

THE FUTURE OF “LANDS” IN ROMANIA

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“Land”-type spatial entities are extremely well-outlined in Romania through a complex of favourable factors (natural, historical, economic, social, and cultural). They form both well-articulated territorial systems and typical mental spaces. Due to these structural and functional attributes, “lands” fall into the category of programme regions endowed with systems features of great authenticity and viability. The present paper analyses the prospects of future evolutions in terms of their characteristic territorial cohesion, national brand attributes and economic and social resilience through conversion from traditional agriculture and wood-processing to rural tourism.

The studies carried out in the last-and-a-half decade have led to the identification of 18 “land”-type territorial formations in Romania, typologically included in the category of “pays” defined by Vidal de la Blache (1908) in France. The Romanian ones, much fewer than those (480) registered by the French geographers, are not the result of the two countries having different surface-areas, but rather of the genetic, structural and functional attributes that contribute to a much stronger individualisation of the Romanian “lands” compared to the French ones. Due to it, they represent *geographical programme regions with systemic features and typical mental spaces* (Fremont, 1976, 1999; Cocean, 1997, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011; Cocean, Ciangă, 2000). From this point of view, they fully correspond to the features of the *functional regions* described by Bradshaw (1997) in the same period.

THE CURRENT EVOLUTIONARY CONTEXT OF “LAND”-TYPE TERRITORIAL SYSTEMS

An analysis of the 18 “lands” existing in Romania has enabled an insight into the current stage of these territorial systems and their evolution, with emphasis on structure and functions, development trends and viability. It should be remembered that we are dealing with systemic entities formed 6–7 centuries ago (Cocean 1997, 2008) against a well-established millenary autochthonous background – always under the pressure of modelling and transformation processes and phenomena. Although in the long interval elapsed from the cystallisation of their mental space to the ethnogenetic space of today (Cocean 2001) many changes have been imposed by political and strategic conditions (leading first to the individualisation of Moldavia, Transylvania, and Wallachia and subsequently to the emergence of other provinces, e.g. Banat, Crişana, Maramureş, Bucovina, Oltenia, Dobrogea, and Basarabia, as well as the gradual limitation of the Romanian ethnogenetic space (by the formation of the Bulgarian, Serbian, and Hungarian states, and the Russian expansion westward), yet the “lands” have preserved their identity (Cocean 2001).

In this case, we have a very original and rare example of the maintenance of certain territorial structures along the centuries, under some of the most adverse conditions. Moreover, these structures did not limit themselves simply to surviving, but have developed materially and spiritually along their own coordinates established since the emergence of the archetypal mental space, whose authentic

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fragments they are (Cocean 2006). These coordinates were the outcome of assumed awareness of the Dacian – Roman origin and of a language, the Romanian Language, singularly rich and melodious.

However, though these territorial aggregates have a coherent ethnical structure (Fig. 1), an obvious spatial individualisation against other units, they do not have political and administrative attributes, being englobed into counties to which, in a few cases, they have lent, partially or totally, their own name (Maramureş, Năsăud, Vrancea), despite the fact that some of these lands, such as Făgăraş, Bârsa, Beiuş, Zărand, Maramureş, Chioar, Haţeg, or Almăj, have a centuries-old tradition. The absence of a political-administrative structure has deprived them of decision-making in matters of development and preservation of their own material and spiritual values and heritage.

