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# Tourism as a driving force in rural development: Comparative case study of Romanian and Austrian villages

## Abstract

This paper is the outcome of a bilateral Romanian-Austrian research project on new and innovative initiatives in rural development. It was the aim of the study to identify success factors of strategies applied and to verify their transferability. This article presents results related to the role of tourism in rural development in a comparative way focusing on the following main aspects: (1) tourism potential in the sense of (used or unused) opportunities on the background of current touristic demand (including main tourism trends); (2) current touristic offer; (3) current touristic demand; (4) perspectives of further (touristic and extra-touristic) development. It then also asks for (5) the relation between endogenous and exogenous factors in developing tourism; (6) effects of tourism on local population and general local development; (7) basic success factors for initiatives in tourism, but also in other fields as well as (8) main differences in rural development, especially by tourism, between the Romanian and the Austrian cases.

**Key words:** tourism; rural development; Romania; Austria

## Introduction

Rural space is facing almost everywhere in Europe similar challenges: structural change in agriculture inducing job reduction; lower average income compared to urban space; narrower skill base; less developed service sector; thinning out of educational facilities, health care and supply services; selective out-migration of the younger, better educated and initiative causing a relict demographic structure with little potential for innovation. This applies also to larger parts of Austria and Western Europe, but is much more significant for transformation countries like Romania (see Jordan, 2009).

Nevertheless, despite unfavorable conditions, some rural settlements undergo a certain economic revival and development. In the framework of a research project funded by the Romanian National Council of Scientific Research in Higher Education (CNCS – UEFISCDI) and the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD) a mixed Romanian-Austrian team<sup>1</sup> has investigated in 2014 and 2015 three villages in both countries selected under the aspect of recent innovative developments. It was the aim of the study to identify success factors of strategies applied and to consider their transferability.

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Although the entire project has a wider approach, this paper focuses on tourism as a driving force in socio-economic development departing from the hypothesis that tourism is a key element in economic restructuring and rural development – as documented by already quite a number of studies (see a.o. Drăgulănescu & Druțu, 2012; Fotiadis, 2011; Heintel, 1994, 2005; Jordan, 1991, 2007; Lankford, 2011; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Pechlaner, Herntrei & Kofink, 2009; Prideaux, 2000; Šimková, 2007; Thompson, 2007; Wilson, Fesenmaier & Fesenmaier 2001). Specific research questions in the narrower context to be addressed in this paper are: (1) relation between endogenous and exogeneous factors in developing tourism; (2) effects of tourism on the local population and on general local development; (3) basic success factors for initiatives in tourism, but also in other fields; (4) main differences in rural development, especially in tourism, between the Romanian and the Austrian cases. Mainly qualitative methodology (interviews, focus-group discussions, participative observation) had been employed to acquire information from stakeholders, representatives of public administration, local and regional institutions, and 'ordinary' inhabitants.

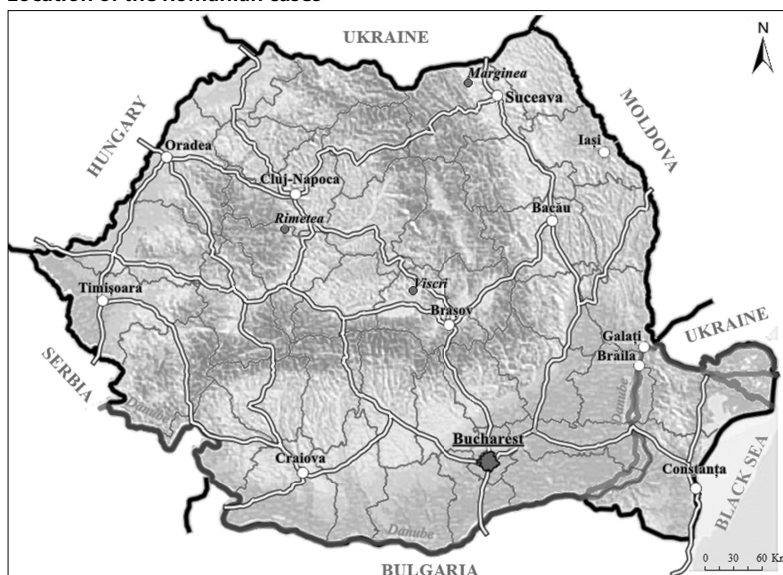
## Tourism in Romanian and Austrian villages

Before we highlight the findings corresponding to our research questions, it is necessary to shortly describe tourism in the six villages investigated – their tourism potential in the sense of utilized and unutilized opportunities, their current touristic offer and demand as well as perspectives for further development.

