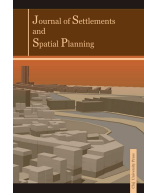




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Tourism Development in a Rural Periphery. Case Study: the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia

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ABSTRACT

Rural areas are considered to be in a peripheral position relative to the urban centres. Dichotomies such as centre-periphery or urban-rural exist because rural areas have always been thought of as less developed, innovative, attractive, densely populated, accessible, etc. than the urban areas. In this study periphery is analysed in terms of distance from the centre, dependence, distinctiveness and discourse according to the view of the European Commission. The traditional approach of periphery associated with the distance from a central place in relation with markets, communication, access to information and services provided and, consequently, the idea of dependence of the rural space is altered due to tourism. Thus, tourism changes the relationships between centres and peripheries. Remoteness, naturalness, culture authenticity, vernacular architecture and gastronomy have become the distinctiveness sought by tourists. In tourism discourse periphery appears as an opportunity to be discovered and used accordingly. The growing demand for distinctiveness can represent a development opportunity for our study area, the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia, a peripheral region both geographically and economically. Based on an empirical research, this paper aims at determining the place of tourism in the sustainable development strategy of the Su-Carpathians of Oltenia. The evaluation of the tourism potential of the area as well as the calculation of its human development index allowed us to reach the conclusion that tourism can generate development in our study area but it should be used as an activity to support the already existing traditional activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The economic view of the spatial organization of centres and peripheries dominates the theories and models applied to urban – rural realities. Politics have followed the same line and divided the world into central developed places, lagging peripheries and semi-peripheral places, which are in-between.

We will argue that *tourism*, the new social, economic and political trend that emerged during the 19th century and became a widespread phenomenon during the 20th century, changes to some extent the already established hierarchy. Rural areas are often defined and characterised in opposition to the urban

space, especially from the perspective of power relations established between the centres that control and exploit the peripheries or from the point of view of push-pull factors. Urban spaces are considered to be attractive because they offer diversified employment possibilities, they host companies' headquarters, government institutions, cultural events, have a good educational system, financial power and they are well connected with other national and international centres. In contrast, rural spaces are sparsely populated and considered to be the supply areas for the urban centres in terms of work force and raw materials. As a general rule, urban centres polarize the rural areas situated in their vicinity. The bigger and more important the urban

centre is, the larger its influence radius over the surrounding space is. Moreover, the expansion of the urban centres seizes lands which belong to the rural space, both from an administrative and functional point of view.

However, the relationships between central urban places and rural peripheral areas are much more complex and nuanced. The core-periphery model generalizes a diversity of space types. Only the rural space is in fact declined in so many categories which skip the general model, that it is sometimes improper to apply such restrictive models to such a diverse reality. Four basic type situations of the rural areas can be identified in the scientific literature: (i) rural areas with poor access and poor physical resources, (ii) rural areas with a specialized economic base, (iii) rural areas with a diversified economic base and (iv) rural areas located near urban agglomerations of significant size [1]. They correspond to the distant, isolated periphery (i), to the semi-periphery (ii and iii) and to the integrated periphery (iv).

Tourism has proved its capacity to animate and help develop places which may seem unlikely attractive like the peripheral rural areas. Indeed we believe that tourism can change polarities, distance, peripheral areas becoming thus appealing, and highly frequented central places within the tourism system.

Based on the capacity of tourism to generate development in peripheral rural areas, this article explores the possibilities for tourism development of the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia, a predominantly rural, natural region in Romania, situated away from the major polarizing cities. We shall first explore the meanings of the word 'periphery', the existing types of peripheral areas, the models that involve peripheral areas and the dimensions of the periphery in the scientific literature as well as in official documents. Secondly we shall concentrate on the analysis of the periphery in terms of indicators in our area of study and finally, on the potential of tourism development in the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia.

2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Conceptual framework

This study pays particular attention to the evolution of the concept of periphery, as well as to the relationships established between centres and peripheries, but also between different peripheries. The economic, political, geographical and lexical meanings of the word 'periphery' intermingle interestingly and open stimulating research leads. We shall focus on the design of a multidimensional approach of the periphery in order to analyze the connections established between our research topics: periphery and tourism development.

2.1.1. Definition of periphery

The lexical meaning of periphery is *the outer limit or edge of an area or object; a marginal, secondary position; of little interest to the majority* [2].

