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## **THESIS**

### **THE CULTURAL TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE TOWNS IN THE TRANSYLVANIAN DEPRESSION AND THE WAY IT IS PUT INTO VALUE**

**- ABSTRACT -**

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**Key-words:** *cultural tourism, The Transylvanian Depression, cultural heritage, attractive elements, urban space, palimpsest, multiculturalism, sustainable development.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sheltered by the rich arch of The Carpathians, The Transylvanian Depression is highlighted by the complexity of its defining elements. Our thesis, called "The Cultural Tourism Potential of the Towns in the Transylvanian Depression and the Way It Is Put into Value" approaches a fascinating geographical space, with multiple development opportunities.

The novelty of cultural spaces is the main element of attractiveness. The special charm of the Transylvanian space is given by the meeting and harmonious blending of three cultures: Romanian, German and Hungarian. This fact is reflected by the richness and variety of the cultural heritage and also by the cultural relations established in time.

The historical evolution of the Transylvanian Depression has been both complicated and difficult. However, today, in many respects (economic achievements, cultural concerns), it occupies the first place in Romania. Why? The answer is simple: although the wounds of history sometimes don't let us admit it, Transylvania wouldn't be itself without the imperial imprint. Along the Romanians there lived, worked and created for centuries Hungarians, Saxons, Armenians, Jewish. The question is: how can we now value our common heritage?

Each town in the Transylvanian Depression represents an open book, offering the reader numerous cultural-historical objectives, whether ancient (ruins of Dacian and Roman settlements), medieval (fortresses, fortified churches), modern or contemporary (palaces, cathedrals). Starting from this premise, we approached the towns of the depression, using both the traditional methods of research and the new perspectives in this scientific field. We also made a needed foray in adjacent fields, such as history, architecture, art, economy psychology. One can appreciate that many of the attractive objectives from the touristic point of view are in a relatively satisfactory state of preservation, but not properly placed into the light. Many measures can be taken in order to better exploit their resources. Fortunately, the importance of cultural tourism is increasing. A very good example is Sibiu, an interesting European cultural capital, or Sighisoara, with its impressing fortress.

If the role of tourism specialists is to open the doors of every geographical space to those who wish to pass its threshold, also avoiding its depersonalisation, the aim of our thesis is to take the urban space of the Transylvanian Depression beyond a former perception, to a deep understanding of the phenomenon of cultural tourism.

# I.

## CULTURAL TOURISM – THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Justified by the need of knowledge, cultural tourism has been since ancient times one of the most complex and yet relaxing ways of discovering the world, the human communities in their relation with nature and the peers and also in their profound relation with God. The side effects are beneficial, too: broadening one`s interior horizon, building the capacity to accept and cherish the others, finding life`s real purpose.

Keeping its privileged status from the past, cultural tourism has become one of the most important directions for sustainable development.

We started our approach by detailing the concepts of *culture* and *tourism*, interweaving them under the dome of what we call *cultural tourism*, continuing by synthesizing the national and international research studies of this field.

From our point of view, culture means spiritual growth. In the same time, cultural geography, in adressing different areas, takes into consideration not only the cultural-historical objectives, but also the lifestyle of the people and the ambience created by blending these two aspects. We must however underline that we will follow only what adds value and not *any* innovative human manifestation.

Today, while modern man gradually closes himself in a virtual world, culture loses its meaning. Accepting its degradation can determine the transformation of cultural tourism in a negative way, or even its disappearance as a phenomenon. That is why we must rethink our system of values, selecting and promoting only the elements that mean growth, becoming, spiritual elevation, through all the modes of expression of the human being.

Cultural geography studies human groups and societies in the most complex and noble forms of their existence and cultural tourism seeks the journey motivated by the desire to discover and understand, as their bond. Facilitating the communication between members of different nations and ethnic groups and mutual appreciation, it can stop the devastating effects of globalization, supporting the preservation of identity and cultural diversity.

Due to its morphological and functional complexity, the urban space has been addressed over time, from different perspectives. As far as we are concerned, we prefer the idea of palimpsest, for its truth and modernity.

Across Europe there have been developed a series of studies on the characteristics of cultural tourism in countries with a special tradition in this field. We note the appearance (in 1996) of a series of works conducted by Greg Richards<sup>1</sup> : "Cultural Tourism in France" -

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Richards (1996, ed.), *Cultural Tourism in Europe*, CABI, Wallingford.

Michel Bauer, "Cultural Tourism in Germany" - Peter Roth and Alfred Langemeyer, "Cultural Tourism in Greece" - Helene Kalogeropoulou, "Cultural Tourism in Ireland" - Gearoid O'Donnchadha and Brian O'Connor, "Cultural Tourism in Italy" - Jan van der Borg and Paolo Costa, "Cultural Tourism in Spain" - Concepción Maiztegui-Oñate and Maria Teresa Areitio Bertolín, "Cultural Tourism in the United Kingdom" - Malcolm Foley etc.