### Romanian case studies

Three villages in Romania were the focus of this project (Figure 1). **Rimetea/Torockó** is a village at the eastern fringe of the West Mountains [Munții Apuseni] in Transylvania in the District [județ] Alba. The old former mining site is nicely located in a mountainous landscape, but at the same time close to the main transportation axis between Cluj-Napoca and Alba Iulia and also in close vicinity of both large cities.

Figure 1  
Location of the Romanian cases



Cartography: Zoltán Marósi.

Its touristic potential, compared to the other two Romanian villages, is very likely the strongest due to an appealing villagescape (Figure 2), its embeddedness into a nice natural mountainous setting and its obviously active and tourism-minded population. The quality of its current touristic offer meets Central European standards. It looks attractive not only for leisure tourists, but due to the mining history of the place, the well maintained vernacular architecture, the museum and private ethnographical collections also for historically/culturally interested persons, i.e. not only for young families with children, but also for cultural tourists in the narrower sense. Due to its location, the village is interesting also for nature and hiking lovers and suitable for extreme sport, such as paragliding. Its good accessibility extends the activity radius of the guest to the larger towns and cities in the surroundings. Although larger groups of tourists are nowadays coming from Poland or the Baltic states, the current touristic demand is obviously still focused on the Hungarian market, to which the village has special relations due to its distinct Hungarian past and still a remarkable share of Hungarian population.

Figure 2  
Traditional house in Rimetea/Torockó



Photo: Peter Jordan (2014).

Tourism is confined to the summer season and generates very likely just moderate revenues due to given accommodation standards and just a few opportunities to spend money for catering and other purposes. This means that for the major part of the population tourism is a more or less important secondary income. But there are also entrepreneurs, which run touristic family businesses. Tourism is, however, not especially well-organized, mainly due to a lack of co-operation between tourism entrepreneurs and the communal administration. It seems as if the current combination of tourism, agriculture and commuting to nearby cities is viable and sustainable. Local tourism depends, however, very much on the Hungarian market. Taking into account the political and economic sensitivity of tourism, this means a risk. A unilateral dependence can very quickly turn from an advantage into a burden.

**Viscri/Deutschweiskirch** is a small village in the hilly landscape of southeastern Transylvania in the District Braşov. It is located not too far from the main road between Sighişoara and Braşov. Its built heritage has been shaped by the Transylvanian Saxons (Figure 3), who were the majority population in the village up to their exodus in the early 1990s. Currently, the village is mainly populated by Roma.

Its touristic potential compared to the other two Romanian villages is medium, with the main asset of a very traditional and unspoiled villagescape. A second advantage is its location in a remote and silent area; a third its truly Saxon character, which manifests itself in many ways: the architecture and the setting of farmsteads, furnishing and a prestigious Saxon fortified church.

Figure 3  
Saxon fortified church in Viscri/Deutschweiskirch



Photo: Peter Jordan (2014).

By Western standards rather archaic structures and the village's current tourism offer meet the demand of people who wish to escape our stressing modern world, i.e. a wide range from students, families and pensioners to top business managers, but in numbers rather a small segment of the tourism market. It does not meet the demands of the average tourist looking for recreation (with a stay longer than a week), but is good enough for short-time visitors (with one or two overnights) accommodated in the traditional and renovated farmsteads, who like to buy local products, visit the church, look around the village and its surroundings and experience the everyday life of the village. This means also that room renters cannot ask for higher prices, although this special group of customers could certainly afford them. The composition of the visitors coming in the summer season seems to be quite international, but guests from Romanian cities (mainly Bucharest) have certainly a larger share. An important share of visitors is made up of day tourists, coming partly by buses, who mainly visit the fortified church listed as UNESCO cultural heritage. An important segment are former Saxon inhabitants, who meet in the village annually and spend there some weeks, but their number is on decline for demographic reasons.

The appealing current state of the village heavily depends on the activities of a very engaged person, a Saxon lady, who descends from the village, but used many opportunities to get educated and versatile. She "manages" the village, especially its predominantly Roma population. Her success is only possible because a larger part of the Roma has, in fact, no alternative than to go with her. Under a new, necessarily less charismatic management the current harmony will very likely give place to more individualism, which in turn means that the village will assume a more ordinary shape and will lose in attractiveness.

Efforts are undertaken to transfer this model to other villages in the surroundings, also because Viscri has already reached the limits of its carrying capacity. These efforts have partly been successful. The village has anyway a beacon for its region and could in this way help to develop tourism in the wider area by drawing public attention to it.