The French geographer Roger Brunet (1993) defines the periphery as *an external part of a space, or a space considered to be under the dominance of a centre* [3, p.379]. This definition shows a distinction between the geographic meaning of the word, which is connected with the spatial, geographic reality and the economic meaning, which leads to the political and economic division of the world. Nowadays, the geographic meaning has lost its importance because even geographers use the term periphery with the economic meaning, referring to a relation of dominance and exploitation of the periphery by a centre whose location site rarely corresponds to a geographic-mathematic centrality. Rural areas are associated, even identified with the periphery because they are usually described as agricultural, remote or isolated, lagging, dependent upon the city, confronted with migrations and demographic aging. Thus, this traditional approach stigmatised rural areas and distorted the image of the periphery. *A peripheral area, then, is one that suffers from geographical isolation, being distant from core spheres of activity, with poor access to and from markets. It also suffers from economic marginalisation, caused either by a lack of resources, by a decline in traditional industries or agriculture, or by a lack of know-how and training in areas such as marketing and innovation* [4, p. 8].

2.1.2. Theoretical models

The theoretical models developed on the relationship centre-periphery are the core-periphery model, the dependency theory and the world system analysis.

The *core-periphery model* developed by Friedmann (1966) is a model of uneven development in the geography of human activity, based on uneven distribution of power within and between societies [5]. Cores and peripheries can be analysed on a variety of geographic scales, including uneven regional development within national economies and uneven development at a global scale.

The *dependency theory* developed by Frank (1967) tries to explain the underdevelopment of countries, usually situated in the southern hemisphere as a consequence of their relationships with the countries of the northern hemisphere [6]. The northern imperial powers perpetuate forms of economic, political and cultural dependence in the southern states.

The *world system analysis* developed by Wallerstein (1979) focuses on markets and exchange [7]. The world is seen as an economic system with

multiple political centres and multiple cultures. The *core* is the developed, industrialized part of the world, and the *periphery* is the underdeveloped, typically raw materials-exporting, the poor part of the world. The *market* is the means by which the *core* exploits and controls the *periphery*.

2.1.3. Types of periphery

The models presented suggest the existence of several types of peripheries according to the scale of analysis, the model, and the activity taken into consideration: semi-peripheries, integrated peripheries, blind-spots, isolates, artificial peripheries, pleasure peripheries and urban peripheries.

Semi-peripheries represent partly developed regions or countries. These societies have remained dependent upon the centre, and to some extent underdeveloped, especially from the human development point of view, despite having achieved significant levels of industrialization and growth [8].

Integrated peripheries are very close to a centre, being in constant interaction with the centre and therefore very dynamic. On the other hand, *blind spots* represent places neglected by the decision centres and therefore lagging areas [9]. The *isolates* are places that live in autarchy and have no relationships with the centre [9] whereas the *artificial peripheries* are created through political decision and can become more attractive once the political system is changed [10].

Urban peripheries are situated at the outskirts of the city and seen as a functional space where the urban expansion takes place, multiple relationships being thus established within this spatial-territorial system.

Pleasure peripheries are designated in connection to tourism activities [11]. They can refer to islands, rural areas or even urban peripheries whose main function is based upon leisure activities.

2.2. Methodology

The methodology applied in this study is both qualitative and quantitative because qualitative research gives important insight upon perceptions, representations and discourse on peripheral areas, while the quantitative research allows an objective analysis of the relationships established between the elements taken into consideration - rural space, periphery and tourism. On the one hand, the qualitative analysis allows us to identify the way rural spaces are perceived, how they are characterised, and the connections established between rural areas and peripheral areas. On the other hand, we use the quantitative research to test if the narratives analysed with the qualitative method are founded on objective, relevant statistical data.

2.2.1. Qualitative research

The qualitative method used in this study is represented by desk research, which implied gathering and analyzing theoretical information about rural peripheries. We analyzed both scientific literature related to the subjects of rural areas and peripheral places, and official documents from the European Union such as the reports on *The future of Europe's rural periphery*, on the implementation of the LEADER programme [1], and at the national level, *The National Strategic Framework for Rural Areas* [12], *The Rural Development Strategy 2014-2020* [13].

Desk research highlighted a multidimensional approach of the concept of periphery: periphery as distance from the centre, periphery as dependence, periphery as distinctiveness and periphery as discourse [1].

The approach of the *periphery as distance* from the centre derives from regional studies (Christaller (1933), Loesch (1954), Isard (1960), Reynaud (1981)). Christaller and Loesch consider that regions are organized in hierarchical systems coordinated by central places, represented by the cities [14], [15]. Christaller takes into account three principles in order to determine central places: the market, transport and the administration. Hence, a central place is considered to be a place of richness, creation and consumption. The offer of goods and services the centre provides determines its area of influence, along with its administrative power. The connections with other places, especially its position in the transportation network determine its place in the urban hierarchy. Consequently, rural spaces are peripheral places, dependent on the services, on the market and on the administrations of the centre.

Many studies, carried out in the '60s and '70s, sought to show the extent to which the distance effect influences spatial mechanism in terms of the distribution of wealth and spatial interaction. Reynaud (1981) considered distance from the centre to be fundamental in the differentiation and spatial organization. In his opinion the centre is a place of concentration in terms of population, wealth, information, innovation, decision making, while the periphery is basically characterised by its absence of autonomous decision.