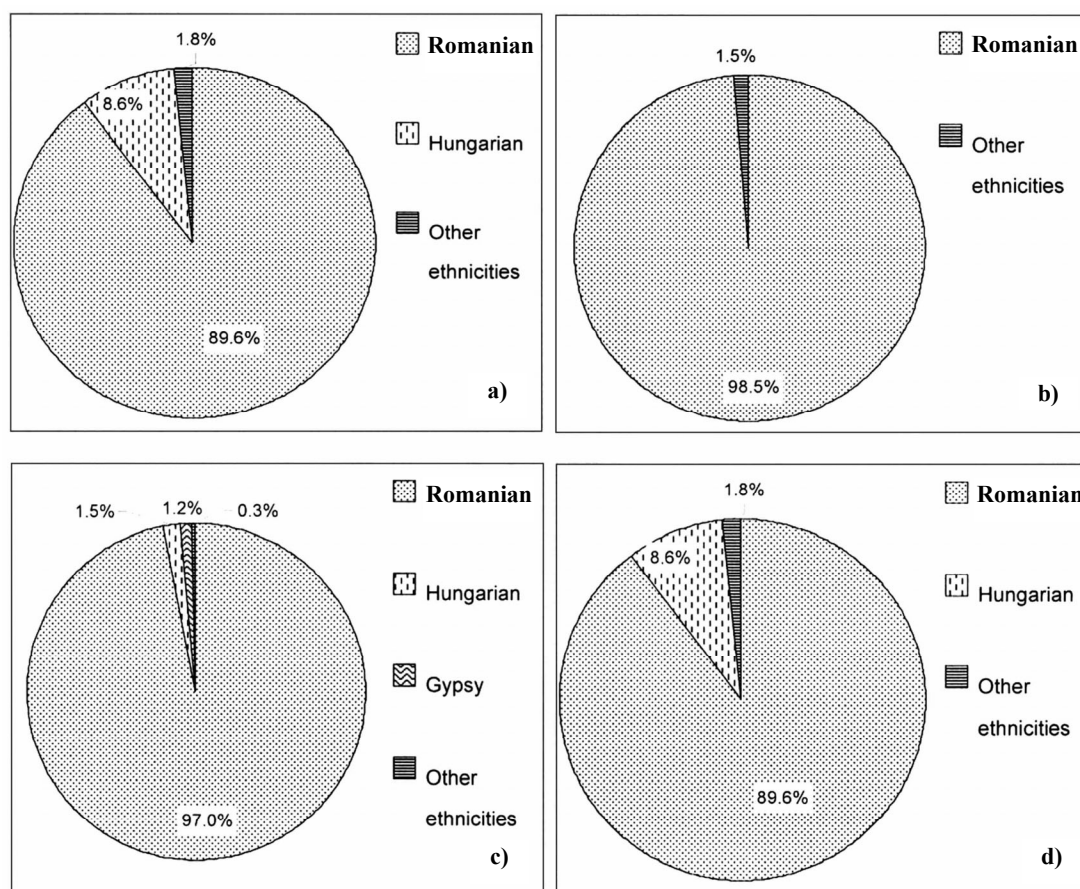


Fig. 1 – Ethnical population structure in Lovištea Land (a), Severin Land (b), Năsăud Land (c), and Lăpuş Land (d).

As a result, in a period of deep political, economic, social, and cultural mutations induced by globalization and the formation of the European Union, within which the circulation of goods and values is borderless, and models of other cultures spread freely through one of the most sophisticated logistics, a natural question arises: what are the perspectives for the perpetuation and affirmation of some territorial systems founded many centuries ago, during the Early Middle Ages, that have evolved in an autarchic manner which the present time can no longer perceive? What are their chances in a competition with “project regions” and “programme regions”, nonchalantly divided and established by present-day territorial development strategists? What advantages have the lands, their pillars of

resistance and catalytic principles, in the face of the political will of transformation equipped with an entire arsenal of logistics (interested actors, specialised human resources, financial resources, and advanced technologies)?

The conclusions reached converge along two main lines liable to ensuring indefinite historical resilience of the “land”-type territorial systems, namely, the decisive role played by their mental space in securing *territorial cohesion* and their *many-sided brand* (tourist, cultural, scientific, and educational).