**Marginea** is a large village in the Bucovina (District Suceava), slightly outside the eastern fringe of the East Carpathians [Carpații Orientali], already in the undulating agricultural landscape of southwestern Bucovina. It is not far from the district capital Suceava and located at the main road from there to Transylvania. Close to Marginea is one of the famous painted Bucovina monasteries, Sucevița. Marginea's tourism potential has a transit character and appears low compared to the other two Romanian villages. The only assets are the vicinity of the Sucevița monastery and pottery as a local tradition and tourism offer. The current villagescape, however, is less attractive than that of many other villages in Bucovina. It represents a faceless agglomeration of homes of migrant workers and commuters to nearby cities like Suceava and some remnants of farmers. Accommodation for tourists is hardly available. Even inhabitants of the village invest into accommodation facilities rather in Sucevița, since there investment promises the higher revenues. Perspectives for a tourism development have been spoiled and are not restorable due to severe planning mistakes, which cannot be made undone. The (former) village will very likely further develop into a sleeping place and weekend site for commuters and a place of reference/return for migrant workers.

All three Romanian destinations benefit of their out-migrants, who return as tourists or invest directly into local businesses. They invest into new tourism facilities or bring existing ones up to the standard they have come to expect as a result of their experience abroad (Newland & Taylor, 2010). A possible target group for the Romanian destinations could be the category of tourists who want to experience closely a country's culture and traditions and meet local people. The destinations can take advantage of these trends and be promoted as authentic. Offers such as private accommodation, home cooking and craft lessons could contribute to that (Newland & Taylor, 2010)

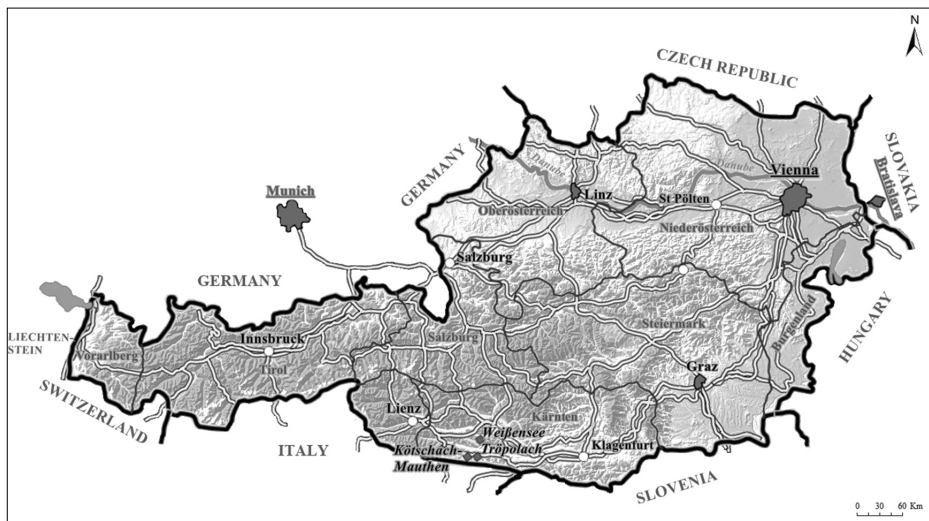
## Austrian case studies

In Austria, the study on two Alpine and a market village was conducted (Figure 4). **Tröpolach** is a village in the Gail Valley [Gailtal] at the bottom of the Carnic Alps [Karnische Alpen/Alpi Carniche] in the Political District [Politischer Bezirk] Hermagor of the Austrian Federal Province [Land] Carinthia [Kärnten]. It is part of the large commune Hermagor-Presseggersee and close to the country town Hermagor, its centre. The village's main (and almost only) tourism potential rests in its location at the bottom of the Nassfeld, the largest skiing destination in Carinthia and one of the top skiing destinations in Austria. This potential is almost completely exploited due to a cable car connecting Tröpolach since 1999 with the Nassfeld skiing region (Figure 5). The village's current tourism offer comprises a large 4-star hotel, a large hotel for younger guests, several smaller hotels and pensions and some private accommodation as well as several restaurants and inns.

The tourism market has developed from a predominantly German to a truly international. In addition to the intensive winter season, a secondary summer season has emerged. The majority of tourists resides in hotels, while the formerly widespread branch of private room renting has substantially declined. Perspectives for a continued development are good as long as skiing and other Alpine winter sports (like snowboarding) remain fashionable and practiced by succeeding generations and as long as climate change does not affect snow cover too much. But even for this case Nassfeld is well-equipped by facilities for artificial snow production. The summer season seems to have the capacity to supplement the

winter season. Especially seniors like to use the dense system of cable cars to go up to mountain peaks that would otherwise hardly be accessible for them. Also mountain bikers appreciate the lots of tracks offered by a largely anthropogenic Alpine landscape.

