

CULTURAL TOURISM AND THE DURABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Preliminary reflections

Tourism, in general, and the cultural one, in particular, can have an impact on the life of a community both in positive, desirable ways and in unwanted ones, especially in the social and cultural field. One can declare that there are favourable consequences both for tourists and the local community.

It is essential that we first distinguish the social and cultural areas upon which tourism may have positive or negative effects on the development of rural areas and on their culture.

2. On culture and cultural identity

The research of cultural issues and cultural development represents a vast theme which is also difficult to fully comprehend. It is an undertaking of utmost urgency as culture is one of the factors of our existence and evolution, of our identity throughout the ages.

Being a synthesis of the experience, knowledge and behaviour of human society, culture also constitutes a basis for prefiguring the future of a human community or the of the population of certain countries.

As regards its contents, Taylor, for example, understands culture as being "a complex ensemble which includes the knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs and all the other skills and habits man acquires as a member of a society". [7; p. 53] Linton describes culture as a whole set of physical and psychological behaviours shared to a great degree by the society and consistent being familiar for the majority of the community and being passed on by its members from one generation to another.

In a more limited sense, culture incorporates set of material and spiritual elements of human life, transmitted by the society from one generation to the other. From this perspective, any human being, any human group, any society has a certain culture.

In a broader sense, culture is an ensemble of knowledge, representations and attitudes of humankind, and of psychic aspects that grant certain individuality to a people within world culture. It also encompasses a range of convictions, laws, customs acquired by humans as members of a particular society.

Structurally, culture includes four main components, as the figure below shows.

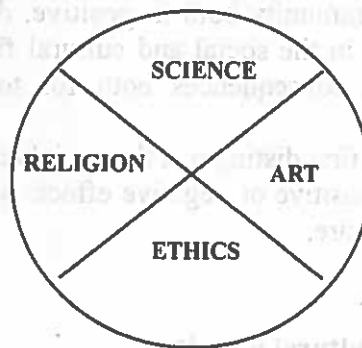


Figure 1. The principal structural elements of culture

In addition, some researchers regard culture as a sum which is acquired to a certain extent and also as creation, movement, action, a means of social transformation. [3; p. XII-XIV]. Certainly, the proportion of the main components within the ensemble of a particular culture may vary from one community to another, from one period to another.

One's membership of a social group, a community of language, tradition and distinct values, as cultural determinants, gives one the feeling of identity and a certain status in a broader human society, such as the European one.

Besides world culture, several cultures have crystallised, specific to the various peoples or human communities, urban or rural, in relation to which they are individualised, defined and exist as cultures.

In its broadest sense, culture regards creation as a complex act by which people develop the potential of their environment and transform them according to certain principles to their own interest.

The creator of cultural values is, undoubtedly, man – the product of a society.

The concrete natural, economic, technical, political and social circumstances of a human community (family, social group, people) have an impact on the nature, structure and functions of culture. This generates the differences between the various cultures of certain societies or of the same society at different points in its evolution.

One can distinguish a certain cultural universality resulting from the fact that certain cultural values circulate more and more extensively around the world, becoming part of the world heritage. In the current context, the circulation of cultural and especially scientific values is more intense than ever, with bi-univocal influences.

Whereas moral, art and religion highlight to a higher degree the specificity of a certain human community, science has a general condition, it is universally valid and has a more dynamic evolution.

Scientific issues have to circulate freely in order to ensure the welfare of the whole humankind.

Nowadays we are called to facilitate the free movement of certain cultural elements (scientific and technical ones, in particular), in all directions and their straightforward transfer for the development of humankind and especially of certain less developed human areas and communities.

We face the necessity and opportunity of creating a cultural milieu favourable to an easier, more effective transfer of cultural elements (scientific and technical ones, in particular). In this manner the free movement of people, ideas, cultural values would have a greater impact on humankind's development.

The diversity of culture on the scale of social groups, of people, and even its universality, as it was emphasised before, also results from the internal structure of culture, which is a synthesis of science, morals, art and religion. Its universality also derives from man's undeniable right to choose a certain religion, certain morals, and certain politics.