As most of the contributors to the location theory are economists, the approach of the periphery as distance is economically oriented. Therefore, theories such as: Reilly's law of retail gravitation [17], Loesch's general equilibrium model [15], even Christaller's (a geographer) central places theory [14] are applied to homogenous spaces that make abstraction of the geographic diversity of the space and do not take into consideration hindering elements such as natural

barriers (rivers, mountain chains, deserts) that constitute isolation factors.

The approach of the *periphery as dependency* is based on the dependency theory [6]. According to this theory, northern, imperial powers that are represented by well developed countries perpetuate forms of economic, political and cultural dependence in the southern, less developed countries. Perroux (1964) and Friedmann (1966) tried to explain the concept of periphery as the dependency through the framework of core-periphery model of development [18] [5]. During the 1970s, the geographers focused on the domination and dependency relationships between the urban centres and the rural areas, the latter being considered 'marginalized', 'devitalized', and even 'deserted' by their inhabitants. Some authors used the core-periphery model to analyze the relationships between the urban and the rural areas [19].

The approach of the *periphery as local distinctiveness* appeared at the end of the 20th century, as a response to an increasingly competitive and globalised world. This new approach is based on the importance of each place's specificity, heritage and resources, introducing thus the spatial dimension into the economic analysis.

Aydalot (1980) was among the first economists to take into consideration the spatial dimension in the economy and focused his research on territorial economy [20]. In the same line of thought, Gumuchian and Pecqueur (2007) identify *territorial resources* - material resources, human resources, traditions, know-how and the relationships established between them as well as the relationships established with the territory they are found on [21]. Courlet (2007) classifies resources into *generic resources* that can be completely transferred during the production process and *specific resources* that are rare exist in only one place and cannot be transferred [22]. Possessing specific resources allows a place to have a competitive advantage on the market and to become attractive.

For peripheral areas, this new paradigm encouraged the emergence of the local development. The emphasis on the particular nature of each place determined that many peripheral rural areas began to gain image capital due to the quality of their resources, human capital, location, lower prices of the real estate and atmosphere of the place, positive distinguishing factors that attracted entrepreneurs. In the best case scenario, such peripheral areas were transformed into business incubation centres or clusters.

Finally, the approach of the *periphery as discourse* evolved over time in close relation to the conceptions, perceptions and representations of the peripheral places. While until the end of the 20th century peripheral areas were considered under the dominance of the centre(s), starting with the '70s the narrative on peripheral places and by extrapolation on

rural areas changed. The first to denounce the inequity between centres and peripheries was the philosopher Michel Foucault (1971) who considered that the relationship core-periphery is an inadequate relationship of power [23]. In his opinion, discourse reinforces power and the discourses that existed at that time were mainly top-down, politics being dictated by the centre and imposed on the periphery. Therefore, his famous argument to "cut off the head of the king" in the political analysis and replace it by a decentred understanding of power is the first step towards the emergence of bottom-up initiatives and a basic condition for local development.

In the case of the rural space, there has been a discursive shift in the way in which the rural economy is imagined and represented. *From being conceived as a space of production, the rural space is now understood as a space of consumption. This includes both consumption activity in the countryside and the consumption of the countryside – most notably through tourism but also through residential investment, the marketing of 'rural' crafts and branded specialty foods* [24, p.71]. Thus, the concept of *periphery as local distinctiveness* undoubtedly becomes strategically significant.

2.2.2. Quantitative research

The quantitative research made use of the *Local Human Development Index* [25] in order to determine the degree of peripherality of our study area in terms of development. The evaluation of the tourism potential in our area of study was done by applying the methodology of Ciangă, Dezsi and Rotar (2002) [26].

The *Local Human Development Index* will be used to determine the communes from our area of study that face development problems. It is an aggregate indicator, advanced by the sociologist Dumitru Sandu (2013), that measures the total capital of localities, focusing in particular on four dimensions: human capital (education facilities at the locality level), health capital (life expectancy at birth), vital capital (medium age of adult population of 18 years old and over), and material capital (average living floor area by house, distribution of gas for household consumption by locality inhabitant, privately owned cars to 1000 inhabitants). Built on the principles and the methodology of the United Nations Human Development Index, the Local Human Development Index allows for the identification of lagging regions at the locality level using statistical data that focus not only on growth, but also on demography, healthcare and education. Welfare, as Rawls (2009) or Sen (1999) pointed out, is not a question of growth, but a question of development, and growth is not equivalent to development [28], [29]. Therefore, the index of local human development measures the total capital of

localities, paying particular attention to the situation the community capital is in. As the author points out, *it is critical to have a good understanding of what constitutes a lagging region and where the lagging regions are located, as this will make it easier to develop tools for the development of these areas* [25, p.100]. In this respect, we shall try to determine the relationship between the level of development of the communes from our area of study and tourism development.