The Romanian School of Geography of Tourism has benefited from the involvement of many personalities. The current stage is marked by the contributions of P. Cocean, N. Ciangă, M. Olaru, Tamara Simon și Melinda Cîndea, Mihaela Dinu, I. Velcea, M. Ielenicz, C. Iațu, Al. Ilieș, N.Popa, Elena Matei, Ș. Dezsi, Angelica Pușcaș, L. Nicoară, Daniela Dumbrăveanu, Mirela Mazilu, A. Gheorghilaș ș.a.

The three principles that lay at the basis of our approach are the principles of spatiality, causality and integration. Of working methods, the direct geographical observation, assuming that the researcher must go to the site in order to pass the geographical facts through his own prism, gave us the opportunity to understand the Transylvanian space, also providing authenticity and value to the documents produced during the study and to the final conclusions. Then we used the geographical analysis and the synthesis. We also used the investigation and motivational research, trying repeatedly to get a clear picture of the preferences and behavior of those involved in the phenomenon of cultural tourism (the results are expressed, where we considered necessary, by numbers and graphics).

In terms of means of study, we used the geographical description (required to meet the rigors of science and aesthetics, to give the true value of the depicted phenomena, facts and objectives), the explanation (linking the cause and its effect, in correlation with the principle of causality, essential in any subfield of geography, including the cultural tourism) and hierarchy (organizing the successive steps of geographic information, from simple to complex, in pyramidal structures - this has proven especially useful in identifying the polarizing centers of the tourism phenomenon).

## **II.**

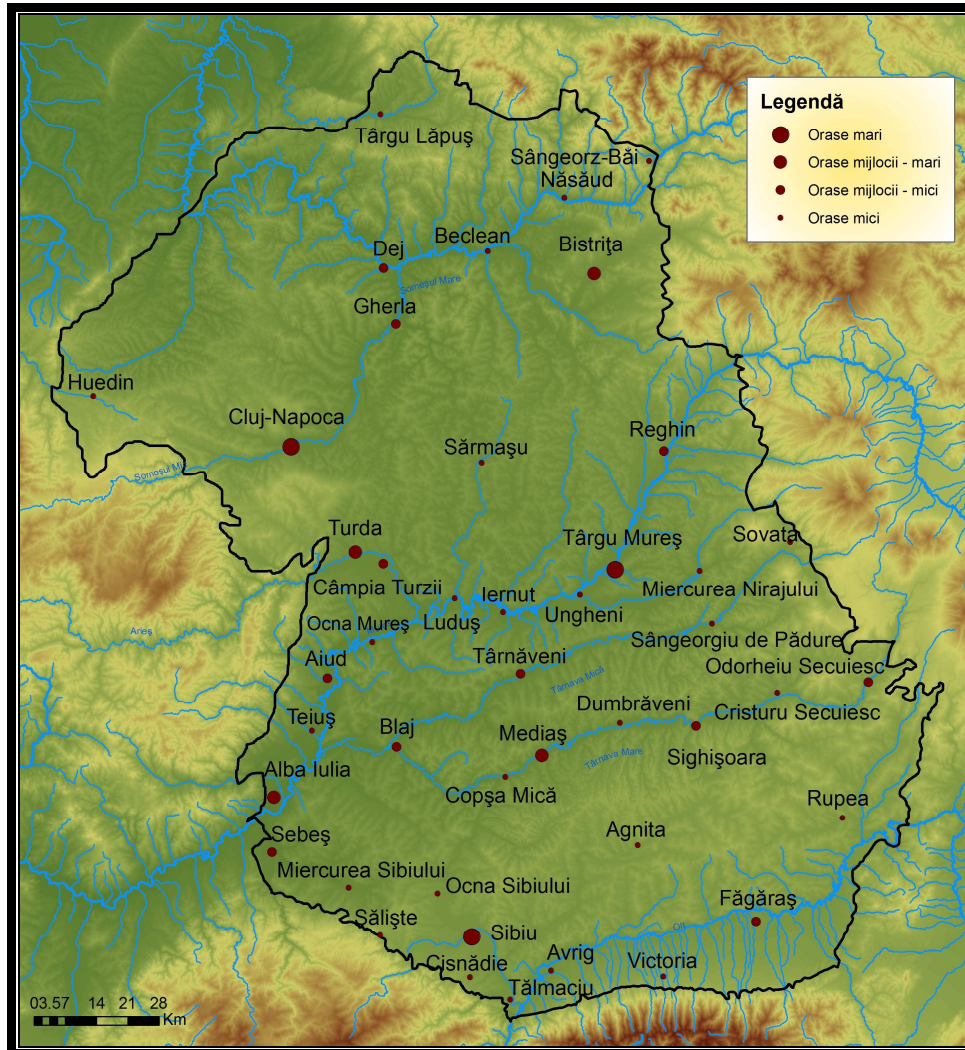
### **THE TRANSYLVANIAN DEPRESSION, A UNITARY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA.**