On the basis of the diversity of life circumstances and of culture, various life-styles have emerged whose knowledge and understanding can facilitate better communication between the different human communities. For example, some studies have highlighted the existence of ca. 16 "Euro life-styles" characterised by different values, attitudes, interests, and opinions. [7; p. 56]

Plummer's research [6] concerning life-style issues, carried out in the United States and in some countries of Europe and the Commonwealth, has highlighted some marked cultural differences.

By the presentation made so far, we have tried to emphasise the highly complex character of culture, the diversity of the components of world culture at different levels of the human society.

A first objective in such research may be the acceptance, to a greater extent, of the existence of a variety of cultures, without classifications and hierarchies. A first step towards achieving this goal is the acceptance of dialogue, the respect of each person's or society's option for certain morals, religion or politics in so far as they do not violate cultural values and the interests of a particular community in general.

Secondly, one may recommend better knowledge of the various cultures and of their individuality. Thus one may better comprehend the cultural particularities of certain individuals, groups and social communities in order to find ways and means to achieve more effective intercultural relations.

Thirdly, there is the question of the respect due to the culture of each individual people and human community.

A fourth necessity is to ensure a more extensive transfer of cultural elements, without imposing directions and restrictions depending on zones, groups, political and social systems, etc. This may arise from the universal right to knowledge, formation and human existence.

As a first conclusion, we can assert that the research of cultural problems may aim at recognising the diversity of cultures, at accepting of dialogue under its many forms, at greater awareness of specific cultural values, at respecting the right to individual culture of each human community and at the non-directed and easier transfer of cultural values to distinct milieus.

3. Cultural tourism – an important means of knowing and promoting cultural values and regional development

Tourism has involved voyages, people's movement aimed at enriching knowledge, exchange of ideas, cultural development in the interest of human communities. A distinct form of tourism has emerged, namely cultural tourism.

In the modern era, cultural tourism has greatly developed both in terms of organisation and number of participants. The main attractions of cultural tourism in rural areas may be: [11; p. 22]

- Local music, dances and customs;
- Religious festivals and pilgrimages;
- Architectural highlights: ruins, famous buildings, rural sites;
- Art, sculpture, crafts, festivals and other cultural events;
- Specific agricultural practices;
- Archaeological sites and museums;
- Other elements of ancient culture.

It is chiefly the young people who are interested in cultural tourism. The awareness, acceptance, respect and promotion of the cultural values of the various human communities depend on the extent to which the young's movement and access to culture and knowledge of different life-styles are stimulated.

The exchange of ideas and knowledge and the friendship that links young people involved in cultural tourism and the inhabitants, especially the young, in the rural areas can expand the methods of knowledge and understanding the present and anticipating the future.

Adults are equally interested in cultural tourism in rural areas as it is an opportunity for spending the holidays in unpolluted areas, with travel, cultural and natural sights, for sharing in the experience and life-styles of local communities. The local inhabitants can also take advantage of the knowledge and experience of the specialists and professionals of non-agricultural background who take part in rural cultural tourism (doctors, engineers, professors, researchers, etc).

Senior citizens are interested in cultural tourism, especially by spending time on farms, participating in pilgrimages and religious feasts, and revisiting areas and life-styles they had known in the past. Their life experience can represent an important source of knowledge, beneficial for rural natives.

Owing to cultural tourism, local communities have the possibility to assimilate valuable assets of other cultures, which can have favourable effects for the whole humankind.

The positive effects of rural cultural tourism can benefit the rural communities both by mutual knowledge and communication with other people and by accepting different ideas and behaviours, without adopting them automatically or implementing them in a milieu where their usefulness is not justified.

On the other hand, the exchange of opinions and ideas can generate new solutions to a series of problems affecting the rural areas, in the field of processing material resources, in medicine, hygiene, nutrition and family life.

Indirectly, the extra income gained from tourism services can help to properly equip the accommodation facilities, which will increase the access to culture of local inhabitants. The professional and scientific training potential of the young and, to a certain extent, of the adults, will also increase.