The tourism potential of the region was evaluated after the methodology proposed by Ciangă, Dezsi and Rotar (2002), which implies scoring the elements that have tourism potential [26]. Hence, the authors have studied in detail each element that can become tourism attractive. The precision of this methodology is high, as it works with elements located at the local scale, allowing a *precise radiography of the status quo* [26, p.81]. The authors propose the quantification of the tourist value of each element. They take into consideration three main aspects: the elements that belong to the natural environment, the human-made elements and the infrastructures. Each group of elements equally contributes to the tourism development of a region and therefore it is attributed a maximum of 50 points. Within each category, the points are attributed from 0 (for the lack of the element) to a maximum number of points set by the authors, according to the importance they give to the element.

For example, in the category of *elements of the environment*, landforms are considered the most attractive tourism elements being attributed a maximum of 26 points, distributed according to the landform type (0-7 points for glacial landforms, 0-3 points for volcanic landforms, 0-7 points for karst landforms or landforms on conglomerates, 0-3 points for other types of landforms). The existence of spectacular landforms such as gorges or steep paths caused the authors to create a distinct category that can receive up to 5 points. The landforms developed on salt receive maximum 1 point. The climate can receive up to 5 points, hydrographical elements up to 11 points (mineral waters 0-4 points, thermal waters 0-4 points, lakes 0-4 points, and rivers 0-1 point), and biogeographic elements up to 8 points.

Man-made elements which are considered tourist attractive are represented by architecture sites, archaeological sites, ethnographical sites, monuments, museums, etc. These elements are scored according to the importance established by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and by the National Territorial Plan.

The authors consider that the *infrastructures* also hold tourism potential because they allow the capitalization of natural and man-made resources. Therefore, the tourism potential of the infrastructures takes into consideration the infrastructures directly

related to the tourist activity, but also the general infrastructures. The infrastructures directly related to tourism are the accommodation infrastructures, which can receive a maximum of 40 points according to the following indicators: size, number of beds, hotel rating; the healthcare equipments, which receive up to 2 points and the leisure equipments, which also receive up to 2 points. Access and general infrastructures receive up to 4 points.

The *overall tourism potential* is calculated as a sum of the individual scores of the above mentioned categories. It allows the ranking of the towns and communes from the study area into four categories of tourism potential: low tourism potential (2-15 points), average tourism potential (16-30 points), high tourism potential (31-50 points), and very high tourism potential (over 50 points). The calculation of intermediate scores indicates the strong points and the weak points of a town or village in terms of tourism resources and allows a better focused investment and tourism planning strategy.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Peripheral areas and tourism impact

In general, tourism follows the same pattern of the core-periphery model. The periphery is still under the dominance of the centre. The population from the centre, represented by rich, technological cities goes into less developed areas, situated more or less close to the centre, but anyhow accessible by car or by plane, that are attractive [4] because of their environment and products' quality, scenery and services provided.

Many tour operators have seized the urban people's desire to experience a less artificial way of life: the tourists' wish to be closer to nature, to eat healthy food and enjoy the calmness of the countryside or even travel to exotic places, undisturbed by the technological evolution, in search of authenticity and unaltered nature. They sell such holidays in the most remote places on Earth, and they stage authentic customs for the tourists' satisfaction, reducing the local population to no more than an exhibit or a service provider. From this point of view, tourism can be an example of the dependency theory as the tourism companies from the rich, industrialized, tourism generating countries control the tourism market of the less developed, often predominantly rural or coastal tourist receiving regions that have to comply with this dominance.

Nevertheless, tourism is considered an activity that can produce territorial development, thanks to its direct and indirect effects on a territory in terms of employment, infrastructures, investments, specialized working force, circumstances that lead to local development. As a result, since 1992 the European Union has acknowledged that tourism has a role to play

in reducing regional disparities and, through subsidies, encouraged regions to engage in development projects based on tourism activities. Hence, many peripheral regions, remote rural areas in particular, which were undergoing decline in agriculture or industry, benefited from developing tourism activities. Thus tourism proved its capacity to revitalise remote rural areas as it is an activity that has the power to *recycle devalued objects* [29] giving them new meanings and usage.

Tourism can paradoxically change polarisation forces between centres and peripheries because beyond objective characteristics, periphery is also a matter of perception and discourse. Urban centres can become repulsive for tourists because of noise, pollution, traffic jams, and peripheries attractive due to scenery, environmental quality, remoteness and tranquillity.