THE “LANDS”, MODELS OF TERRITORIAL COHESION

Territorial cohesion, a new concept in the panoply of regional development, is the focal point of many approaches to spatial planning, sectoral and integrated development strategies. It has also focussed the attention of many approaches of the EU bodies specialised in spatial management and, being included in their programmatic documents elaborated in the last decade-and-a half, etc. Achieving cohesion is synonymous to the optimal functioning of the system, the harmonisation of relations and interrelations between its component elements on both horizontal and vertical planes, the attainment of the ultimate goal of political-administrative, economic, infrastructural, or environmental actions meant to increase the living standard of the population within a territory and create social harmony. Among the first three conditions underpinning the Community’s sustainable development and mentioned in the strategic EU documents (*The Community Development Scheme*, CDS, Potsdam, 1999; *The European Landscape Convention*, Florence, 2000; *The Territorial Agenda of the European Union*, Leipzig, 2007; *The Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion*, Brussels, 2008; *The Treaty of Lisbon*, 2009) lies the very principle of territorial cohesion, materialised in the efforts of planning out the whole territory afferent to this supra-state structure which Romania belongs to since the 1st of January, 2007.

As Renard emphasises (1995), “lands” are one of the most illustrative examples of territorial cohesion, which after the lapse of over a century from the time of Vidal de la Blache (1908) first tackled the subject, becomes again topical in our pragmatic present. This is not surprising: in search for ideal models of natural or anthropic spatial organisation, of the most adequate criteria for the delimitation of *functional system–regions* (of *organism regions*, as Vallega names them, 1995), geographers, but also other analysts of the regional phenomenon in general, have noticed that “lands” embody these very models, with structures and functions developed and improved in the course of centuries by communities intimately linked to the place, with a spiritual cohesion worthy of an inextricable conglomerate. Communities that identify themselves from a material, spiritual, and behavioural viewpoint with the territory they live on, putting it to optimal account from ancient times, and resisting all political or social metamorphoses of a history, not always friendly to say the least, generating a cultural landscape of great organic originality, whose genuine elements are still omnipresent in the case of the absolute majority of the Romanian “lands”.

The driving force behind the territorial cohesion of all these “lands” lies in the multi-secular specificity of an ethnographic mental space, whose structure has been minutely polished, articulated and strengthened along historical times. Built on a sense of property over the land, a constituent element of the natural framework, but also on the social system imprinted in the collective memory as supreme asset, as vital existential resource, has generated numerous and lasting genealogical bondings between the inhabitants, unique traditions they have unconditionally accepted and respected, a mythology of places and elements which the population of the “lands” identifies itself with. Hence, the inextricable attachment of man to his ancestral environment, the dedication to “sanctifying” it, the obstinacy carried to sacrifice in order to protect its status and values.

The territorial cohesion that characterises them structurally and functionally makes of the Romanian “lands” *project regions with systemic features* (Marcelpoil 2000; Cocean 2003), clearly delimited in space, in which development policies find an ideal environment for promotion and materialisation.

“LANDS” AS A BRAND

“Lands” as a brand is an attribute acquired due to the great material and spiritual values contained within the intimate structure of their spatial systems. In a period of human society development, when everything relates to competition, the only things capable to ensure the existence and continuity of “lands” is their highly original and peculiar heritage which becomes an important resource capable to secure, by rational, adequate and inspired exploitation, the progress of the human communities who identify themselves with and assume the respective territory.

Depending on their specificity, we distinguish four categories of brands, namely the folklore, the architectural, scientific (historical), and cultural (ethnographic) characteristics (Cocean 2011) (Fig. 2).