Figure 4  
Location of the Austrian cases



Cartography: Zoltán Maroš.

Figure 5  
Tröpolach with its cable-car station



Photo: Peter Jordan (2015).

**Kötschach-Mauthen** is a small market town ("market" in the juridical sense) in the upper Gail Valley. It is located, where a crossroad through the Eastern Alps touches the valley bottom between two mountain passes, one of them (Plöckenpass/Monte Croce Carnico) connecting it with northern Italy.

This road, however, has lost in importance compared to earlier times, when trans-Alpine motorways were not yet available. Compared to Tröpolach, Kötschach-Mauthen is in a much more remote position related to central places in Austria (Hermagor, Villach), but somewhat closer connected with Italy.

The town's tourism potential rests on its pleasant landscape, its vicinity to a picturesque high-Alpine valley with many witnesses of traditional Alpine culture (Lesachtal), in hiking and mountaineering opportunities in the nearby Carnic Alps rising to their highest most attractive peaks right in the vicinity of Kötschach-Mauthen as well as in good opportunities for canoeing and rafting on the Gail River. Also the closeness and good accessibility of northern Italy with its tourism market on the one hand and its touristic attractiveness on the other may be mentioned as an asset. Compared to Tröpolach, however, Kötschach-Mauthen's tourism potential is much less specific.

The current touristic offer is composed of several smaller attractions. The relatively most important is an "aqua park" with an indoor swimming pool and connected leisure facilities. It is open year-round. Other offers are guided mountaineering, rafting and canoeing. A (under Austrian conditions) small skiing slope with lifts from the valley bottom represents some winter attraction. Moreover, the commune's strive for energy self-reliance may be classified as a touristic offer: Kötschach-Mauthen has acquired some reputation in this field inside Austria and beyond and is on these grounds visited especially by student and expert groups. They are offered customized energy-related (paid) programs with guided tours. Accommodation and catering facilities in the town are small-scale.

Touristic demand has rather declined in recent years in accordance with the general stagnation and decline of summer tourism in Carinthia and Austria and the closing down of earlier larger skiing facilities. But the aqua park attracts (mainly day) visitors all over the year. They come predominantly from Italy. Mountaineering, hiking, mountain-biking, rafting and canoeing are activities demanded by a wider range of international tourists, not the least from the Netherlands. As regards skiing, Kötschach-Mauthen stands clearly in the shadow of the Nassfeld and attracts not much more than a local clientele.

Continuation of tourism demand at the current level is the best that can be expected. Whether these expectations will come true will depend on the place's reputation as a "nature and adventure resort" as well as on the continued attractiveness of the aqua park for Italian visitors. This in turn is a question closely connected with the condition of the road across Plöckenpass to Italy, which needs refurbishment, if not reconstruction.

**Weißensee** is a commune in the Political District Spittal an der Drau of the Federal Province Carinthia. It is composed of several small villages forming a continued agglomeration in the western part of a narrow high-Alpine (around 900 m) valley, which is otherwise filled by a picturesque fjord-like lake and surrounded by high mountains (Figure 6). The commune has due to its remote high-Alpine location and its specific (Lutheran) traditions a very specific position in Carinthia's cultural pattern.

Weißensee's tourism potential clearly rests in its nature, i.e. the unique lake at a respectable altitude and in an Alpine scenery. The lake is covered by ice every winter and thus offers opportunities for skating. It is also good for bathing in summer, but much more than a bathing attraction it is an eye-catcher for hiking tours along its shores and in the nearby mountains. Summer sports in the mountains (hiking, biking etc.) and skiing in winter with respectable slopes as well as the well-maintained cultural landscape are additional assets. The current tourism offer comprises a large variety of high-quality medium- to small-scale hotels and a wide choice of pensions and private accommodation. The commune's preference is quality over mass tourism. This affects also catering facilities, the traffic regime (limited accessibility for private cars, a public bus connecting all villages) as well as a good balance of various touristic offers in winter and summer providing a certain "soft tourism" with two seasons.