Blomgren and Sørensen (1998) have argued that the qualities perceived by tourists as being symptomatic of a peripheral situation - qualities which are attractive to some and repellent to others – and the actual characteristics of peripheral areas are in a mutual interdependence: *the peripheral destination may possess symptoms of peripherality, but relies on the subjective interpretation of these symptoms by the tourist, while simultaneously the tourist will not perceive an area as peripheral without certain symbols of peripherality being present* [30, p.334]. Perceptions and discourse thus represent the key to tourism development in peripheral areas, *for, in general terms, as people in industrialised societies in the West react to the stresses of city life, and to long-term global shifts in production and consumption, with a seemingly insatiable interest in nature and the past (see Urry, 1990; 1995); and in tourism terms, as tastes in holiday taking have become more sophisticated and diverse, the attributes of peripherality, long viewed as disadvantageous, are now being seen as opportunities* [4, p. 3].

The *pleasure periphery* phenomenon identified by Turner and Ash since 1975 is in constant expansion. The evasion paradises of the urban dwellers are farther away than they were twenty years ago but accessibility remains a key issue. Even if in the beginning the main purpose of the pleasure periphery was evasion, starting with the 1970, a new tourism trend appeared: the cultural turn, which became popular at the end of the 19th century. In a globalized world, where centres have a tendency to standardize cultures and replace the natural with the artificial, the individual instinctively seeks to return to his origins, to the basic values of life [31]. Such motivations determine the search for traditional cultures, unchanged places and authentic experiences, which determine the choice of peripheral places for leisure activities [32] [33]. The return of the modern tourist to rural places represents an opportunity for development in these places.

In almost any rural area it is possible to find local products, traditional dishes and handicrafts. These tasty, traditional and natural products can become attractions in themselves. Their association with a particular geographic region proved to be very useful for attracting tourists, but also for further developing small businesses in the agrifood sector. The European Union has even developed schemes of geographical indications and traditional specialities known as protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication and traditional specialities guaranteed that promote and protect names of quality agriculture products and foodstuffs [34]. The EU Regulation No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament promotes rural and agricultural activity, helps small producers sell their authentic products at premium price and protects consumers from non-genuine products [35].

Labelling can bring economic benefits as well as a gain in image since rural areas associated with organic farming and good-quality products will almost automatically be considered good quality-life environments, which might determine certain enterprises move to a rural area and benefit from the positive image of the area, or entrepreneurs to start a business or tourists to buy a holiday house.

As demonstrated, tourism has the power to generate development. The problem is that tourism projects are viewed in general as risky [36] because of seasonality and fashion changes, therefore, tourism should not be the only activity developed in vulnerable areas, but combined with complementary activities such as organic farming, light manufacturing, creative industries, etc.

Moreover, we must keep in mind that tourism can easily disturb the environmental balance of the visited area through overcrowding, pollution, pressure to modernize, which may lead to identity loss and trivialization of the traditions [37].

3.2. Area of study

The Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia are situated in Oltenia Province in South-Western Romania. They are an intermediary geomorphologic landform between the Southern Carpathians and the Getic Plateau and due to this position they are an area of intense exchange between the mountain and the plain, which favoured the development of settlements - market towns and villages.

Well delimited by the river valleys of the Olt River (in the East) and the Motru River (in the West), this natural region of about 3000 km² is also a well distinguished cultural region. With a density of about 100 inhabit. /km², it is predominantly a rural region (about 70%).

Its geographic unity is made obvious by the landscape. The hills and the depressions longitudinally

distributed alternate following a particular pattern: at the contact with the mountains a first row of depressions is located at the bottom of the mountains, followed by a row of hills, separated from the Getic Plateau by another row of depressions [38].

From a cultural point of view, this region still remains well rooted in its customs and traditions. Traditional occupations and crafts such as cattle and sheep grazing, pottery, weaving and wood carving are still practiced by the population.

Despite its rich cultural heritage, represented both by material (architectural monuments) and immaterial heritage (traditions and handicrafts), this region has development difficulties. The collapse of the industrial sector entailed high unemployment rates and migrations. It bears many of the hallmarks of a peripheral area, among which industrial reconversion and population aging are the most important.

It is subject to a triple periphery [31] in connection to the European political and economic centres:

- geographical periphery (situated in Eastern Europe, at an average distance of 1700 km from the European highly urbanized and economically developed regions);

- political periphery (because its GDP is under 50% of the EU average, it is considered an underdeveloped region);

- economic periphery (at the national level, this region is not situated within the area of influence of the capital city and its dominantly rural character does not place it among decision-making players).

In this context, taking into consideration the cultural and natural resources of the region, tourism appears as a possible option worth exploring in relation with territorial development. In this respect we shall first proceed to the evaluation of the degree of development of the communes situated in the area under study, then to the evaluation of their tourism potential with the purpose of determining the attractive elements that can trigger development.

