traditional architecture from private households changes the rural landscape, Rendering it unappealing to tourists.

The physical degradation of wooden material and subsequent intervention in the renovation or restoration of architectural components are often done inappropriately (e.g., the insertion of PVC and thermopane materials into the structure of houses and churches, replacing wooden roofs with other modern materials, using bright-colored paints, etc.), which deteriorates the original architectural appearance. As a result, the image of what traditional architecture means is distorted by the younger generation.

There is a lack of formal and informal education regarding the recognition, appreciation, possibilities, and management options for traditional Maramureș architecture. This does not include exceptional heritage elements that possess specific traditional architecture and are already protected by law, although even in these cases, many steps are necessary for effective management. Failure to attribute value to the components of traditional architecture, regardless of their condition and how they are used, can lead to their disappearance.

Young rural generations have a low direct contact with traditional architecture and only with certain component elements of traditional architecture. The causes are various:

- some young people were born and spent the first years of childhood in the countries where their parents had emigrated, thus there was a break in the contact and development of feelings of rural belonging.
- the share of traditional architectural elements is reduced in native towns. The maintenance costs of wooden material are high, and the construction techniques required for wooden buildings and traditional craftsmen are increasingly rare.
- traditional architecture for domestic use is currently only used by the older generations and is thus associated by the younger generation as an "outdated" architecture
- the simplicity of the traditional household does not satisfy the modern needs of generations, being considered non-functional and aesthetically unattractive
- the state of degradation of many households and the fact that they are predominantly inhabited by old population, associate the traditional household with „poverty”.

The territory of the studied area is populated by several ethnic groups, and each ethnic group has specific traditional cultural elements (Ilieș G. , Țara Maramureșului: studiu de geografie regională, 2007). Because of this, it is difficult for the youth of rural communities to distinguish between what is authentic, what is traditional and what kind of traditional. The objective of this material is to identify the value perceived by the young local rural generation on the traditional architecture of Maramureș. Also the awareness through which it can be exploited for tourism. Quantitative and qualitative research was

carried out in Maramureș villages (55 rural localities in Maramureș Land) to highlight the state of the architectural heritage (Simion, Hotea, & Moisuc, 2018), but the problem of knowledge among the young generation of the value of traditional architecture and its importance for tourism makes the objective of this material. This study primarily monitored young people's knowledge (18-25 years) of the components of traditional regional architecture, then the recognition and identification of similar components of the traditional architecture of their regions, and then the way in which they are aware of their touristic value.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on the analysis of specialized literature and the performance of empirical studies, through the collection of data with the help of questionnaires and the application of specific statistical analyzes and tests. In our study, we used a questionnaire to collect information about how the young generation in Maramureș perceives the values associated with traditional local architectural elements.

Data collection took place between May and June 2023, using a questionnaire. A sample of young people from different areas of Maramureș county was selected, in order to obtain representative opinions. All participants had been informed about the purpose of the research and their participation was voluntary. Also, the confidentiality of the answers provided was guaranteed.

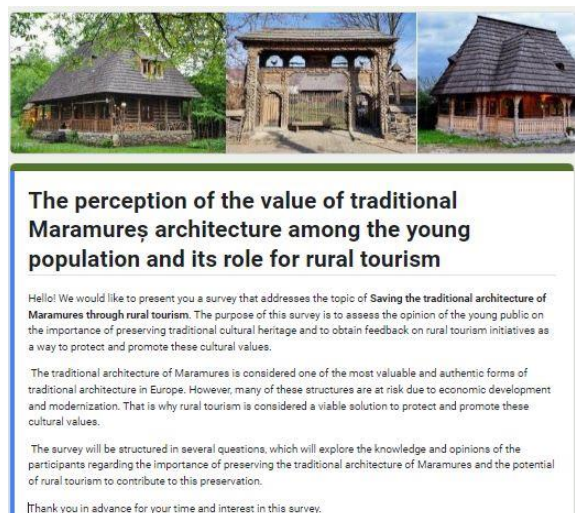


Figure 1. The completed questionnaire

The questionnaire was elaborated and shared using Google Forms and it has 12 different items such as questions with open answers, questions with multiple answer choice, questions with only one correct answer, questions with multiple answer box and questions with representative images attached.

In the structure of the questionnaire had been

included 4 questions aimed at social characteristics and another 8 items aimed at identifying the elements of traditional Maramureşan architecture, awareness on the value of these elements and also identifying the measures that should be taken to protect the traditional Maramureşan architecture, exemplified in the figure above down:

Which of the following do you consider to be elements of the traditional architecture of Maramureş?

braided fence

Wooden gate

traditional store for dry grass ("Şopru")

Wooden house

Wooden church

Trinity wooden cross sculpture


Traditional wooden fountain

Other...


Figure 2. Example of a question with checkboxes

Which of the following images is a traditional house from Maramureş?

1



2



3




Figure 3. Example of a question with checkboxes accompanied by images

What measures do you think should be taken to protect the traditional architecture of Maramureş?

Multiple choice

Restoration of wooden buildings

Education and awareness of the community and tourists about the importance of protecti...

Implementing policies and regulations to prevent the destruction of traditional buildings

The realization of new constructions with traditional architecture

All

Figure 4. Example of a multiple-choice question with one correct option

IV. THE RESULTS OBTAINED

Analyzing the direct data obtained on the platformed, we can firstly extract the social characteristics of the respondents. The data were synthesized in the table below:

Table 1. The social characteristics of the respondents

Social characteristics	Divisions	N (%)
Gender	Male	27,2%
	Female	72,8%
Environment of origin	Rural	57,3%
	Urban	42,7%
Residence	Rural	55,3%
	Urban	44,7%
Age category	18-20 years	19,4%
	21-23 years	30,1%
	over 24 years	50,5%

The respondents identified correctly the elements of traditional architecture of Maramureş and they consider that the both, wooden traditional gate and the wooden traditional house, have cultural value (91,2%, respectively 90,2%).

