



Tradition and Modernity in the Occupational Structure of the Population from Gurghiu Morphohydrographic Basin

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ABSTRACT

This paper approaches aspects referring to the tradition and ancient customs of the region of the Gurghiu Basin, the specific characteristics of mountain villages, emphasizing at the same time the aspects which are connected to the modernization of the Romanian village, in terms of tourism related development (agro-tourism, ecologic tourism, cultural tourism), generating a modern infrastructure, and also their impact on the rural traditional structure. The purpose of this paper is to relieve the fact that tradition and folklore represent the most important poles on which the economic development of the villages stands up, combining both tradition and modernity. The Gurghiu Valley Festival is one of the events whose main aim is to promote tradition and customs of Gurghiu's Valley area, a region situated at the interference of many cultures, but which is unique because its residents have guarded and handed down the traditional customs. However, the modern accents marked their influence on the Romanian village, mostly by generating a modern infrastructure providing the economic development of the area.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gurghiu morpho-hydrographic basin belongs to the upper Mureș basin, in the central part of the country. The main river, Gurghiu, has its springs at 1200 m altitude, in the northern part of Gurghiu volcanic mountains.

The northern limit is represented by Giurgeu Depression and the Mureș Corridor, while the southern limit is represented by the Niraj river basin, the springs of Târnava Mare river, Sovata-Praid depression and Mureș Hills. The basin's eastern limit corresponds to the Mureș county's eastern administrative limit, while the western one is represented by the Mureș Corridor and Reghin Hills. The unique features of the Gurghiu basin consist in the preservation of the traditional customs and activities, while the modern influences are more and more noticeable, especially in the last 20 years. The activities of its inhabitants are related to the natural and ethnographic resources. Wood represents the most important resource and therefore its

exploitation has had a long tradition. The most recent activity is rural tourism, based on a very rich ethnographic dowry and traditional customs.

2. POPULATION'S STRUCTURE

The rural space of the Gurghiu basin is organized in 4 large communities, containing 29 villages. In 2002 the total number of inhabitants in the basin was of almost 19,000. Population's density is about 28 inhabitants/km², and it is more reduced in the villages situated in the mountainous area (Lăpușna, for example).

The settlements along Gurghiu Valley have a long history, the toponym Gurghiu being related to some historical events, that the actual ruins are confirming it. At the beginning, the fort belonged to the Prince of Transylvania, Gabriel Bethlen and then, in 1641, it was restored, like other forts in Ardeal region, by the Hungarian Prince, Gheorghe Rakoczi.

Table 1. Population`s structure of the Gurghiu basin (in 2008).

Community	No. of inhabitants	Male population	Female population
Ibănești	4,443	2,251	2,192
Gurghiu	6,218	3,141	3,077
Hodac	5,035	2,527	2,508
Solovăstru	2,947	1,466	1,481
Total	18,643	9,385	9,258

The fort used to be the scene of some important battles between the Austrian troops and the Hungarian ones and Székely rebels, at the end it was occupied by the Habsburgs and demolished in 1708. The Gurghiu domain was leased to the Bornemissza baron, the ruins being reused to the reconstruction of the Bornemissza castle and the houses in the Gurghiu village.

Regarding the ethnic structure of population, in the monography of the Gurghiu Valley it is mentioned that, in the earlier last century, this area was inhabited by Romanians, Hungarians and Székely. Nowadays, the majority is represented by Romanians, whereas the Hungarian population is of about 1834 inhabitants, mostly located in the Gurghiu community (Glăjărie village).

3. THE TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES

The traditional activities of the inhabitants in the Gurghiu basin are related to the presence of various natural resources, such as: wood, agricultural land, pastures, hays and orchards. Among the traditional activities, wood exploitation is one of the oldest activities in the Gurghiu basin`s area, followed by agriculture (land cultivation, animal breeding especially ovine). Also, craftsmanship and manufacture of traditional objects are past activities that had left a great and vast dowry for the future generations.

3.1. Wood exploitation

Forests represent 60 % of the basin`s total surface: among 40000 ha. The forests are ordered by altitude.

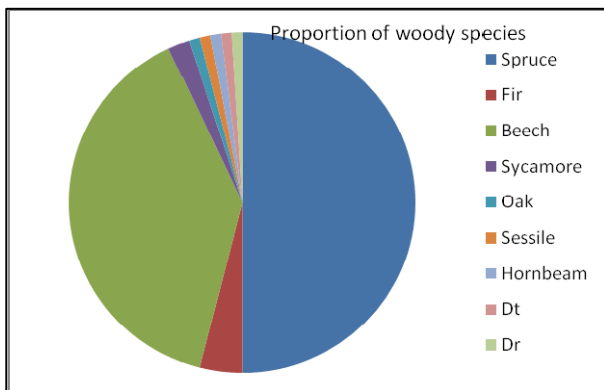


Fig. 1. Proportion of wood species in the Gurghiu basin`s forests.