3.3. Periphery in terms of indicators

3.3.1. Regional organization and polarization forces in the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia

The Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia are situated at the margin of the area of influence of the most important cities that polarize the southern part of the country, Bucharest, the capital city, and Craiova, the regional capital of the South-Western region of Oltenia (Fig. 1). As distance and accessibility play an important role in determining the relationships established between the centre and its periphery, we can observe that our area of study is located in the distant periphery of the area of influence of the capital city. Therefore, the

fluxes between these two areas, in terms of human and economic capital exchange are sparser than the exchanges between the centre and its close periphery. However, the relationships with the regional capital are more intense, as a result of historic, long-rooted connections between the regional capital and its subordinated territories.

The two towns that structurally organize the region from an administrative, political and economic point of view are the towns of Râmnicu-Vâlcea in the East and Târgu-Jiu in the West. The town of Râmnicu-Vâlcea has a population of 111,701 inhabitants and the service providing sector is the best developed, absorbing 40.4% of the total employed population [39]. Târgu-Jiu is a slightly smaller town, with a population of 96,318 inhabitants, mostly employed in the industrial sector (mining and building materials industry). The privatization of the energetic sector of Târgu-Jiu as well as of the chemical plant of Râmnicu-Vâlcea resulted in job cuts, unemployment, and return of the former employees to the rural areas and to the agricultural activities of subsistence [39]. The fact that SME¹ sector is underdeveloped and that clusters could not be formed diminished the attraction of these towns and, consequently, diminished their power of influence, which is rather local. The consequences appear at the level of development indicators, which display an uneven development for the communes situated in the area of study.

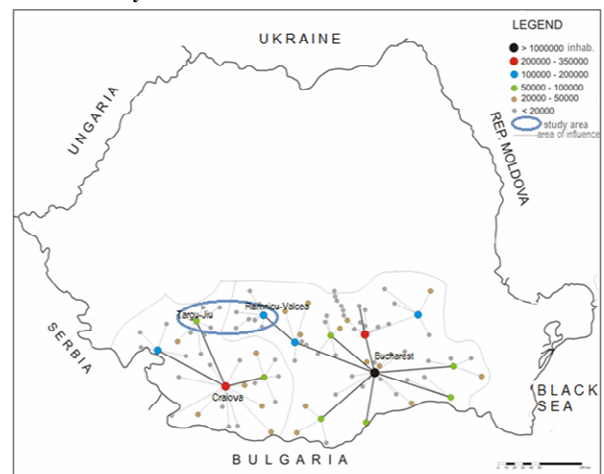


Fig. 1. Areas of influence in South Romania (Source: Oacheșu (2011)).

3.3.2. The human development level in the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia

As we can see, regional location plays an important role in the development of rural localities in Romania. The most developed ones are located closer to a large city and a modernized European road. The human development dynamic for rural communities is also dependent on their population composition,

¹ Small and Medium Enterprises.

accessibility to urban growth centres, micro-regional communication facilities, and general development of the regions they are part of or close to [25]. Mălăescu (2009) distinguishes several types of periphery in the Sub-Carpathians situated between Olt and Jiu rivers, according to the geographic location and the economic development of the communities analyzed [41].

The map of the local human development index (Fig. 2) shows that the overall level of development of the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia is middle-developed, having however many communes that are lower developed. The towns Râmnicu-Vâlcea and Târgu-Jiu have the highest development index from this area (Fig. 2) as they are the main economic centres of the region as well as the service providing centres for a predominantly rural area, where services are scarce. This explains their power of attraction over the surrounding region. The other towns that organize the region: Băbeni, Govora, Horezu, Novaci, Bumbești-Jiu, Rovinari, Țicleni and Târgu-Cărbunești are in general developed (Fig. 2). They benefit from their status as towns which brings along the existence of urban services that improve human indicators values.

We can observe that the rural space is divided between communes that are middle-developed, communes that are lower-middle developed and communes that are poor (Fig. 2). The best values of the local human development index are found in the communes situated in the northern part of the region that are situated at the contact of the mountain area. In these communes the tourist activity led to the creation of infrastructures and contributed to the development of multiple services that other rural spaces that have not developed this activity do not have.

The second category of communes that have good values for the local human development index are the communes where the industrial activity is developed. We can observe such a cluster in the south-western part around the towns Rovinari – Țicleni – Târgu-Cărbunești (Fig. 2).