Out of all the respondents, 79.4% want to know more information about the rural tourism projects that promote the protection and preservation of the traditional architecture of Maramureş.

About the measures that should be taken in order to protect the the traditional architecture of Maramureş, 52,9% of the respondents consider that all variants must be taken into account, namely: the restoring of the wooden buildings, education and awareness of the community and tourists regarding the importance of protecting cultural heritage, the implementation of policies and regulations to prevent the destruction of traditional building, constructing new building with Maramures traditional architecture.

Very important for our study is the fact that 95.1% of the respondents believe that rural tourism can help to protect and save the traditional architecture of Maramures.

For a more complex analysis of the data it was used SAS Enterprise Miner. This simplify many

common tasks associated with applied analyses and it offers a secured management of the analyses and a big variety of instruments with a consistent graphical interface (SAS Institute Inc, 2023).

The data collected from the platform (questions answers) were downloaded in a csv file.

Gender	Origin_environment	Residence	Age_category	Owner_of_architectural_component	Tradit_house_mm	Value_of_tradit_house_mm
F	urban	urban	21-23 years	Yes		2 cultural_value
M	rural	rural	21-23 years	No		2 cultural_value

Tradit_gate_mm	Value_of_tradit_gate_mm	Component_with_high_potential_for_tourism	Tourism_project_inform	Role_of_rural_tourism
4	touristic_cultural	tradit_wood_house	Yes	Yes
4	touristic_cultural	tradit_wood_church	No	I don't know

Figure 5. The data collected from the platform

In the first stage the data were processed in order to be imported in SAS Enterprise Miner.

Name	Role	Level	Report	Order	Drop	Lower
Role_of_rural_tourism	Target	Nominal	No		No	
Tourism_project_inform	Input	Nominal	No		No	
Residence	Input	Nominal	No		No	
tradit_house_mm	Input	Nominal	No		No	
Value_of_tradit_house_mm	Input	Nominal	No		No	
tradit_gate_mm	Input	Interval	No		No	
component_with_high_potential	Input	Nominal	No		No	
Gender	Input	Nominal	No		No	
Age_category	Input	Nominal	No		No	
Owner_of_architectural_component	Input	Nominal	No		No	
Origin_environment	Input	Nominal	No		No	
Value_of_tradit_gate_mm	Text	Nominal	No		No	

Figure 6. The defined variables in SAS Enterprise Miner

Role_of_rural_tourism is the Target Variable and essentially collects responses to the question 'Do you believe that rural tourism can help protect and preserve traditional Maramureş architecture?' (response options: Yes, No, I don't know).

Among the analysis tools available, including AutoNeural, Dmine Regression, DMNeural, Neural Network, Decision Tree, Partial Least Squares, Regression, Rule Induction, etc., we opted for Decision Tree. We created a diagram that provides us with decision trees at the end.

The generation of decision trees with SAS Enterprise Miner serves various purposes, with the most important being the identification of the importance of input variables within the generated decision tree (SAS Institute Inc, 2023). This can help in understanding the influence of variables on the outcomes and identifying the most significant characteristics.

Analyzing the decision trees, we observe that the input variables with significant influence on the final response to the objective question are (in order of importance):

- *Component_with_high_potential_for_tourism*, specifically the responses collected to the question "Which component of traditional Maramureş architecture do you believe can be capitalized on in rural tourism?"

- *Images of the traditional Maramureş house*, with response options to the question "Which of the following images is a traditional Maramureş house?"

- *Awareness of projects*, with data collected about the level of awareness regarding rural tourism projects promoting the protection and preservation of traditional Maramureş architecture.

- *Residence and Origin Environment* are variables that also significantly influence the target variable.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In the Maramureş region, rural tourism is a determining factor in rural development and the enhancement of community life quality. Our study focused on the perception of the younger generation regarding how rural tourism can contribute to the preservation of traditional Maramureş architecture.

Tourists' preference for locations dominated by traditional architectural elements is the primary factor that preserves Maramureş rural areas. Tourism necessitates the preservation of the cultural heritage built with traditional architecture and its continuation in new tourist-oriented constructions (accommodation and dining facilities). The rural population is aware that traditional architecture is the cornerstone of regional attractiveness. Therefore, we can assert that rural tourism compels the local population to maintain and perpetuate traditional architecture.

Analyzing the data obtained in this study, we have determined that it is very important for the younger generation to identify the architectural components that can be capitalized on in rural tourism.

We can also conclude that only traditional wooden churches are attributed value and tourism significance. Traditional gates and household architecture are often used primarily in rural accommodation facilities. The heritage of rural life, the church, and the house, have constantly undergone adaptations tailored to the needs of the rural community.

An essential role can be played by informing the younger generation about the benefits that rural tourism development projects could bring. The most important sources of information in this regard are held by higher education institutions in the analyzed territory.

The guidelines developed by OAR (Zaharie, 2009) and the model projects suggested by the Maramureş County Council (Consiliul Judeţean Maramureş, 2018) represent the starting point for architectural education for the young generation in Maramureş. These are catalogs with illustrated architectural plans aimed at restoring the local rural landscape by blending traditional architecture with modern-day comfort. In this way, the aim is to motivate the rural population to preserve elements of local and regional identity for sustainable rural tourism

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