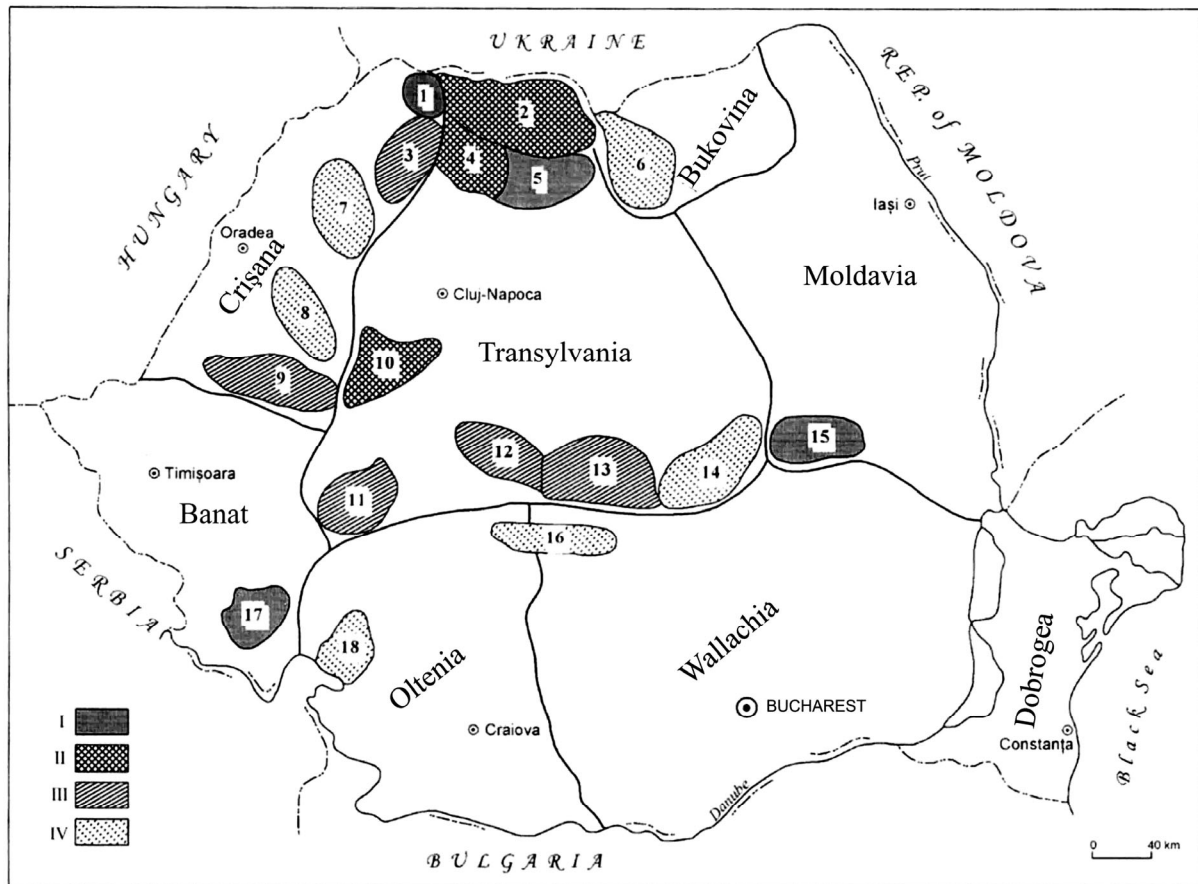


Fig. 2 – The brands of the Romanian “lands”.

I. Folklore: 1. Oaș Land; 5. Năsăud Land; 17. Almăj Land; 15. Vrancea Land; **II. Architecture:** 2. Maramureș Land; 4. Lăpuș Land; 10. Moți Land; **III. Symbolic (historical):** 3. Chioar Land; 9. Zărand Land; 11. Hațeg Land; 12. Amlaș Land; 13. Făgăraș Land; **IV. Cultural (ethnographic):** 6. Dorna Land; 7. Sylvania Land; 8. Beiuș Land; 14. Bârsa Land; 16. Lovișteea Land; 18. Severin Land.

I. The folklore is a brand specific to the “lands” of Oaş, Năsăud, Almăj and Vrancea, being represented by extremely original elements of costume, music, and folk dances.