Up to 600 meters there are mainly broadleaf forests: beech (*Fagus silvatica*), evergreen oak (*Quercus petraea*), oak tree (*Quercus robur*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), alder (white and black) (*Alnus incana* and *Alnus gletinosa*), ash wood (*Fraxinus excelsior*), sycamore maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). Between 600 and 1000 meters altitude resinous trees mixed with broadleaf forests are found. Pure resinous woods - spruce (*Picea excelsa*), fir (*Abies alba*) and larch (*Larix decidua*) - can be found above the altitude of 1000 meters. The dominant species are beech and spruce.

In time, wood exploitation has represented the main activity of the inhabitants in Gurghiu basin, especially for those of belonging to Ibănești and Hodac villages. The organized wood exploitation began around 1865 with the foundation of the Reghin Log Floating Society ("Societatea de Plutărit din Reghin") also known as The German Society ("Compania Săsească"). This was the first step in the wood exploitation process. The second phase, represented by the systematic wood exploitation, began due to the building of the railroad Lăpușna – Reghin, with a total length of 73.2 km, finalized in the early 1900`s (1905), but badly damaged by the 70`s floods.

Nowadays, spruce and beech wood is mainly exploited, the harnessed trees generated by nature hazards (wind throws and snow breaks), by forest cleaning (sear trees) and by the range`s decimal plans.



Fig. 2 A, B. Wood exploitation at Lăpușna (photos by E. Negulescu, 1940).

The presence of a great number of societies that exploit wood from the forests in Gurghiu Basin and process it in the Reghin factories indicates the economic importance of the forest.

Musical instrument's industry occupies an important place in the economy of the Reghin micro-region.

Whistles are produced in Hodac and Gurghiu, whereas a wide range of musical instruments (violins, guitars, wind instruments) are made in Reghin; the city is also known as "The City of Violins". Wood is used in the manufacturing of some handicraft items, and also

for the decoration of traditional symbols specific to the Gurghiu Valley area.

3.2. The agriculture

Agriculture represents one of the oldest activities in the Gurghiu Basin. Corn, potatoes, barley, rye, wheat and vegetables are the most cultivated, especially on the valley meadow, the arable land being of reduced in surface in the basin's area. The geographical position of the basin at the bottom of the Gurghiu Mountains, has favored the sheep breeding.

Table 2. Land-use in the Gurghiu basin (2008).

Community	Pastures (ha)	Hays (ha)	Arable land (ha)	Forests (ha)	Total agricultural area (ha)
Gurghiu	2,679	2,679	1,322	5,100	11,676
Solovăstru	739	399	754	192	2,084
Ibănești	1,947	2,133	662	25,848	30,590
Hodac	2,121	1,524	1,021	4,769	9,435
Total	7,486	6,631	3,759	35,909	53,765

Nowdays, the sheep breeding has become the main activity in small farms in the villages of Cașva, Hodac, Ibănești and Ibănești Pădure with the help of some associations for agriculture. If in the past the dairy products were produced by the peasants for their daily use, nowadays those products are commercialized outside the limits of the basin, and the trade is increasing; in this respect the remarkable production activity of the private cheese factory in Ibănești is to be mentioned. Besides ovine breeding, beekeeping has become a new occupation in the last decades, and the trade with honey has made an important progress.



Fig. 3. Animal Fair on St. Gheorghe Holiday, in Gurghiu (photo by E. Negulescu).

3.3. Commercial activities

From the local traditional fairs organized in important religious holydays where the peasant trade livestock, food, tools and objects used around

households, the evolution of the commercial activities is translated today trough a market in Ibănești and a numerous village shops in every village of all four townships (biggest shop located in the centre of the township).



Fig. 4. A. The Gurghiu Valley Festival; B. Traditional costumes from Ibănești.

Some of the products manufactured in the peasant's households are commercialized both on the local markets and the markets from the nearby localities.

4. THE MODERN ACTIVITIES

The richness and variety of the landscape, the great number of cultural objectives (Lăpușna Castle, Lăpușna Wood Abbey, Hunting Lodge, Cașva Monastery, Bornemissza Dendrological Park, Gurghiu Citadel's ruins, etc), and the ethnographical resources represent today the milestone in development of the rural tourism in the area.

In the last years, the attempt to revitalize the traditional village is represented by the organization of The Gurghiu Valley Festival, a great occasion to celebrate the local traditions and customs. In 2006, an important intercommunity association was founded: the Gurghiu Valley Association. Its main objective is to organize traditional manifestations and to initiate projects that aimed at developing a proper tourist infrastructure.

5. CONCLUSION

The activities of the inhabitants of the Gurghiu basin have evolved in time, either by improvement of the techniques used in the exploitation of natural resources, or implementing a modern infrastructure, especially in the last two decades.

Wood exploitation, wood processing, agriculture and rural tourism are the most important activities of the inhabitants of this area; therefore their development is vital for the revival of the local economy.

Attracting external funding for the development of agriculture (especially livestock breeding) and the initiation of projects to develop the rural tourism are more than necessary in this respect.

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