

Cultural heritage, tourism and sustainable development in Beius Land: The Wood Civilization as wandering tourism product

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Abstract: Beius Land is an original geographic region of Romania, having an anthropic tourism potential whose true value is not being promoted. One can especially distinguish between the tourist attractions related to The Wood Civilization, such as the wooden churches of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, well preserved in many villages of this area. Taking into account that the main reason the tourists prefer the rural environment is that they want to find out and understand the local culture and the genuine traditional lifestyle, the development strategies must be adjusted and a tourist product should be designed according to these trends. The layout of an itinerary rural tourist product on a theme like The Wood Civilization in Beius Land might be a feasible solution to encourage the development of the rural tourism in this area. The appropriate tourist capitalization of old traditions and values, the most important “dowry” of the “land” type areas, would implicitly guarantee their permanence.

Key-Words: wood civilization, rural tourism, sustainable development, Beius Land

1 Introduction

Along with the other 18 “land” type Romanian areas, Beius Land is part of the original geographic regions of Romania whose regional coherent nature is expressed in the objective reality, both territorially and especially mentally. (Cocean, P., 1997).



Figure 1 Geographical position of Beius Land.

Because of the dominant character of “land” type region, with origins in the historical past of the Romanian area and the excellent preservation of its most genuine features, Beius Land has a strong genetic opening that accounts for the development and promotion of the rural tourism. Among the arguments that can be shown for this purpose are to be noticed the vivid tradition, the originality, the strength and wealth of the forms characteristic for the rural lifestyle, the simple and deep nature of the life philosophy, the remarkable level of preserving most of the components, starting with the habitat up to the cultural and spiritual ones, the great variety of the cohabitation forms between man and nature and so on. The Romanian villages of Beius area are among the most generous and attractive places within the European rural tourism offer.

What is worth highlighting as the starting point for the present study is that the representative character and the inherent value of the tourist attraction natural elements and of the anthropic ones alike (the wooden churches, the customs and traditions genuinely kept in the daily life, perpetuating the folk crafts – the rural architecture, the wood carving etc) are relevant arguments whose unquestionable motivational

function is the ground for a specific development of the rural tourism, with more and more individual features. In the past decade, the rural tourism has been remarkably developed in Beius Land as well as in the entire regions representative for localization and promotion of the national tourism potential; the result was the impressive growth of the certified rural boarding houses and consequently the number of tourists choosing the offer specific for this kind of tourism. Thus, at the beginning of 2010, there were 44 certified boarding houses and rural boarding houses as opposed to only 4 boarding houses available in 2001 (www.antrec.ro). According to Dezsi and Benedek (2010), a share of 14,3% of the total number of households in a similar land-type Romanian area is earning 50 to 75% of the household's budget from tourist related activities.

2 Objectives and methodology

Beius Land, the area chosen for study, has been selected for its quality of "land", that may be exploited for designing a genuine tourist product since it is not an artificial territory, but one whose regional coherent nature is expressed in the objective reality, both territorially and especially mentally (Filimon et al, 2010).

The purpose of the article is to give value to the original attractive qualities of a "land" type mental space in order to create a unique tourist product whose capitalization should be a sustainable development alternative of Beius area, a pillar supporting the efforts to achieve a sustainable and balanced strategy of evolution of the rural area.

Therefore, the major objectives of the current study are (1) quantifying the way of using the anthropic potential and (2) working out some alternative solutions identified in terms of the best evolution perspectives. The study has been carried out through field research, the bibliographic documentation and the data