#### **NATURAL AND SOCIAL-HISTORICAL PREMISES**

The Transylvanian Depression, the geographical area on which we focused, is distinguished by the favourable character of all components of the natural environment. Protected by the Carpathian Mountains, the Transylvanian Depression is the core of the Romanian landscape. This allowed and supported the individualization of a large network of settlements.



Transylvania was also noted over time for the constancy of its population, becoming the nucleus of civilization in the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontical space. Determined by a difficult historical evolution, at the contact between the Latin and the Slavic world, between the Eastern and Western culture, the multiculturalism of the Transylvanian Depression is another great advantage, in terms of tourism.



**Fig. 1.** The Transylvanian Depression  
- the physical-geographical framework and the towns-

The towns of the Depression bear the imprint of foreign domination. Details of it are found everywhere, both in the visible domain, in architecture and urban structure and also in the social, cultural, political or economic field. The minorities are generally the subject of a process of assimilation by the ethnic majority, but the most frequent situation is that of a cultural mosaic, where different groups meet and collaborate, without sacrificing the distinctive details, essential in terms of identity. History has brought about the Romanian, Hungarian, Saxon, Székely, Armenian and Hebrew, to build together, literally and figuratively, the Transylvanian Depression, as we know it today.

### III.

## THE CULTURAL TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE TOWNS

Buildt in a multicultural space, the towns of the Transylvanian Depression have a rich tourism potential. Putting it into value primarily means a good knowledge of its component elements. In Chapter III, we referred in turn to the influence of the geographical space and historical evolution upon the development of the urban settlements, to the structure of the cultural heritage, and to the role of events and personalities in promoting culture and increasing the touristic attractiveness of the studied towns.

The urban cultural tourism potential includes on one hand the objectives of the immobile cultural heritage, both laic and religious, and also archaeological, historical-documentary, artistic, ethnographic, scientific and technical goods, that make up the mobile cultural heritage. Present in all of the towns of Transylvania, they are very numerous, but poorly put into value, despite their importance.

**Tabelul 1.** The Immobile Cultural Heritage

<b>Historical era</b>	<b>Laic objectives</b>	<b>Religious objectives</b>
<b>Antiquity</b>	- archaeological vestiges ( ruins of the old Dacian settlements, Roman camps and fortresses)	- archaeological vestiges (ruins of pre-Christian temples and ruins of the first churches)
<b>Middle Age</b>	-fortresses -urban architectural complexes	-medieval churches
<b>Modern Era</b>	-buildings of various institutions -monuments -memorial houses	-churches belonging to different Christian denominations -synagogues

From a synthetic perspective, the towns of the depression belong to three basic generations. Thus we can identify ancient settlements, such as Napoca (Cluj-Napoca), Apulum (Alba Iulia) and Potaiissa (Turda), medieval towns (Sibiu, Bistrița, Mediaș, Sighișoara, Târgu Mureș, Făgăraș, Dej, Sebeș) and modern towns (Ocna Mureș, Victoria, Târnăveni etc.). The Antiquity is characterized by the development of an extensive urban network, whose centers are placed along the major roads. In the Middle Ages, the increasing interest for crafts and trade, brings a new stage of development in which appear and are consolidated firstly the fairs and then, after the invasions, the fortresses.

The towns evolve both in terms of architecture, but also of facilities for daily life. The Modern era, in the spectrum of the industrial revolution, brings new urban centers on the map of the Transylvanian Depression (their structure is substantially changed). Now, the accelerated development of the technology imposes the rapid and sometimes forced transformation of the original urban framework.



**Fig. 2.** The map of the laic cultural objectives of the towns in the Transylvanian Depression

Returning to the importance of understanding the urban palimpsest, we add the idea of continuously rediscovering our towns and cities. The charm of each town lies in the attributes of the natural environment, in the historical past, in architecture, in the treasures of art and science protected by the museums, but also in the legends and stories, in the beliefs, the occupations and the way of being of its residents.



**Fig. 3.** The map of the religious cultural objectives of the towns in the Transylvanian Depression

Often called „fortresses of culture”, the towns of the Transylvanian Depression offer their public a wide range of cultural events, suitable to all ages and aspectations, throughout the year.