Thus, Oaş Land, located in the north-western extremity of Romania, is famous for its ancient agricultural occupations and handicrafts, the polychrome folk costumes, the tempestuous dance rhythms, and the unrivalled trill of specific witty couplets, called “ţâpurituri”(Ilieş 2006).

Năsăud Land, stands out by its inhabitants’ pride of independence, expressed in the heroic myth of the “frontier guards”; it is known for the splendour of the folk costume, especially the male one, whose most valuable piece is the hat adorned with peacock feathers (Ilovan, 2009).

Almăj Lands’ regional brand is given by its natural and anthropic landscape, the preservation of a deeply rural area highly authentic and original, of a folklore peculiar to the highland of Banat and traditional occupations, among which the widespread artisan production of plum brandy (Ianăş 2011).

Vrancea Land lasts in the visitors’ memory for its historical legends reflecting the inhabitants’ spirit of independence, their lyrical creativity (it is the cradle of “Mioriţa”, the most striking Romanian ballad), but also for the millenary palaeo-Christian or pagan traditions inherited in the local folklore (Conea 1993).

II. Architecture as a brand is embodied in the landscape of Maramureş, Lăpuş and Moţi lands where wood processing was not only a traditional occupation, generating a genuine civilisation of the “wood”, but also a vector for the building of works with a unique physiognomy and line. We refer mainly to the wooden churches, extremely numerous, but also to the slender houses or barns with thatched or shingled-roofs.

Maramureş Land, located in the homonymous depression, is the best example of such a brand. Here, the civilisation of the “wood” is represented by the wooden churches of Ieud, Bârsana, Budeşti, Deseşti, Poienile Izei (UNESCO monuments), Bogdan Vodă, Botiza, Călineşti, Giuleşti, Sat Şugatag, Rozavlea, Moisei, Sârbi, etc., slender structures and more numerous than anywhere else, noteworthy are also the monumental gates, the expression of exquisite creative skill and inspiration, singular among the mountain regions of Europe (Man 2005; Ştef 2008). One of the tallest wooden churches on the Continent, over 63 meters high, was built at Săpânţa. This locality also hosts the “Merry Graveyard”, a unique cemetery worldwide (Ilieş 2006).

Lăpuş Land, neighbouring Maramureş Land, is sheltered in a peri-Carpathian depression. Each visitor is impressed by the unique lines of its rural architecture (the wooden churches of Şurdeşti, Plopiş, Rogoz – UNESCO monuments), Cupşeni, Dobric, Lăpuş, Larga, Libotin, Stoiceni, etc., and by the “song with knots”, an element of absolute originality in the area’s folklore (Dezsi 2006).

Moţi Land is an unforgettable place due to its picturesque location in the valleys, on the slopes and summits of the Apuseni Mountains, as well as the distinctive landscape and local spirituality shaped by two millenary occupations: gold-mining and home processing of wood (Boţan 2010). There are wooden churches as well (Ponorel, Vidra, Gârda de Sus), and a unique architecture of scattered villages (“hamlets”), with slender roofs, built in successive layers of twigs and straw.

III. The symbolic (historical) brand is peculiar to the “lands” that boast an important historical heritage of buildings with symbolic function (fortresses), events or personalities. It is the case of Chioar, Zărand, Haţeg, Făgăraş, Amlaş and Loviştea “lands”.

Chioar Land reveals a tumultuous historical evolution, centered around Chioar Fortress, a peculiar mental space, preserved in its original form despite all hostilities; the area’s specific architecture is visible also in the great many wooden churches (Cărpiniş, Culcea, Jugăstreni, Posta, Remetea Chioarului, and Valea Chioarului).

Zărand Land. Besides its distinct spatial configuration (a succession of three depressionary basins created by one and the same river, namely the Crișul Alb) it dows its specificity to the historical myth of Avram Iancu (the leader of the 19th-century “Moți” people’s uprising), buried in the shade of an oak at Țebea, and to the myth of gold extraction from the mines of Brad and Săcărâmb with huge efforts (David, 2010).