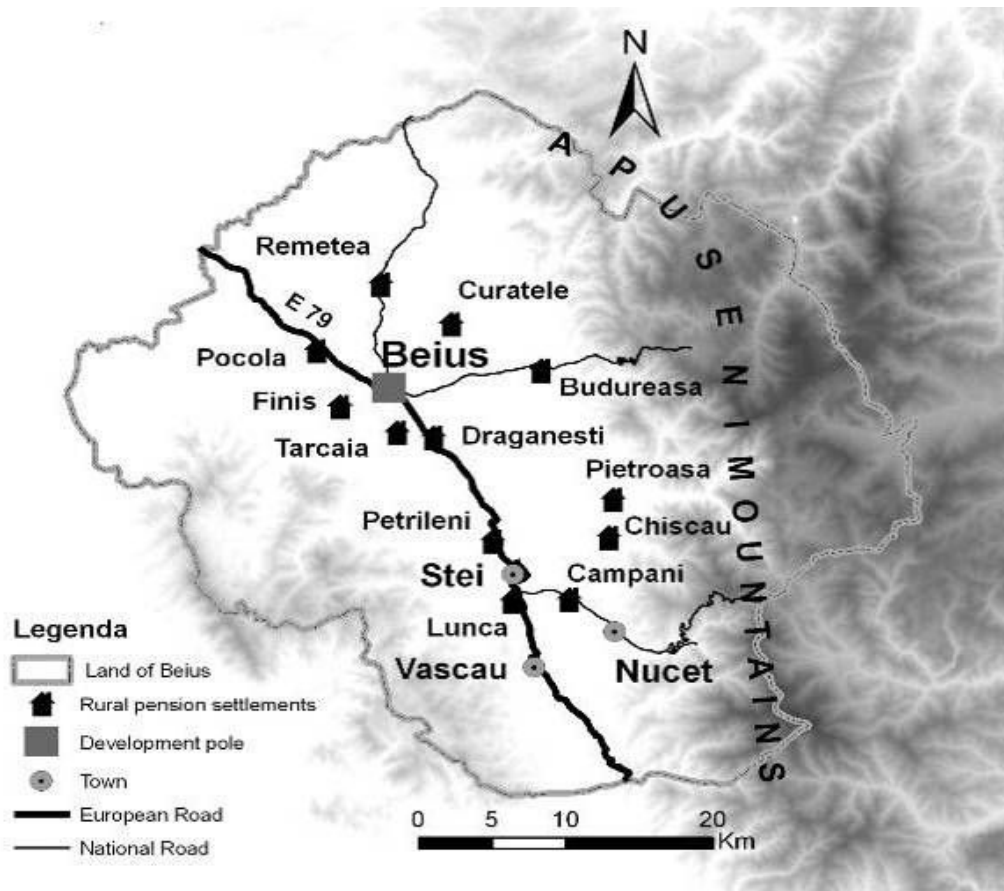


Figure 2. Beius Land. Places with rural boarding houses

gathered from the town halls of the

municipalities in the chosen area and the data from ANTREC (www.antrec.ro). The functional, statistical, cartographic, diagnostic and prognostic analysis was emphasized during the examination.

3 The Wood Civilization as landmark of the anthropic tourist potential

Outstanding through the landscape, cultural, historical and spiritual variety, wealth and value of the places, the tourist potential is a defining feature of this Carpathian area (Petrea, 2011).

The various forms of humanization (grazing, giving true value to forests and water resources, using the subsoil resources, cultivating the plants etc) generated traditional activities. A traditional activity that makes the most of these forms of humanization is the wood processing: joinery, shingling, cooperage, making tools and furniture etc, is being promoted by the existence of wide forests.

The area of the Apuseni Mountains to which Beius Land belongs, is famous for "*The Wood Civilization*" expressed both through the

Folk technical installations were very well represented until the XXth century (Stefanescu, 2001): the well bucket mills (archaic type of mill), the vertical wheel mills (many more), fulling mills, hackles, whirlpools (for processing wool fabrics) and sawmills (for basic wood processing). The change of the property system and the political form