Although essentially marked by an extensive array of personalities from all the fields of art and science, but also of the ecclesial space, the towns lean too little on their life and their work, a worrying fact, including from a tourist perspective. Why do we say this? Because ignoring these valuable details destroys the importance of the objectives. Their belonging to a certain historical stage or to a special current of architecture is only one side of their accepted value. The context in which they were created and the personality of those who in one way or another have linked their destiny to that of the objectives are also worthy

of consideration. Born in the rural space of the depression, many personalities have strengthened and perfected their knowledge and passions in its towns.

So here is a happy meeting between the profound world of the Romanian village, sincerely and inextricably linked to God and the refined, rational world of the city, always in search of novelty. Outlining the true value depended on the ability to precisely balance the essential and the newly acquired values, and its recognition at national and European level was determined by opposite political, social and economic factors.

In concluding this chapter, we intended to achieve a synthesis of the elements which give attractiveness to the urban space of the Transylvanian Depression. Our conclusions are based on both bibliographic and field research, as well as a brief survey conducted among the Romanian and foreign tourists encounter over the last four years.

The bibliographical research showed the existence of many cultural sights, concentrated mainly in three major centers of depression, but present in all of the other towns. Different authors that have approached the patrimony of the Transylvanian towns brought to light their undeniable value.

The field research has indicated, however, the incomplete and sometimes inaccurate character of the bibliographic data, partially explained by the difficulty of updating them. There is a need for an unified action to collect and verify the data and to develop comprehensive studies, adapted to the requirements of both tourists and researchers. On the other hand, the status of the objectives of the national heritage is of concern, both for lack of financial resources and the lack of interest of the local communities.

The ideas formulated by the tourists themselves have stressed the following aspects:

- ✓ in every town there is at least one objective that is worth being discovered;
- ✓ many objectives are poorly put into value and only seldom do we refer to the personalities that influenced the existence and evolution of the towns;
- ✓ small towns are not put into value from the point of view of cultural tourism;
- ✓ the most attractive centers remain Sibiu, Sighișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Alba-Iulia, Târgu Mureș, Bistrița, Sebeș și Mediaș;

Placing into the light the cultural heritage of the towns in the Transylvanian Depression is, in our view, a complex and dynamic process, in which are called to take part the people and the local authorities. Financial problems often can be resolved with simple and effective solutions. It is essential to find a unitary vision on tourism development, which would allow the removal of the current gaps.

## IV. THE TOURISTIC INFRASTRUCTURE OF TOWNS

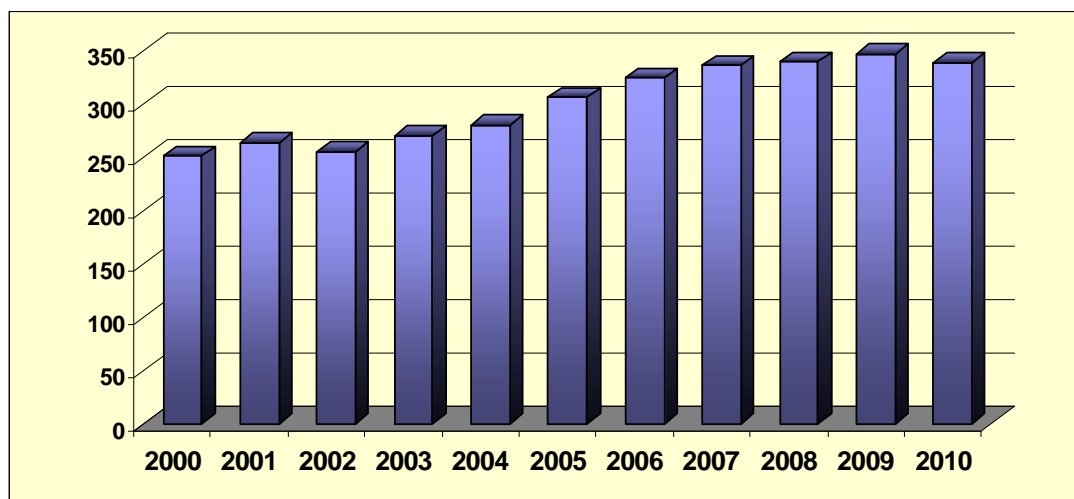
Chapter IV is meant to reflect the importance of the connection between the cultural tourism potential and the development of the infrastructure that supports its exploitation. We presented the current state of the infrastructure of accommodation, alimentation and communication, and their evolution over time.

According to the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the towns in the Transylvanian Depression currently have a wide network of accommodation units, (hotels and guesthouses, in the first place, followed by tourist villas, motels, inns, hostels and rarely, camping places). The last emerging forms of accommodation are apartments for rent.