Figure 6  
Lake Weißensee in the Gailtal Alps



Photo: Peter Jordan 2014

Starting in the later 1980s, tourism demand has been extended from a summer season to a season also in winter. This was due to Dutch guests, who arrive for skating competitions every January. Today, they augment the summer season, which sees, however, a variety of international visitors besides a traditional clientele of domestic, mainly Viennese, guests. So Weißensee enjoys real two-seasonal tourism providing for a high occupation rate in accommodation facilities. There are nevertheless also "dead seasons", when tourism offers no occupation and when the villages are almost empty. Carrying capacity is – taking into account the claim to be a quality resort – already exhausted. Tourism managers aim nevertheless at a (small) further increase in arrivals and overnight stays.

Perspectives for being able to continue the currently very prosperous situation are good. Offer as well as demand are diversified and rather independent of problems in a specific segment or on an individual market. The offer corresponds also to several current trends in European tourism, e.g. towards quality tourism, ecological consciousness, good opportunities for seniors as well as sportive guests.

All Austrian case studies are characterized by the fact that investors into tourism are predominantly locals or quasi-locals and co-operation between private entrepreneurs and public authorities works well. The strive for two-season tourism is also common to the three cases, but could in an optimal way just be effectuated in Weißensee, where natural conditions are the most appropriate. Quality tourism resulting in higher revenues per guest has also best been implemented in Weißensee due to a conscious policy in this direction comprising strict measures of nature protection, support for the cultivation of a traditional cultural landscape and strict observation of the carrying capacity.

A rough comparison of all Romanian and Austrian cases by all four criteria is presented in Table 1.



Table 1.  
The six case studies compared by four criteria

Place	Tourism potential	Current tourism offer	Current tourism demand	Perspectives of future development
<b>Romanian case studies</b>				
Rimetea/ Torockó	strong; villagescape, mountainous setting	summer vacations; private room renting, inns, museum	moderate; vacationers mainly from Hungary; summer season	sustainable; risk of unilateral orientation towards Hungary
Viscri/ Deutschweiskirch	medium; traditional Saxon village	summer vacations, cultural tourism; private room renting, horse carriage tours	small; some escapists, day visitors; summer season	sustainable, if strict management is continued
Marginea	low; vicinity of a monastery, traditional pottery	pottering; private room renting, inn	random; some transit travelers; summer season	spoiled due to uncontrolled urbanisation
<b>Austrian case studies</b>				
Tröpolach	strong; vicinity of a large skiing area	winter sports (dominant), summer vacation (sub-dominant); hotels, pensions, private room renting, cable car, close-by skiing area with abundant facilities	strong, international; winter season (dominant), summer season (sub-dominant, but growing)	sustainable, if skiing continues to be popular
Kötschach- Mauthen	moderate; mountainous landscape, (mainly summer) sports, good accessibility of Italy	aqua park, guided mountaineering, rafting and canoeing, energy self-reliance; all kinds of accommodation and catering facilities	moderate, international with a focus on Italians and Dutch; summer season (dominant), winter season (sub-dominant)	difficult to maintain the current level
Weißensee	strong; lake in a high-mountain setting, "pure" nature, opportunities for winter and summer sports	winter sports (skating, skiing), lakeside vacation, hiking; all kinds of quality accommodation and catering facilities	strong, international with a focus on Dutch, also many domestic guests; two strong seasons	sustainable due to quality, diversified offer and markets

## Relation between endogenous and exogenous factors in developing tourism

Taking into account all six cases, it can be stated that endogenic factors prevail, if initiators, who spent some time elsewhere, in-migrants from other places and actors from the neighborhood count as locals. This is very true for Rimetea/Torockó, where house owners and local entrepreneurs are engaged in tourism activities and provided the place with the image of a tourism destination. An important driving force is also the support from the Transylvania Trust Foundation with its technical expertise in restoration of vernacular architecture. This is valid also for Viscri/Deutschweiskirch, where a lady from the place "manages" the village in cooperation with the local population. As an external factor may be regarded the British crown-successor Prince Charles, who owns a house in the village, engages himself personally and provides the village with some prominence. He is actually the patron of the Mihai Eminescu Trust, which plays an important role in the built cultural heritage protection. Marginea's residual tourism offers, i.e. selling of pottery products and private room renting, rest also completely on local initiatives. In all Romanian cases, public authorities play a secondary role in tourism initiatives and development.

In Tröpolach and at the Nassfeld most initiatives were started by entrepreneurs from the neighbourhood, mainly from the communal centre Hermagor, and by a newcomer from another part of Carinthia. But he became over time a "local" and engaged himself also in other segments of the local society. Only later, when tourism was already well-developed, external actors like hotel chains and other investors into hotels and catering facilities came in. For the earlier stages of tourism development it was, however, very important and even essential to have the support of the provincial government and administration, who invested into the reconstruction and improvement of the mountain road to the skiing area. Without this timely public support further private investment at the Nassfeld would have been impossible.