Figure 3. Wooden church in Saca

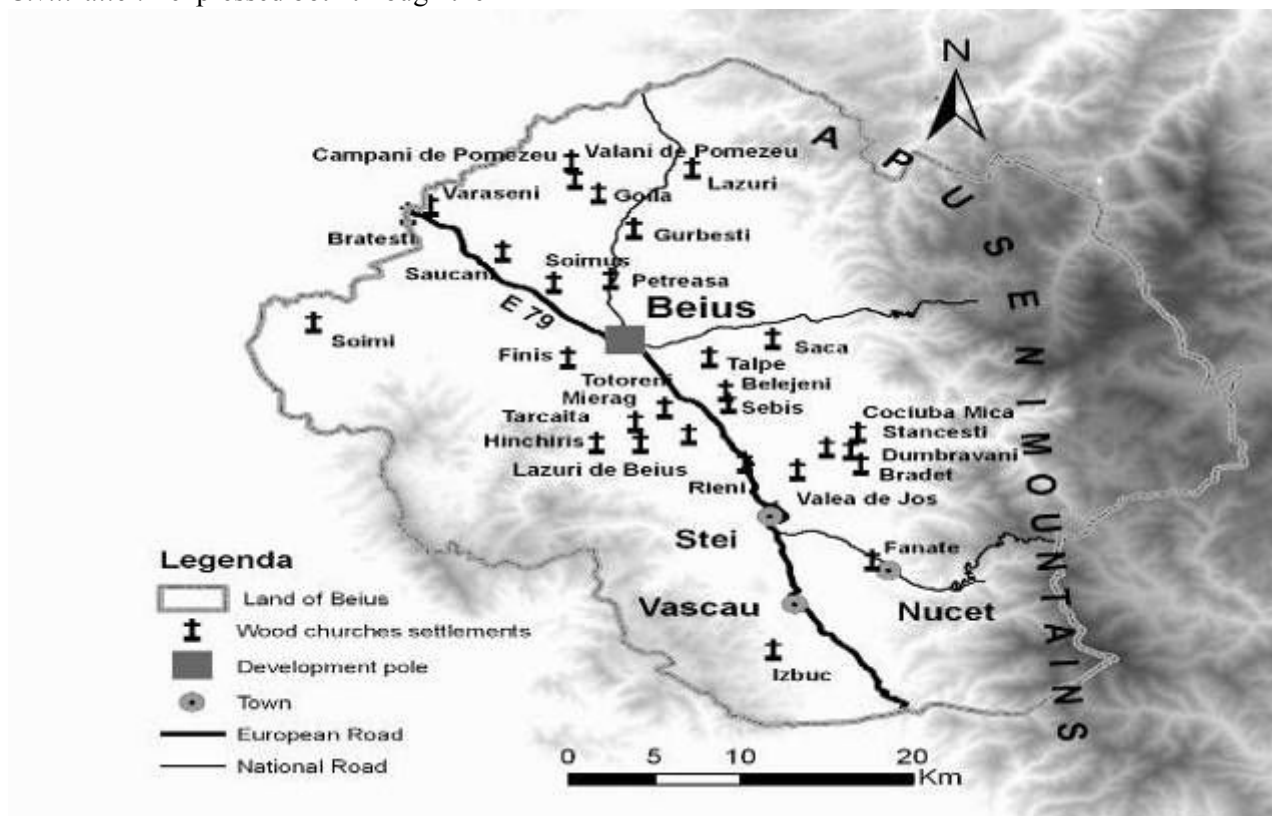


Figure 3. Beius Land. Settlements with wooden churches.

architecture of the churches, the rural households and the manufacture of various wooden objects.

of government in the second half of the XXth century, the occurrence of the industrial units specialized in wood processing and the competition

created by the objects made out of other materials, determined the decrease of the rural places specialized in wood processing.

Nowadays, *The Wood Civilization* distinguishes itself by the wooden churches, the manufacture of farm tools (rakes, pitchforks, shanks), wooden furniture (hope chests) wooden measuring pots and pots for macerating the fruits etc. Although the number of folk crafts and installations has seriously decreased, they still persist in the rural context of Beius and are special values that might be revived through the development of rural tourism. While their practical value has decreased across time, the artistic value has increased, making them first class attractions for tourists (Petrea, 2004). The most attractive anthropic tourist resources in the places with rural boarding houses or nearby are those which meet the needs of authenticity, oldness and originality. The rural places offering unique products on the market are fewer: Brădet, Budureasa, Izbuc and Chișcău.

The most important folk architectural monuments are represented by the *wooden churches* of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. There are still 3 wooden churches of the XVIIth century and 23 of the XVIIIth century (Chiriac, 2006). The most valuable one is that of Brădet, which is also registered in the patrimony of the Romanian historical monuments (Fundatia pentru Protejarea Monumentelor Istorice din Judetul Bihor, Foundation for the Historical Monuments Protection in the County of Bihor (www.monumentebihor.ro). The oldest wooden church in this area is however the one in Totoreni (1697).