We also note that: on one hand, the great majority of towns in the Transylvanian Depression (25 cities) fall into the category of a small number of units (1-5); on the other hand, the existence of a large number of objectives in some urban centers determines the focus and the development of accommodation inside their limits and close to them.

**Tabelul 2.** The evolution of the total number of accomodation units in the urban space of the Transylvanian Depression, between 2000-2010 (Data source: INS)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Accomodation units	251	263	255	270	280	306	324	336	339	347	338

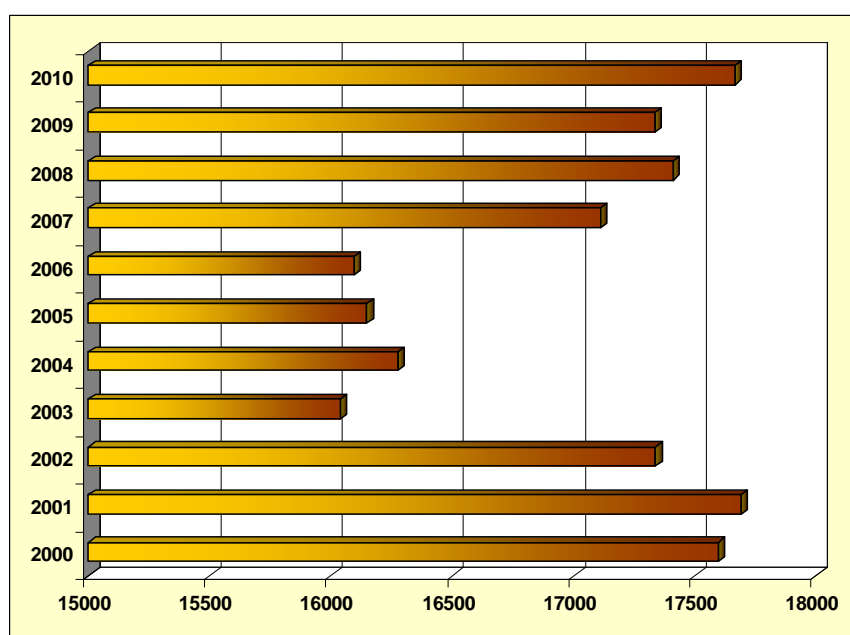


**Fig. 4.** The evolution of the total number of accomodation units in the urban space of the Transylvanian Depression, between 2000-2010 (Data source: INS)

It is interesting to see that in the same time segment, the total number of places provided by the towns in the Transylvanian Depression varied differently.

**Tabelul 3 .** The evolution of the total number of accomodation places in the urban space of the Transylvanian Depression, between 2000-2010 (Data source: INS)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Accomodation capacity (nr. of places)	17598	17692	17338	16039	16274	16147	16095	17109	17410	17335	17664



**Fig. 5.** The evolution of the total number of accomodation places in the urban space of the Transylvanian Depression, between 2000-2010 (Data source: INS)

However, although the number of units and the accommodation places follows a positive trend of development, the financial crisis of the last years caused a gradual decrease in the number of overnight stays. Hence, the accommodation managers must fight to retain customers and attract new ones by offering quality services at decent prices.

Regarding the infrastructure of alimentation, the towns of the depression use, according to the data provided in 2011 by the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, a total of 797 units (of which 271 one star units, 255 two stars units, 194 three stars units, 64 four star units and 13 five star units), with a total number of 63,350 seats.

Rail and road networks have a relatively high density and there is a general concern for improving them, with visible benefits. The Transylvanian Depression is crossed by three main railway lines (M2, in the south, along the Făgăraș and Sibiu depressions, M3, which crosses the plateau diagonally, in the SE-NW direction, M4 in the north of the corridor of Someșul Mare) and three of the most important European roads: E60, E81, E68, to which we

add the recent highway, which is currently under construction, designed as the main axis of movement of the depression in the future. The three airports of the depression (Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu and Târgu-Mureş) allow the inhabitants to travel at a national and international level and give the foreign tourists an easier way of acces to its towns. Regarding the special forms of transport, they are provided by a complex network of pipelines, aqueducts and power lines.



**Fig. 6.** The Transylvanian Depression: The Infrastructure of Transportation



## **V.**

### **TOURISTIC CIRCULATION**

The touristic circulation in the studied area has a number of distinct features, such as a long evolution, directed mainly by economic and social factors, a relative stability of internal circulation and an intense dynamics of international tourism demand, a less intense manifestation of the seasonality of the tourism phenomenon, due to the continuous attractiveness of the cultural heritage.

Tourist flows are oriented mainly to the cities, without bypassing the smaller centers, except the industrial ones. Amazingly, although the number of units of accommodation and the accommodation capacity values are constantly increasing, many towns in the depression warn us about the decrease of the number of tourists who choose to spend their time inside them, demanding greater involvement in the promoting of the touristic potential.

