

## **HABILITATION THESIS**

### ***Applied geography concepts transferred towards tourist destinations: the experience and discourse of Maramureș***

**Candidate:** Associate Professor Dr. **ILIEȘ Gabriela**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis aims to analyze the main trends that have influenced the directions of applied research in the field of geography, at the microscale level, with real potential for transfer toward the community and the economic environment, especially in the tourism and community resilience sectors.

Internationally, applied geography studies have at least five directions: mobility, human-nature interaction, location/resource allocation, geographic profiling, and regional problematization. They all have an important spatial component, involving either exhaustive field research with community activation or large dataset analyses and reports. Thus, we have developed implementable ideas, demonstrating the functionality of theoretical principles and ways of using new technologies in tourism geography.

In addition to the main themes of applied geography, I also touched on a series of micro-scale topics, as part of the micro-geography sphere. In the post-pandemic context, the need to analyze the space around us more carefully became intuitive, and attention to local characteristics and resources is already part of resilience thinking. Therefore, my work focused on the geographical concepts applicable in the real environment, research projects were integrated with projects for the Maramureș community, most of them having relevance in a wider national and international context.

Maramureș has always been a fascinating territory for researchers from all scientific fields. In this context, my thesis represents a detailed analysis of the development trends of geographical-integrated and tourism-specialty concepts that touch the region.

The nature of the disciplines I teach in the programs of *Tourism Geography (undergraduate level)*, *Tourism and Spatial Planning*, and *Tourism Planning and Development (master's level)* has guided my scientific interests, helped clarify and develop concepts, methodologies, or research tools for students, Maramureș being a suitable space for their explanation and application:

- Maramures Land; Analysis of land-type geographical regions in Europe
- Traditional Romanian village – regional identity, tourist exploitation, development strategies, protection of traditional rural landscape, community resilience
- Mountain areas – tourist cartography, thematic cartography, territorial analysis, rural and mountain space analysis, infographics
- Innovation and creativity in tourism geography – trend exploration and experimental research.

The main body of this work is structured in two chapters: (1) Integrated geographical analysis of tourist destinations and (2) Geography of Maramureș - regional discourse, specificities, and identity tourist destinations. To illustrate in more detail the original elements of the studies, I have compiled excerpts from the main references, by chapter, in the form of annexes.

The emphasis is on: ***modeling for eco-destinations, efficient visualization and specialized analysis methods, heritage digitization, Maramures Land from a geographical perspective, tourism discourse and brand, traditional village and identity tourist destinations, and the positioning of destinations in a cross-border context.*** In this respect, the array of published research comprises the following:

- studies on the state of conservation of traditional architecture in the context of tourism development strategies in rural Maramures, in eco-destinations
- tourism prospecting studies on valorization mechanisms and conservation of cultural heritage (memorial houses, museums, vernacular architecture, traditional occupations, gastronomy)
- microgeographic studies useful in strategic planning, within the studies for the development of the county territory
- tourist cartography publications (atlases, maps, models, etc.) in the tourism activity of operators and substantiating decisions at the level of local authorities, OMD Maramures, GAL Mara-Gutâi
- studies in the field of tourist guiding transferred to traditional partners - Museum of Maramures and the Memorial Museum of Victims of Communism and Resistance, Bârsana Tourist Information Center, CNPIT Sighetu Marmăției

Future doctoral theses will address important contemporary problems as contributions to the progress of science within the following topics:

- The spatial dimension of the phenomena studied through place awareness mechanisms - the relationship between the attributes of a place for geographical profiling (place awareness, place brand, tourism brand and place image)
- The global dimension of processes, the current situation, and the causes that led to the current state of affairs, detection of interdependencies and analysis of global trends – innovative types and forms of tourism, emerging destinations, safety and security, digital nomadism, freedom of movement
- Big data and tourism – methods of producing and analyzing data sets to be correlated with the geographical characteristics of places to be truly relevant
- Navigation mechanisms – spatial orientation, choosing appropriate routes (in the field of wayfinding) through field tourist signage and mobile applications
- Smart tourism concepts in an increasingly smart world - user experience, new spatial orientation mechanisms, selection of nearby services, the role of ratings, and the algorithms involved
- Green tourism concepts in an increasingly (un)green world - the implementation stage of green practices in tourism, SDGs, resilience, and carrying capacity indices
- Contextualization of informative content - analysis of concepts and terms used, ways to optimize/alter the perception of natural phenomena
- Cultural contextualization – adapting to the various specificities for intercultural products (such as tourist guides, ranking the importance of points of interest, inconsistencies related to the quality of services) and cross-border issues.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gabriela ILIES,