Tourism development in Kötschach-Mauthen was based on a wider range of small private local investors and entrepreneurs, who are, however, to a larger part "commuters" between this place and Austrian cities, mainly Vienna [Wien] and Graz, and profit from their networks and experiences gained there. Communal administrative support is especially important for the energy self-reliance project as well as for the aqua park. Tourism development in Weißensee was almost exclusively a matter of locals, i.e. inn keepers and farmers looking for an additional income already in the interwar period, but even more so after World War II.

## Effects of tourism on the local population and general local development

In all the cases investigated except Marginea, where tourism is a marginal activity, tourism affects almost all the locals and the whole village. In Rimetea/Torockó and Viscri/Deutschweißkirch this is mainly by private room renting and catering, but tourism generates several kinds of modest direct income for a large part of the population: by souvenir production, the selling of local products (wool, wood or pottery, jams, dairy products), offering leisure services (e.g. horse-carriage rides or demonstration of traditional handicraft activities), but also indirect economic opportunities, such as supplying guest houses with agricultural products. Due to tourism as a complementary source of income, inhabitants are motivated to protect and maintain the built cultural heritage as the main touristic attraction. Although some basic infrastructure developments were mainly motivated by tourism, they improve at the same time living standards of locals. However, several potentials for tourism-related business remain unexploited due to a lack of human resources and entrepreneurship.

In the Austrian case studies, where tourism is – with the limited exception of Kötschach-Mauthen – very intensive and dominant, the effects are manifold. First of all, tourism provides the local population with jobs – albeit not permanent and rather not so well-paid. The latter results in the fact that increasingly locals are not willing to accept jobs in tourism and are replaced by migrant workers, mainly from "new" EU member countries or from (the eastern part of) Germany, and rather in the catering business than in hotels. Job opportunities in tourism contribute nevertheless to the reduction of out-migration to cities, which would otherwise be much stronger and affect social structures in the villages severely.

Tourism has also the very important effect of stabilizing local infrastructure in various fields. Tröpolach is a striking example in this respect. Much in contrast to another village just some kilometers away, but without a strong tourism (Rattendorf), it was able to maintain its elementary school, its post office and police station. Also in the cultural events organized primarily for tourists, locals can participate.

The contrast between Tröpolach and its neighbour village Rattendorf is also an example for the very limited spatial range of tourism effects, when walking distance to the attraction plays an important role. Under such circumstances tourists favour just the tourism resort itself, while already the next village is

rather suffering; investments are not located there, but in the tourist resort, where revenues are easier to achieve<sup>2</sup>. This is also supported by the Marginea/Sucevița case, where inhabitants of Marginea prefer investment in Sucevița instead in their own village.

A contrasting example is Dutch tourism to Weißensee. While it was first focused on skating at Lake Weißensee in the winter season and thus spatially very concentrated, it later expanded to the summer season and to other places in the wider surrounding. This was due to the fact that the Dutch tourists had "discovered" during their presence in winter other leisure opportunities elsewhere and were increasingly using these opportunities.

Tourism in the home region encourages also the remigration of out-migrants. Carinthia has already for a longer time been the source of heavy out-migration, mainly to Austrian cities. Many of these migrants have, however, preserved their ties to their place of origin and are inclined to return if they find good opportunities for their personal development and for applying their skills. If they return, many promote local initiatives, augment the tourism offer and establish new networks supportive for local tourism. This practice sprouted also in the Romanian case studies, though for the moment as a rather marginal phenomenon.

Most local administrators and stakeholders are well aware of the fact that a tourism "monoculture" is not ideal and that it would be good to complement it by some other economic activities – to provide seasonal workers in tourism with complementary work outside the season and to have another choice, should tourism decline. Since agriculture is everywhere a residual economic branch and would in Austria's mountain regions not function without considerable transfer payments – in Weißensee partly financed also by the tourism tax paid by every tourist – all the hopes rest on small-scale manufacturing and industry. While small-scale manufacturing can be successful also in small and remote places – as the example of Kötschach-Mauthen shows – when they succeed to produce very specific products that find a more than local market, industrial activities need besides a skilled and not too expensive labour force also a convenient location in the transportation network. This is hardly available in small and remote villages. Even Kötschach-Mauthen, a market town and located at a railway line and an international road, has no illusions in the respect. In the Romanian cases, agriculture (also subsidized) contributes to a larger share to income, in Rimetea/Torockó and Marginea also commuting to work is a prominent factor.