## **VI.**

### **PROMOTING THE CULTURAL TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE TOWNS**

The promotion of the cultural potential, born from the general concern to attract tourists, both nationally and internationally, has gone through some notable changes in the recent years by increasing the number of channels of information dissemination and by multiplying the means used in this process. Advertisements are also more numerous and with a better image quality.

The sustainable development of the towns, seen in terms of tourism, requires further research, adding a careful study of marketing and redefining cultural publicity. Essential during this step is the capacity to see the city as a whole. Only then can we create quality brands, which correspond to reality and are more than a facade. Outlining the details is important precisely because it ennobles the whole, simultaneously offering specificity, without approaching the component parts separately.

The traditional media for travel information has been supplemented in recent years by tackling a new means of communicating with multiple valances: the Internet. It offers several advantages and considerably expands the area of coverage of the invitations to travel. Tourist sites are available anytime, almost anywhere and can be accessed by anyone. The information can be very complex without paying anything more. Another important advantage is the possibility to update the information, whenever this is needed, to maintain a real, correct image of the destination.

The Internet is one of the simplest means of getting tourist information, but in the towns of the Transylvanian Depression, it is rarely used at its full potential. Regarding the creation of an accessible database to all actors involved in the tourism phenomenon, and also of specialized sites, the situation is worryingly delayed for lack of funds or lack of interest. The objectives, the accommodation units, the ways and means of transport are presented in a chaotic manner (with a few fortunate exceptions). The data provided by various sources are sometimes very different, which makes the search meaningless and easy to abandon.

Currently, the most successful sites belong to the cities of Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca and Alba-Iulia. The provided information is complex, but attractively organized and very accessible. Cultural tourism is taken seriously, giving it the importance it deserves. So there are, fortunately, several models that can be followed.

## **VII.**

### **THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL TOURISM ON TOURIST DEMAND AND DESTINATION AREAS**

Regarding the impact of cultural tourism on tourist demand and tourist destination areas (in the second case we stopped on the changes appeared in the built environment and on the economic and social level) there can be highlighted a number of positive and negative effects.

#### **A. The positive effects of cultural tourism:**

- Boosting the cultural life of urban centers;
- Expanding the cultural horizons of residents and tourists;
- Increasing ones self-respect;
- The acceptance and appreciation of the values of other people;
- The economic growth of the towns involved;
- Increasing the social cohesion in the city;
- Creating a unitary image of the city;
- Promoting the image of the city at a national and international level;
- The improvement of communication networks;
- The protection and preservation of the historic centers of the towns.

#### **B. The negative effects of cultural tourism:**

- Loosing the personality of the destination area, by excessive adaptation;
- The artificial increase in prices;
- Creating a false, exaggerated or wrong image of the town/city;
- Promoting a false image.

**VIII.**  
**DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES.**  
**CURRENT PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE ANSWERS**

We stopped in this last chapter on the role of development strategies in the context of the characteristic features of the Romanian tourism, then making a brief SWOT analysis of the studied geographical area.

Proving its usefulness by the concise and accurate rendering of the reality, the SWOT analysis allows us to understand the parts of the geographic systems and the relations that arise between them, leading to different evolutionary trajectories. It is used in many scientific fields dealing with the urban space, especially in economics. Development strategies are also built on the SWOT analysis of the addressed areas. It provides, in other words, a resume of the current situation and a brief scenario for the future.

In our case, this tool has helped us to identify the positive and negative elements of the towns in the Transylvanian Depression, under the dome of cultural tourism and emphasized the steps to be followed and the situations of threshold of their subsequent development.

**The S.W.O.T. analysis of the towns in the Transylvanian Depression**

<b><u>STRONG POINTS:</u></b>	<b><u>WEAKNESSES:</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the existence of a strong network of urban settlements;</li><li>- the remarkable value of the cultural heritage (movable and immovable);<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the large number of secular/laic and religious cultural objectives;</li></ul></li><li>- the cultural diversity and the frequency of cultural events;</li><li>- the existence of prestigious cultural institutions;</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the advanced stage of degradation of many objectives</li><li>- the limited cooperation between cultural institutions and travel agencies<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the lack of projects to ensure the transfer of experience between the cultural and administrative institutions of the towns of the depression</li></ul></li><li>- the lack of actions to promote tourism in the small towns;</li></ul>