However, adopting recklessly elements of moral, art or religion of other persons or groups of tourists, of life-styles foreign to the ones of the local community can engender negative effects, distorting the native culture. The positive effects are more obvious in the professional and scientific field and less so in that of art and morals. The majority of negative effects can emerge in the field of morals and religion exactly those cultural components that best define the identity of the local communities.

To a lesser or greater extent, all the institutions and organisations of local administration can encourage the promotion of local culture and prevent foreign implants especially in the field of morals, arts and even religion.

The impact of cultural tourism on local development can be approached differently depending on particular fields of culture, while its negative effects can be inhibited so that the local community on the whole should enjoy real cultural growth and achieve the same level of economic prosperity as all the other regions of the state.

4. On policies, strategies and tactics of regional development

The issue of diminishing regional imbalances and, in general, of supporting the processes of regional development is of chief concern both in specialist studies and in researches aimed at rationalising the social and economic policies, at national and regional level. This is motivated by the following reasons:

- One can notice that differences in economic and cultural development persist or become even more striking.
- As part of economic and cultural policies, it is essential to incorporate concrete steps aimed at surpassing the problems generated by restructuring and reforms.

- In the context of future integration of southeastern European regions into the European Union the interest in regional development, under its many forms, will have to be more intense.
- Solving historical problems with neighbouring states, especially cross-border areas, also necessitates solving the existing cultural problems.

As the EU integration of new states draws nearer, it is highly necessary to achieve a balance of economic and cultural development between different states and especially between the regions of Central and Eastern Europe.

In order to properly tackle these issues, it is essential that regional development strategies be based on:

- A systematic approach of the macro-environment, even of the new EU macro-environment;
- Global development policies, not exclusively on disconnected scenarios for different regions or fields of activity. This is also due to the fact that the measures aimed at knowledge and at development involve a succession of the type "theory, hypotheses, policies, strategies, tactics", which have to be integrated into programmes (plans), and projects. [2; p. 42]

Policies establish strategies while these are at the basis of prognoses, and tactics serve at founding plans and programmes.

The lack of systematic and coherent approach of global development strategies and tactics facilitates neither the overall development nor the regional one and does not prove effective in using local resources.

According to various specialists researches, regional and development strategies have to derive from the national development strategy while the latter has to derive itself from the long-term economic, social, and cultural development strategy of the European Union. This is why the through knowledge of such (EU, national, etc.) strategies is needed.

Awareness of higher-level policies, strategies and scenarios allows that, at the rural level, the resources and ways of development consistent with global development policies be selected and employed.

Economic agents and entrepreneurs need to know the coordinates of higher-level development in order to better and more effectively orientate in their initiatives. They should not work as particles in a Brown movement.

In order to correlate regional development policies and strategies one starts both from the coordinates of global development and from the potential of the rural regions and areas.

The research of the realities of each individual region needs to be performed scientifically, by respecting principles and rules known and accepted by all researchers.

In elaborating regional analyses, one has to take into consideration first of all that the activities carried out in a certain area are inter-dependent and therefore production, the phenomena related to investment, culture, and consumption, etc must not be approached separately.

At the same time, spatial relationships are inter-dependent and asymmetrical. This is also due to the fact that the economic activities carried out in a certain area, a rural one for instance, can be based on resources coming from other areas.

In the rural development policies, and not only, clear organisation and priorities are of utmost importance so that resources should be optimally used and the multiplying effort be effective. Developing permanent activities of processing local resources can, in the longer run, ensure better incomes, population stabilities, facilitating infrastructure and market development, etc.

5. Prerequisites of (rural) development policies elaboration and implementation

The policies, strategies and tactics resulting in coherent plans and programmes of rural development are mainly aimed at preserving the territorial unity of the state and the non-discriminating approach of rural areas. Such an approach establishes the role of the local communities in elaborating and implementing certain local development strategies.

Central administration will have to deal with regional, and rural, development in a non-discriminating and non-partisan manner. Development programmes launched with internal and / or foreign support, at any level, should not affect the unitary, indivisible and unalienable character of the state.