## Basic success factors for initiatives in tourism, but also in other fields

Taking into account the real success stories among the places investigated (Viscri/Deutschweiskirch, Tröpolach-Nassfeld, Weißensee) it becomes very obvious that the primary success factor for initiatives in tourism, but very likely also in all other fields of the economy, is a strong personality as a driving force. He or she needs not to be equipped with massive capital from the beginning, but to have ideas, to find partners and cooperators and to continuously browse for new ideas and solutions. It is also necessary to be courageous and perseverant.

A second factor is networking – in the economic field as well as with bodies of public administration, locally and regionally as well as internationally. A case in point is Mr. Arnold Pucher, one of the "pioneers" of Nassfeld, who identifies as one of the main reasons of his success his early connection with Germany, the main tourism market for Carinthia in the post-war period. Another example is Ms. Fernolend, the "manager" of Viscri/Deutschweiskirch, who established networks with Germany and

even with a British foundation that later promoted her efforts essentially. Worth mentioning is also the case of Rimetea/Torockó, where the cooperation with an organization versatile in built heritage protection contributed largely to the visibility and appreciation of the village on an international level.

A third factor is the support by public administration. At least for the provision and enforcement of infrastructure of all kinds (from transportation via water supply and canalization to health care and education) support by the municipality and by the province in Austria as well as by the district and central government in Romania is indispensable. This support has to be available in time, almost contemporary to private investment. To be successful in this respect it needs not only energetic and convincing private investors, but also farsighted and courageous administrators and politicians. The best example in this respect is the reconstruction and enforcement of the road to the Nassfeld, which was developed from a harsh macadam military road in the First World War to a convenient pass road easily accessible also for less-experienced drivers. Without this road, all investment in the Nassfeld mountain area into accommodation and skiing facilities would have been in vain.

Cooperation between private initiators and public administration as well as vertical cooperation between the different territorial-administrative levels (local – district – regional – national) in Romania is rather weak and their strategies are not properly integrated and coherent. Tourism development in Rimetea/Torockó and Viscri/Deutschweißkirch, e.g., initiated by locals has not prompted investment into road access falling into the responsibility of the district. A fourth success factor is the continuous and continued exchange of experiences with other actors in the field – locally and even globally. To learn from others and to grasp always the latest trends, to be a forerunner in the field, is very important. To be able to do this is not a matter of scale and also not so much of financial resources, but of personal energy and interest.

## Main differences between Romanian and Austrian cases

It was another goal of the project to identify differences between Romania and Austria relevant for rural development and more specifically for tourism development in rural space. This meant also to identify major obstacles to overcome, should transfer of strategies and practices between the two countries succeed. This part of the investigation resulted in three major differences.

### Level of rural development

Rural space is indeed one of the biggest problem areas in transformation countries. Already in the Communist era, it was a zone burdened with socio-economic problems, low quality of life and unfavourable economic and demographic development. After the political turn in 1989/90 and during transformation, the situation has almost everywhere become even more critical, except for rural areas with intensive tourism, areas located along development axes between larger urban centres and along borders towards countries in a more prosperous economic situation. General reasons for the at least relative, but frequently also absolute and accelerated socio-economic decline of rural space are the following (see Jordan, 2009):

1. Rural space receives less investment than urban and especially metropolitan regions.
2. Much in contrast to rural space in Western Europe in general, rural space in transformation countries receives much less subsidies from European or national sources. Therefore, rural economy is much more determined by market prices and income in agriculture, which is usually low compared to income in other branches of the economy.

3. The forced opening of the agricultural markets of transformation countries towards the world market resulted in the intrusion of powerful competitors from the EU and from overseas, not only with agricultural production in the narrower sense, but also with foodstuff based on agricultural products.
4. Due to the inefficient post-Communist land reform, the average agricultural enterprise is small and economically weak.
5. Supportive structures by administration are rather missing. Planning and financial capacities of local administration are too small to absorb EU funding. Bureaucracy is a major obstacle.
6. Migration flows are directed towards better economic prospects. This means in general selective migration from rural to urban space leaving older, less qualified and less active, also politically structure-conservative people behind.
7. An insufficiently defined rural development concept impedes progress. Examples show that improper and uncoordinated applications of EU policies counteract each other to the disadvantage of environment, economy and society.

A negative migration balance applies also to rural space in Austria, but certainly to a lesser extent than in Romania. This is certainly due to the fact that a larger part of Austria enjoys intensive tourism with a double (summer and winter) season. This means in turn that the local rural population is strongly engaged in tourism and that many mountain farmers receive a considerable second income from tourism and are for this reason not so much inclined to abandon their farmsteads and migrate to cities.