<b><u>OPPORTUNITIES:</u></b>	<b><u>THREATS:</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the intensification of the activities to promote the cultural tourism potential;</li> <li>- turning into account the multicultural character of the urban space;</li> <li>- improving the perception of the towns in the eyes of the population;</li> <li>- increasing the involvement of young people in the cultural life of their cities;</li> <li>- creating an attractive cultural image of the towns/cities;</li> <li>- increasing the cultural exchanges between twin cities;</li> <li>- multiplying tourist information centers;</li> <li>- improving the accommodation and communication infrastructure;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the rapidly rising phenomena of subculture;</li> <li>- the decreasing interest in cultural events of the population;</li> <li>- the overcrowded large urban centers;</li> <li>- the decreasing number of population of the small towns;</li> <li>- a progressive degradation of the built environment in towns without economic power;</li> <li>- the loss of cultural identity in the growing process of globalization;</li> <li>- the migration of young intellectuals;</li> </ul>

### **SPECIFIC FORMS OF CULTURAL TOURISM**

- **Ethnographic tourism**

Although normally associated with rural ethnographic tourism, due to its ability to exploit the traditional heritage, it is still an important form of expression of interest in culture, inside the limits of the towns. They preserve and highlight the cultural heritage of the majority population, and of the ethnic minorities through ethnographic museums.

Organized in the center of the towns or sheltered by the forest, the ethnographic museums give us the chance to meet with our spiritual roots, resting our eyes on countless homes and traditional households, objects (furniture, tools, ritual and household objects, decorative objects and jewelry, clothing items), or ingenious installations around them, very interesting from a scientific, technical point of view.

The outdoor sections of the ethnographic museums revive a world of simplicity and humility, reconstructing the traditional village, around the churches, wooden items of invaluable heritage, preserving our sense of being. Visiting them is absolutely necessary for understanding a multicultural space, like that of Transylvania. In a world where,

unfortunately, globalization often means loss of identity, the ethnographic tourism plays a key role in its recrystallization.

#### ▪ **Religious tourism**

As the oldest form of cultural tourism, religious tourism is practiced by most people for two reasons: on one hand it is a joyfull manifestation of their faith, on the other hand it shows the desire to discover new religious objectives with aesthetic value and historical importance. It should be noted that religious objectives have a relatively unique status in the framework of the cultural heritage.

Secular/laic objectives are subjected to their belonging to different historical stages and affirm their value in reference to them. In contrast, religious objectives go beyond the narrow historical marker and step into another dimension in which the value is conferred not by their age, but by the role they play.

Religious sights are emblematic of the urban landscape of the Transylvanian Depression.

Typologically they include:

- Cathedrals ( Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, Greec-Catholic);
- Churches;
- Synagogues.

A separate category of religious objectives are the orthodox hermitages and monasteries located inside the administrative limits of the towns or in their immediate proximity. They are preserving the ancient faith of the people, and are also centers of spirituality and culture in a world increasingly subjected to superficiality and materialism.

Today, many towns of the Transylvanian Depression are guarded by monasteries and hermitages:

- Aiud: "The Ascension of the Holy Cross" – "Râpa Robilor" Hermitage;
- Alba-Iulia : "Saint Joan The Baptist" Monastery, "Saint Lazarus" Hermitage;
- Cluj-Napoca: "Holy Trinity" Monastery – Feleacu, "The Covering Of Vergin Mary" Monastery – Florești;
- Gherla: "The Assumption of the Mother of God" Monastery – Nicula;
- Năsăud: "The Spring of Healing" Monastery - Salva;
- Săliște: "Holy Trinity" Monastery – Orlat, "Holy Trinity" Hermitage – Sibiel;
- Sângeorz-Băi: "The Annunciation" Monastery - Cormaia;
- Sighișoara: "Saint Martyr Dimitrie" Monastery;
- Ungheni și Târgu Mureș: "The Birth of the Holy Vergin" Monastery– Recea;
- Turda: "The Archangels Michael and Gabriel" Monastery – Mihai Vodă;

On the mountainous frame of the basin there are also two famous centers of Orthodox spirituality: The Monastery of "The Assumption of the Holy Vergin" - Râmeț (25 km from Teius), related to the Saint Hierarch Ghelasie, The Monastery of "The Assumption of the Holy Vergin" - Brâncoveanu – Sâmbăta de Sus, related to the outstanding personality of Father Arsenie Boca called by those who knew him "The Saint of Transylvania" (about 30 km from Făgăraș).

Târnavelor Plateau has in turn a fabulous cultural heritage: the Saxon fortified churches (over 100 objectives, such as: Biertan, Viilor Valley, Câlnic, Apold, Iacobenii, Agnita Cîsnădie, Bazna). Specific to the Transylvanian Depression, hidden among the gentle hills, placed at the end of winding roads, they impress by grandeur and austerity, fascinating tourists from everywhere. Prince Charles of Great Britain openly expresses his commitment to these unique objectives every time he mentions Transylvania.