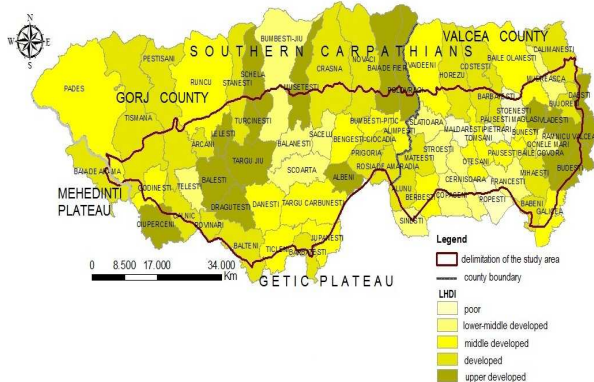


Fig. 2. Local human development index in the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia (source: after Sandu [26]).

Also, the communes situated in the immediate proximity of the towns, especially Târgu-Jiu and Râmnicu-Vâlcea are in general middle-developed. This

can be explained as the proximity effect: *being close to places with a large economic mass, it is beneficial, as development tends to spill over from these areas to neighbouring ones* [25, p. 129].

However, the power of influence of the two towns is relatively low, because the influence radius in terms of development only concerns the communes situated in the proximity periphery.

We can observe that a considerable number of communes situated in the centre of the region are lower-middle developed and even poor.

3.4. Tourism in the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia – an overview

The evaluation of the tourism potential shows that the area of study is suited in particular for the development of cultural tourism, as material and immaterial heritage is widely spread. The most remarkable elements of the material heritage are represented by traditional architecture, monasteries built in the ‘Brâncovenesc’ style and the ‘cule’ (see below). The rural houses from this area tend to preserve the ethnographic specificity of the area and use the traditional building materials such as wood and stone, keep the organisation of the household and the traditional activities of cattle and sheep grazing, fruit-growing, crops, vegetable growing, beekeeping, as well as handmade pottery, weaving and wood carving. The rural space in this area is still traditional and yet very little modernized. The agricultural practices are still subsistence practices and thus have a great potential for ecological farming development.

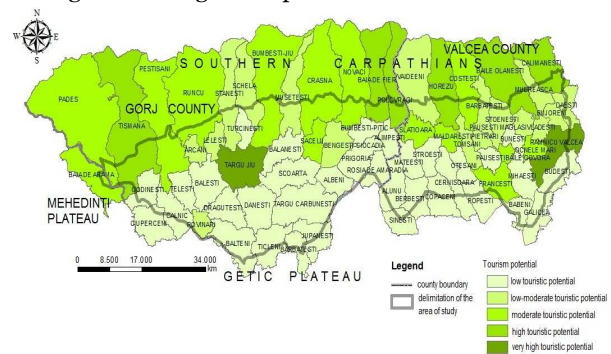


Fig. 3. Tourism potential of the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia.

The monasteries situated in this area form the second most important monastic region in Romania [42]. The most well-known are Cozia, Dintr-un Lemn, Arnota, Bistrița, Hurez, Polovragi and Tismana. They have an almost linear disposition as they are situated along the main longitudinal access road – ‘the road under the mountains’ – that runs through the area. The Hurez Monastery was labelled UNESCO heritage for its architectural purity and balance, the richness of its sculptural detail, the treatment of its religious compositions, its votive portraits and its painted

decorative works [43], being considered the most representative construction in the Brâncovenesc style.

The 'cule' are semi-fortified houses built by the nobles from Walachia – the boyars – with a double purpose: housing the boyar's family and as a defence from the Turkish invasions or the peasant revolts [44]. These houses used to be numerous in the area of study but few of them withstood time and abandonment. The ones that stand today are usually museums or, more recently, due to massive investment from private entrepreneurs a 'cula' has been transformed in an accommodation infrastructure for tourism.

The immaterial heritage is as valuable as the material one. In 2005 the popular dance 'Căluș' was labelled Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, followed in 2009 by the labelling of the popular songs called 'doina' and in 2012 by the craftsmanship of Horezu ceramics [45]. All of these expressions of traditional culture are still practiced in the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia.

The overall natural tourism potential of the area is only moderate as the hilly landforms and depressions are not spectacularly steep, or geologically varied enough to become highly appealing for tourism. Nevertheless, communes situated in the northern part of our study area have obtained high and very high scores (Fig. 3) because they are situated at the contact with the Carpathian range. Thus, the landscape constitutes an attraction in itself as the landforms are varied and spectacular: gorges (Oltețului Gorges, Galbenului Gorges, Sohodolului Gorges), caves (Polovragi and Muierii), steep slopes, chalk scree, etc. Locally, in the communes situated in the hilly region, it is possible to find spectacular landforms such as 'the Fan' of Ocnele Mari, a geological landform on dacite tuff, the concretions of Costești and the pyramids of Slătioara. The natural potential of the area also includes mineral springs and lakes used for therapy, such as the mineral springs of Călimănești, Căciulata, the salt lakes of Govora, Ocnele Mari (Vâlcea County) and the mineral lakes of Săcelu (Gorj County).

The types of tourism that can be developed in this area are rural tourism, agro-tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, balneal tourism, adventure tourism and ecotourism.