## Voluntary associations

A much less noted, but very likely not much less important reason for not leaving, however, is a dense network of voluntary associations in the Austrian villages. Even the smallest village has at least a (voluntary) fire brigade, a choir, a brass band, a dancing company, a young fellows' and a veterans' association. Larger villages and small country towns boast of an even more diversified structure including activities in various cultural and sport fields. These voluntary associations are not only promoters of activities in their relevant fields, they have also very important social effects of shaping local communities: They confer personal comfort and security, provide people with prestigious functions they would hardly achieve in an urban environment and by that earn appreciation and social capital in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (1983). They contribute to local identity building, to the "feel of place" in the sense of Yi-Fu Tuan (1991), to be embedded in a human community by social interactions and relations. As a result, these associations connect people with their place and reduce the probability of out-migration. They even contribute to maintain ties between locals and out-migrants and have in this way an important function in increasing the probability of their return as well as of their active participation in community life, even if they preserve their permanent residence far away. This can also mean making their skills and resources available for the community where they come from.

Voluntary associations are sprouting also in Romania. Rimetea/Torockó, e.g., has a voluntary fire brigade, a choir and a brass band. Folk-dance has a long history in Marginea and those who practice this tradition are organized in groups. Authority figures, such as teachers or priests still have a major role in organising and engaging citizens in community building activities. Religion and spirituality is important in rural Romania. Women's associations function usually in the frame of the church with charitable activities. Thus, although some forms of voluntary associations exist also in Romania' rural space, they have not the tradition and the decisive role in community building as in Austria. Facing

the situation that Romania has not a similar tradition of voluntary associations, the question arises whether at all or at least to which extent or under which conditions the Austrian model would be transferable and would have similar community building effects.

## Continuous versus interrupted development after World War II

It is true that the events of World War II meant also discontinuation of social and economic developments in Austria. Family enterprises had lost their heirs, many buildings were demolished and most economic activities needed a new start. But ownership and social structures remained roughly the same. In contrast, the Communist period in Romania between 1945 and 1989 changed also ownership and social structures completely. In the early 1990s, a restituting of land to former owners or their heirs took place, but it met owners, who had no experience in management and more specifically in market economy. Thus, a lack in continuous experience accumulation and in skills that are needed to conduct a business and manage it successfully is certainly another important difference between the Romanian and the Austrian situation.

## Conclusions

The results of our research reveal similarities and differences between the Romanian and the Austrian cases. This comparison has, however, has to take into account a rather different tourism intensity and a rather different level of rural development: While the Austrian cases enjoy intensive tourism in the sense of a strong economic factor, the Romanian villages with a larger number of tourist arrivals (Rimetea/Torockó, Viscri/Deutschweißkirch) lag far behind. Although Alpine rural space in Austria is – in relation to the more central parts of the country – also a region of reduced opportunities and therefore usually characterized by a negative migration balance, the situation in Romanian rural areas is still worse.

It is common to our Romanian and Austrian case studies that tourism is the main driving force in rural development and with a few exceptions the only realistic economic opportunity. It is another common feature that new initiatives in tourism originate mainly from locals in the wider sense and that the local population is strongly engaged in touristic activities. For this reason, it endorses community-based approaches to tourism and regional development in general and is prevailingly of the opinion that local cooperation, trust and networking are essential ingredients (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). This approach needs, however, vision and leadership, entrepreneurial skills, access to credit facilities and the mobilization of resources (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Petric, 2007).

Natural and cultural heritage are important touristic potentials. Therefore, sustainable management practices are required to maintain the value of these assets. Heritage conservation increases the quality of the touristic offer as well the quality of life of local residents (Chand, 2013). Residents' perceptions of heritage tourism benefits are therefore crucial success factors.

A certain difference between the two countries could be derived from our cases as regards cooperation between private investors and public authorities. While there were little complaints in this respect in the Austrian cases, this seems to function by far less conveniently in Romania. At least equally important, however, is the lack of voluntary associations in Romania, which are so essential for social cohesion and the functioning of villages in Austria. Finally we conclude that the identified success factors of tourism and other economic initiatives are basically employable in the rural area of both countries, yet keeping in mind the local potentials and realities.

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## Notes:

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<sup>2</sup> Another example is the Croatian coast and the Croatian islands, where walking distance to the seaside plays a decisive role. Also there already the first village behind the coast rather suffers from tourism than profits from it (see Jordan, 1997, 2000).

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