It is sad that the foreigners seem to love our country more than its inhabitants, as many targets were saved from destruction by associations from different European countries, while the Romanian authorities shrugged their shoulders helplessly, and people find different uses for the building stones from the fortresses in their own households, deliberately forgetting the identity role that they play.

- **Educational tourism**

Educational tourism is specific to academic centers of tradition, where young people come to study for different periods of time, through grants, trying to decrypt the temporary living space in what is has authentic and more valuable.

Inside the Transylvanian Depression, Cluj-Napoca, sheltering an old and well-known university is the proper place to conduct this type of tourism. Within weeks, tourists can discover the most important and most unexpected targets in and near the city, feel the atmosphere by attending cultural events and meet personalities. The effect will be an inborn desire to return.

- **Cultural events-related tourism**

Attractive cultural events include artistic events (theater performances, concerts, festivals, exhibitions) and scientific (congresses, conferences), both national and international. They attract a well-trained audience, eager to live special cultural experiences and to explore in the same time the city where they take place.

Through the prism of this type of tourism, in the Transylvanian Depression, the richest offer is found in Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu (we consider primarily the international festivals: TIFF, Sibiu Jazz Festival, The International Theatre Festival in Sibiu etc.).

- **Gourmet travel**

Born from the simple human need to feed, the cuisine has evolved over time, to the indisputably stage of art. In connection with the idea of hospitality, the culinary art becomes a foray into the culture of the people to whom it belongs, and also of the visited region or town.

If we consider the vast network of alimentation units, from simple self-service, to the finest restaurants, the towns in the Transylvanian Depression offer an unforgettable experience. Traditional dishes belonging to the Romanian, Hungarian and German cuisine are an unsuspected confirmation of the multicultural character of this space.

Knowing the preference of tourists for specific products, efforts are made to improve and promote the offer, many of them successful. Special occasions to understand the local cuisine are given to tourists through festivals (e.g.: " The Honey Festival" in Blaj, held annually around the date of the Annunciation – on March, the 25th).

Under the dome of gourmet travel we also find special forms like wine tasting and traditional visits to vineyards and villages in their vicinity. Although the "Wine Road" has been traced in the Transylvanian Depression and presented attractively, there are many aspects of organization and quality that need to be perfected.

- **Visiting tourism**

The trips made to visit museums, memorial houses, libraries and traveling to meet certain personalities are included in the sphere of this type of tourism. The existence of numerous art museums, history, pharmacy, hunting museums etc. some of which are of national importance, provide the motivational support of pursuing this branch of cultural tourism. We remark the cities of Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu, followed by Alba-Iulia and Târgu Mureş.

- **Transit tourism**

Transit tourism means making several stops along the road toward a final goal (destination), with the role of discovering the most important elements of cultural heritage in a particular country or region. It can be practiced mostly by tourists traveling by car (personal or rented car, bus, minibus), which offer greater freedom and mobility.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the context described above, taking into account the cultural tourism potential of the towns in the Transylvanian Depression, should be based on a thorough knowledge of the realities of geographical space, the environmental and human characteristics, the advantages that each town/city has. The construction and application of development strategies require the involvement in this process of teams of specialists from all fields of research and the active involvement of the authorities and local communities.

Among the imperatives of the moment, we find the need for:

- defining and articulating a unitary vision of urban centers, no matter their size
- creating an image and a special identity for each town;
- creating stable structures to ensure efficient and correct management of European funds;
- developing investments in areas where there is local tradition, and identify new ones;
- creating and applying economic and social cohesion programs;
- identifying the sources of innovation specific to each geographical area;
- increasing the initiative of all those involved in this field;
- creating flexible political and administrative structures;
- improving the communication between cultural institutions.

Another aspect which we consider essential is the following: the academic environment, favourable for building and strengthening a vast culture supports the extending of one's intellectual horizon through culture. Traditional university towns allow the blending of various professional and personal interests. The involvement of students in the cultural life takes place today at a medium level. It is thus necessary to create a more dynamic spectrum of activities, and to train young people in creating, sustaining and promoting cultural events.

In conclusion, in our opinion, the priorities of the sustainable development of the cultural tourism in the towns of the Transylvanian Depression include the articulation of an unitary system of values, turning into account the adjacent rural areas, the rehabilitation of historic centers, finding new ways of "recycling" the industrial ruins, solving environmental and traffic problems, creating a complete, accurate and accessible database of information on cultural tourism potential, highlighting the attractive elements of the urban space, creating and developing new thematic tours.

*If we should associate only one expressive word to cultural tourism, we would choose "ennoblement". That is why, the sustainable development of urban cultural tourism binds us to be creative, persistent and, above all, responsible.*



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