Rural tourism can be best developed in the rural areas that have cultural resources and that have conserved their traditional way of life. *Rural tourism defines a local type of tourism, planned and coordinated by the local people, a tourism based on discovery and sharing, based on local products and locals' sociability and warm welcome* [19, p.60]. It basically means spending time in the countryside, sleeping in traditional houses at the peasants', consuming local products, involving in the rural community's daily life and enjoying the scenery and the calm of nature.

Closely related to rural tourism is the agro-tourism which, in addition to rural tourism, implies that the tourism entrepreneur has his own farm, grows his own vegetable and fruit and produces dairy products or other traditional products from the exploitation he owns. Thus, the tourist can closely observe the rural production process and the resulting goods.

In our opinion, rural tourism has a good potential for development in the villages from the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia such as: Lelești, Arcani and Peștișani, situated in the neighbourhood of cultural and natural attraction points, because they can offer accommodation and catering to the tourists in transit, as well as to the tourists that plan longer stays. Agro-tourism can best develop in the villages situated on the trails taken by cattle and sheep herds in their movements to the alpine meadows. In our area of study there are several shepherds' villages such as Băbeni, Vaideeni, Polovragi, Baia de Fier, Novaci, Crasna and Runcu. Villages with fruit-growing, vegetable-growing and wine-growing tradition can also develop agro-tourism, or in the case of wine-growing villages, wine tasting tourism.

Cultural tourism can be generically developed in this area as rural customs, traditions and handicrafts are present in almost any village. Beside rural civilization, the other cultural attractions from this area are the semi-fortified houses called 'cula', found in Măldăraști and Slătioara and the many monasteries and hermitages, appealing for religious tourism. Cultural thematic routes have a high potential for development in this area as the number and the geographic distribution of the attracting cultural elements allows the creation of tourist routes or trails [46], [47].

Ecotourism can be practiced in any of the villages and camping areas situated within the confines of the nature reserves or in the natural areas from the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia. The existences of Buila-Vânturarița National Park in Vâlcea County as well as other geomorphologic and bio-geographic nature reserves such as the Chestnut Tismana-Procuria Forest, Izverna's Sources, the Gorges of Sohodol River, the Gorges of Olteț River, the Polovragi Cave, the Polovragi Forest, etc. in Gorj County have the potential for developing this type of tourism.

Moreover, the steep chalky cliffs and the fast flowing rivers through the gorges situated in the region are suited for adventure tourism activities such as escalade, paragliding and rafting.

4. CONCLUSION

As Scott (2000) pointed out, *to talk of peripheral regions is to invoke a relationship, for peripheries only are peripheries in relation to other places designated as centres* [10, p.58]. This view of centre and periphery as an opposition is very frequent,

even if the urban space and the rural space on the one hand, the core and the periphery on the other hand are complementary.

The approaches to periphery presented in this article take into account the multiple dimensions of peripheral regions, a point of view that should be taken into consideration not only for establishing a diagnosis but also a development strategy.

The four identified dimensions, even if they seem opposed should be dealt with as the two sides of the same coin. Distance and dependency are mainly associated with factors which hinder development in general and economic prosperity in particular, by contrast, distinctiveness and discourse are factors which attract people and investment, and for this reason may contribute significantly to bringing about an improvement in economic conditions.

The idea of periphery of distance from the centre is still common, both from a geographical point of view (physical distance) and functional (connectivity). The reference to periphery as dependency is also still relevant provided it is reassessed in the light of today's realities.

The way in which mechanisms of internationalisation, transnationalisation and globalisation have developed over the last few decades suggests the need to replace the dichotomous concept of core-periphery dependency with more complex relations of interdependence [1, p.72]. Lately, the questions of difference and distinctiveness have become decisive for the development of a territory because they stress the importance of local resources, both natural and human resources. The idea of periphery as discourse emerges as a marketing strategy that increases the visibility of peripheral regions, creating positive images, conveyed especially by tourism.

The case study analysis shows that there are disparities in terms of development indicators between the regions and even between the communes belonging to the same region. Periphery is a phenomenon present on different scales and expressed by the accessibility index, the growth index and the human development indexes. However, it should not be denounced, compared with the indexes for central places, and thus stigmatized as lagging or underdeveloped.

The most important aspect for a peripheral place is to find the activity or the activities that animate the community, bring an income to the community and help it develop.

Tourism seems to be such an activity and in the Sub-Carpathians of Oltenia it could generate development, both territorial and human development, since it finds a use for traditional customs, activities, know-how, scenery, etc. Nevertheless, given the disparities of development and tourism potential between the communes situated in the area of study, tourism should be developed in the areas where the

tourism potential has high or very high values, and used as an activity complementary to agriculture and manufacture.

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