Hațeg Land, located in a classical Carpathian depression, preserves the legacy of some great historical values of the Dacian and Dacian-Roman civilisations (here is the site of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, the capital of the Roman province of Dacia, established in the 2nd century A.D., traces of which have been only partially uncartherd so far), some important religious buildings of Early Christianity (e.g. at Densuș), as well as palaeontological remains (numerous bones and nests with eggs belonging to some rare species of small dinosaurs).

Amlaș Land had an unusual destiny, disappearing as “land”-type spatial entity due to some unfavourable historical factors. Its reconstitution is imperative in order to go back in time and understand how relatively well-bound territorial system lost in the competition with adaptation, transformation and change.

Făgăraș Land, associated with the most impressive mountain group of the Romanian Carpathians and with the homonymous depression, stands out by its historical past, with a very well individualised political-administrative structure, traditions and occupations of its inhabitants.

Lovișteea Land lies in the heart of the mountains. Its tumultuous history was linked to its age-old position at the borders of the two Romanian sister states, Wallachia and Transylvania (Conea 1935).

IV. The cultural (ethnographic) brand illustrates complex material and spiritual values, the majority of ethnographic origin. Elements of historical or architectural symbolism are also present. The “lands” of Dorna, Silvania, Beiuș, Bârsa, Vrancea and Severin belong to this category.

Dorna Land’s symbolic aura is given by the unforgettable memory of the founder of the Moldavian state, but also by a landscape of endless forests in which former buffalos, seen on the Moldavian coat-of-arms, used to roam; Bukovina has also a unique architecture and a folklore extremely rich in spiritual manifestations.

Silvania Land is located in a hilly area, a very accessible pathway for all past invasions into Transylvania. Its brand is the outcome of the ethno-cultural symbioses between Romanians and Hungarians, reflected in occupations, customs and traditions (Josan 2009).

Beiuș Land gathers together the authentic valences of the Bihor folklore, ancient occupations (lime making, bee rearing), distinct customs and traditions;

Bârsa Land is an example of brand derived from multi-culturalism and an extremely well-outlined ethnic mixture, produced by the secular cohabitation of the autochthonous Romanians with the groups of Szeklers and Saxons colonised beginning with the 12th century. Its “central place” geographical position within the Romanian space has for centuries been a cross-roads between the three major Romanian provinces: Transylvania, Muntenia (Wallachia) and Moldavia.

Severin Land, lies at the junction of the Carpathians with the Danube which, together with the Black Sea, are among the fundamental landmarks of the Romanian ethnogenetic space). It is the place where Apollodorus from Damascus built the bridge crossed by the Romans who brought with them their civilisation, north of the River. Noteworthy are also the great many authentic elements of the Mehedinți traditions and folklore.

The few intrinsic features of the territorial system of “lands” outlined so far represent a complex, scientific, cultural and tourism brand likely to sustain the prospective future development of these territories.

THE “LANDS”, GOOD PROSPECTS FOR RURAL TOURISM

The aim of identifying the representative brand of each “land” is to present its specific elements and individualise them against similar territorial systems. At the same time, it has also a pragmatic component, namely, to ensure the resilience of its territorial body, the repository of so many ancient and traditional assets faced with the challenges of the present and future evolution of human society. In the context of the “land’s” declining traditional economy, based mainly on agriculture and wood processing (excepting Moți Land and Zărand Land, where mining has been the major occupation for several millennia now – Boțan 2010; David 2010) caused by low productivity (modest fertility and difficulties in using advanced land improvement techniques) and the need to preserve the forest fund, and its ecological and environmental functions, shifting to other occupations and economic branches is an imperative necessity. Such a branch, currently in expansion worldwide, is tourism and especially one of its particular forms, *rural tourism*.