Among the folk professions and crafts we can distinguish the artistic processing of wood, still preserved in the places near the boarding houses that can be easily visited.

The artistic processing of wood is specific to Budureasa. The hope chests made here are unique in the country due to the smoking process of the beech wood boards meant to increase their strength. In the past their role in the life of community was a very important one; the girls used to keep their dowry inside, therefore they had to be as large as possible (in the traditional rural houses they were also used as a sort of benches) and nicely decorated. This craft has been preserved in Budureasa (Filimon, 2007).

Beside the hope chests, we can also mention the chairs with the rests carved in hominoidstyle, specific to the villages of Chișcău and Giulești.

The craft of stair building is a traditional one, still performed in Beius Land, by the few families in the

village of Cresuia. An extremely difficult job is searching for the wood and getting it ready for manufacturing the stairs. They also process the wood in Beius Land for making farm tools needed in the households, especially forks and rakes, scythe and axe handles etc, in the places of Mierag, Tărcăița and Hinchiriș.

Many wood products are promoted at the weekly fair in the town of Beius – the development centre of Beius Land. In Chișcău we can find the ethnographic collection of the Flutur family living in this place; the collection comprises a considerable number of objects from the ethnographic area of Beius.

4 Aspects of tourist capitalization

Developing tourism in a rural community cannot be the result of isolated approaches. These must be correlated and integrated in the general development plan of a site. Therefore, promoting the rural tourism can and must be the result of a planning work of the rural development that integrates individual ideals into suitable programs having real chances of being carried out and expanded at the level of community.

Taking into account that the main reason the tourists prefer the rural environment is that they want to find out and understand the local culture and the genuine traditional lifestyle, the development strategies must be adjusted and a tourism product should be designed according to these trends. However, as urban destinations are currently struggling to promote a tourist oriented policy too, (Mazilu, Avram, Ispas, 2010), rural tourism must show flexibility, affordable prices and provide quality services, varied offers and attractive programs, in order to overcome competition. Therefore, designing an itinerary rural tourist product on a theme like *The Wood Civilization in Beius Land* might be a feasible solution for encouraging the development of rural tourism in this area.

A project that might complete the offers of rural tourism is the “*Ethno-tourism*”, since this kind of tourism may go beyond the “rural” status, including also the “agrotourism”, implemented in order to preserve the genuine values of the cultural and spiritual treasure specific to the “site”, to protect them against the kitsch and to

promote the specific regional and local symbols within the international cultural circuit (Petrea, 2006). Once implemented and carefully supervised, this type of project could become the peak of the rural tourism in Beius Land.

5 Conclusions

The rural tourism has started to become a real competitor for other types of tourism, showing it has potential. The perspectives of the rural tourism are related to mastering a clear vision, based on the reality of the national and international tourism market that takes into account the trends shown in the field of travel choices. Tourists prove to be more and more interested in the offers based on tradition, genuine character and spirituality.

Following the analysis carried out in Beius Land, we can highlight the discrepancy between the outstanding tourism potential of this area and its poor capitalization.

The harmonious combination between the natural and the anthropic elements gave birth to an attractive rural landscape, expression of the current state of the territorial system; yet the natural and anthropic tourism resources are not exploited enough, due to a lack of a coherent development strategy. Among the restrictive aspects we notice: poor access and accommodation infrastructure, lack of tourism planning at the level of objectives, superficial exploitation of anthropic tourist resources, poor information of the natives (possible hosts for the rural tourism) and lack of some attractive tourist programs.

Designing some itinerary rural tourist products on a theme like The Wood Civilization in Beius Land would contribute to the personalization of the rural tourism offer, thus emphasizing the original character of this area.

Taking into account that Beius Land distinguishes itself through a high level of archaism and a good preservation of traditions and customs, the rural tourism could become the main future development option. Giving appropriate value to the old traditions and values, the most important “dowry” of the “land” type areas, would guarantee their permanence. Therefore, the “Ethno-tourism”

could make up an essential component of the sustainable development process of the rural tourism in Beius Land.

Acknowledgement

This paper was elaborated under the framework of CNCSIS research project TE_287, nr.74/2010.

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