The success of development programmes is greatly influenced by technology and information transfers, which represent ways of constructive support and cooperation in rural areas. Such transfers can be stimulated and supported by national programmes, especially those concerning small producers from rural areas. Instead of individual subventions, the technical equipment should be lent or leased to small producers by public administration institutions.

Secondly, according to the same principles, it is necessary to de-centralise the decision-making system related to local, and particularly, rural economic and social development. De-centralisation can be achieved by transferring power of decision to local institutions and economic or social agents, respecting the provisions of central authority decisions and the unity of the national territory. In developing rural areas, it is important that the local economic, social, and political interests should not contravene to national interest. In order to achieve real effects, de-centralisation needs to be supported by the transfer of certain economic and legal procedures.

Thirdly, it is vital to acknowledge the role and right to act of local administration institutions, the power to manage local business aimed at the economic, social, and cultural development of rural areas, land-development in the concerned region; improving housing facilities; infrastructure, education and professional training; health, culture and environmental protection issues.

Of course, it is important that the objectives of local development derive from national development programmes and from requirements of economic and social efficiency, without putting at risk the interests of the national economy.

Fourthly, it is important that, in developing the rural areas, local administration should only intervene in creating business opportunities and facilitating their accomplishment, in protecting the natural, economic and even social environment through widely acknowledged and accepted norms. Central administration, through research institutions, can recommend scenarios with clear objectives, means and ways of development of certain rural areas.

At the same time, the local administration needs to ensure freedom of trade, loyal competition and the protection of consumers without disturbing private entrepreneurs.

6. On rural economic and social development strategies

Rural development strategies, with potential input from tourism, and in particular, cultural tourism, must aim at reducing the differences in economic and social development of the various areas of the national territory, between urban and rural areas, without encroaching on the cultural identity of local communities.

The actual objectives of the strategic development programmes are closely related to the issues of global economic development and to the specific realities of each local community. They take into consideration the inter-regional environment (for example, cross-border areas) and even the international environment.

Research on European or even larger scale highlight the fact that the objectives of regional development strategies display dissimilarities in terms of content or at least form, from one country to another, according to their national or local particularities. Under the circumstances, the *ad litteram* adoption of such strategies may prove unfruitful and may lead to the alteration of the regional or local individuality and may have an unfavourable influence on the culture of these rural communities.

The different European countries have included in regional development strategies such objectives as:

- Supporting regions with declining industry to convert economic activities on new, prospective coordinates;
- Encouraging investment and implantation of new economic agents;
- Accelerating economic growth through policies of national resource allocation;
- Balancing demand and offer of workforce in areas with excessive or insufficient workforce;
- Creating / modernising infrastructure;
- Supporting urban and / or rural reform. [9; p. 16]

One can notice the attention paid to areas with declining economy, in general, and declining industry, in particular, and to attracting capital influx and modernisation of rural areas.

In the context of Romanian rural areas, special attention needs to be paid to the de-population of villages and to eliminating their dependence on only one or two types of activity.

The strategic objectives must lead to a diversification of local production. Investment should be focused on those fields of production that generate permanent job and which justify, consequently, the modernisation of local infrastructure, population stability, housing development, cultural heritage protection, maintaining the economic and tourist attractiveness of the areas.

Many rural areas are poorly developed both as a result of economic reform, which has involved job cuts, and to various natural and historical conditions. Such rural areas can and must be included in the policies applying to disadvantaged areas, by which the state budget supports their economic and social development.

The economic revitalisation of these areas can be achieved by granting considerable facilities to investors on the initiative of the local administration. The actual use of these facilities needs to be controlled more strictly.

It would be useful to provide information regarding local business opportunities, which can be offered by business centres.

In view of the fact that restructuring in Central and Eastern European regions is carried out at the request and recommendation of international bodies, tackling the regional development issues is hard to achieve without their support.

Partial foreign financing of some internal programmes must lead to achieving some top priority objectives for the national and local economy and to the effective use of internal financing. The central administration, which directly intervenes in the relations with foreign investors, has a significant role in negotiating partnership conditions.

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