The natural and cultural heritage of the “lands”, their harmonious landscape-related environment, the permanent opportunity for a direct contact between man and nature, as well as the chance to integrate into the local spirituality, to get a first-hand knowledge of occupations, traditions, customs, folklore and gastronomy, represent ideal conditions for the development of rural leisure tourism. Using attractive landscape features, and the products offered by the millenary creativity of the human genius, rural tourism combines the benefits of two major types of tourism, namely, leisure tourism and cultural tourism.

In response to industrial tourism, with its giant locations and infrastructures, already a producer of major dysfunctions (pollution, interspecific stress), rural tourism is the best modality to put to account an authentic, yet fragile environment, that offers privacy and recreational potential. It is also the most adequate form for the tourist to test one’s own views on nature and of the becoming of man in the midst of the surrounding landscape.

As technologisation of agriculture and robotisation of industrial processes are progressing at a fast pace, removing part of the workforce from these sectors, tourism in general and rural tourism, in particular may contribute to solving *some social problems*, such as unemployment, by providing new jobs in the most diverse areas. Moreover, the employment of the workforce is indirectly but substantially connected with rural tourism, it maintaining and developing traditional occupations in the settlements of “lands” and promoting artisanal items. The increasing demand for organic products stimulates agriculture and all its sub-branches (crops unmodified genetically, the growth of wine, fruit, vegetables and animal husbandry), small industries (the processing of local agricultural raw materials, of wood, building materials, and handicrafts). If produced in the household of a rural tourist cottage owner is a guarantee of authenticity and quality. The creation of local jobs for the population of the “lands” is a major benefit because it eliminates temporary or permanent migration from one’s ancestral environment. The phenomenon of migration has many negative consequences for the individual or collective mentality, being ultimately responsible for the impairment of the social and cultural matrix created within these territorial systems for centuries on end.

Noteworthy, rural tourism permanently combines in the structure of its activities and manifestations the concepts and attributes of other two forms of tourism, namely *ecotourism* and *agrotourism*. The analysed territorial systems have optimal conditions for the practice of both forms, rural tourism clearly dominating urban tourism by creating a balanced relationship between man and the natural environment, between the human community and the components of the landscape, basic ecological attributes of the ecotourism offer. The rural environment, defined in economic terms as the generalisation

of agricultural occupations, provides a wide range of attractions for those keen on agrotourism, from specific activities, many with visible archaic, traditional connotations, to related ones, including crafts peculiar to the former peasant household.

Since rural tourism has become the basic occupation of the population of the “lands”, preserving and protecting the characteristic ethnographic values as primary attractive resources, included in the tourist offer and the regional tourism product, is of major importance. In the case of Romania, this amounts to safeguarding the rural civilisation itself, threatened with permanent disappearance over the last two decades by economic and social leeway (a process that has been taking place in many developed European countries since mid-20th century). Therefore, instead of rebuilding traditions and customs from bibliographical sources, as is the case in the above countries, we still have the opportunity to continue them in the form and spirit inherited from our ancestors. The organic interconnection between rural tourism and the ethnographic heritage of the “lands” is already visible in those lands that have started on this line of regional development. In the “lands” of Maramureș, Năsăud, Moți, Hațeg, Dornelor and Oaș, the dynamics of the accommodation infrastructure and the fluxes of visitors foreshadowing, a boom of this modern form of leisure with definite international echoes. The tourist cottage owners’ association had in view to subsidise also cultural tourism, with folk groups being formed to present before tourists with specific regional artistic programmes. The Vadu Izei folk group from Maramureș is a perfect example in this respect.

The deep-going territorial cohesion produced by the characteristic brands and the ongoing economic conversion (from traditional agriculture and wood processing to rural tourism) make the “lands” of Romania viable territorial systems, resilient to the structural and functional metamorphoses imposed by the ever greater globalization and industrialisation of the present civilisation.

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