

## ***RURAL TOURISM IN LAPUS LAND - A PRODUCT INSUFFICIENTLY EXPLOITED***

**Helena Maria Sabo, Assoc. Prof., PhD, "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca**

*Abstract: Lăpuş Land is located at the foothills of Țibleş, overlapping in most the upper basin of the Lăpuş River, hence the name "Lăpuş Depression." This area has significant tourism potential and the tourism activity is the main phenomenon that was imposed after 1990 because of the rural areas that had a real development potential, particularly in the development of rural tourism. Today tourism is poorly capitalized, but a highlight of the natural and anthropic attractive potential that has this area could increase the interest of local authorities' for tourism development in general and rural tourism in particular. Thus, this study is an inventory of natural and anthropogenic resources in the territory, as well as a presentation of the possibilities of tourism development, its current state of development, its evolution over the years on the whole space of the people living here, types and forms of practicable tourism and, the main tourism risk factors in the region, impact of tourism and the preservation of traditional urban architecture and propose of new ways to exploit the tourism areas.*

**Keywords:** *Lapus Land, rural tourism, traditions, tourism recovery, natural resources*

### **Preliminary considerations**

Lăpuş Depression is part of "tectonic-erosive depression corridor Baia Mare-Copalnic-Lăpuş, formed upstream of the gorge dug of Massif Preluca made by the river network [...] that deals almost entirely the upper basin of the river Lăpuş" (Dezsi, 2006a).

Due to its sub-carpathic character, Lăpuş Depression is a distinct unit, individualized, bordered by mountainous and hilly units on about one third of its parts. Thus, in the South, Lăpuş Depression is bordered by Breaza Peak (974 m Peak Breaza) west boundary is marked by the presence of massive Preluca (810 m Peak Florii) and Pietriş Hill and the massif Şatra (1041 m).

The northwestern part of the Transylvanian Depression and Maramureş County includes on their territories geographical forms known as "țări (country)". In Maramureş County runs not less than four "countries": Țara Maramureşului, Țara Chioarului, Țara Codrului and one that will be analyzed below, Țara Lăpuşului (Lăpuş Country) (Posea, 1962).

Țara Lăpuşului is located in the north-west of the Transylvanian Depression, being superimposed on most of Lăpuş Depression, the name coming from the river that runs through the depression (Rus, 1995).

### **The role and importance of the Țara Lăpuşului, for promotion and development of rural tourism. The role of attractive resources in shaping attractive dowry.**

In the meaning of World Tourism Organization and other European organizations, rural tourism, rural tourism is defined as "a form of tourism that includes any tourist activity in

rural areas organized and led by local people, taking advantage of local tourism resources (natural, cultural - historical and human) as well as facilities, tourist structures, including hostels and agro-tourism farms".

Thus, the main "actors" in rural tourism activity should be local people because they are the only people who can keep the memory alive and unchanged of the Romanian traditional village( Simion, 2011). Village means for practitioners of this type of tourism the human dimension, social intimacy, school, church, places that marked the life of a man during its existence. The village is the place where local craftsmen show their true value, is the place of small businesses in handicrafts, the place where preserving customs and usages make the holidays to be different.

Țara Lăpușului, because of its attractive potential can be assigned in rural tourism, without forgetting development opportunities of other forms of tourism. Thus, due to anthropic well-developed tourism potential of the Țara Lăpuș, with affirmation on the tourist market, we chose to analyze the development of rural tourism in the area.

The rural tourism have raised slowly on the tourism market in the Land of Lăpuș, which was not developed due to the relatively small number of people who visited the area, and most of them aimed the religious sightseeing. However, to exploit the potential of the rural area in 1997 was formed the Rural Tourism Association "Lăpușul" which aimed to ensure organizational support for ongoing in good conditions this form of tourism and to include the tourism offers in the profile market. The activity of this association was a weak, so that the support came from other association that deals with the promotion of rural tourism in Maramures, named the Association of Development and Promotion of Rural Tourism in Maramures, based in Târgu Lăpuș city.

Lăpuș Land or the country of the legendary outlaw Pinteș stands from a great distance, under the shadow of Țibleș and Șatra and by the beauty of the places, the people and picturesque settlements that have lot of things to show to those who want to visit it.

The ethno-cultural area of Land of Lăpuș, located at the crossroads of four major geographical areas, keeps in a natural setting dominated by Țibleș massive and the volcanic mountain Șatra Pintii, the original folk traditions. The area hosts numerous wooden churches; some of them are in the UNESCO patrimony, many traditional elements and villages with welcoming people. The formation of this "image" specific to the people living here have attended both her position among the four "countries" and the specific natural environment and people who helped the diversification of the attractive resources of ethnographic and folklore order.

The villages from Lăpuș Land have a rich cultural, historical and architectural heritage, scenic rich landscapes in recreational resources, hydro and leisure, non-mechanized lifestyle, hardworking and hospitable people, villages that deserves to be known and used for tourism purposes.

Regarding the natural touristic potential, the area is characterized by a natural complex environment, given by the diversity and geological composition which leads to the existence of three areas of relief: mountains, piedmont and hilly. Each area presents various natural tourism resources, except the depression where they are fewer representatives (Butian, 2004). Thus, elements such as the volcanic neck fragmented by the tributaries of Lăpuș river, the

presence of karst and karst topography, presence of Lăpuș Gorge in western area, the presence of numerous gorges and picturesque valleys and of Baba keys represents the first step in knowing the Land of Lăpuș, not lastly are the main elements that can lead to the development of tourism in the area. Therefore, the existence of a natural heritage fund, hydrographic and biogeographic compact, was emerged the practice of mountain tourism (trekking), wildlife tourism, spa tourism in the area (Dezsi, 2006a), fishing tourism, tourism for extreme sports (climbing, rafting), and not least for winter sports tourism.

All the elements mentioned above, in conjunction with numerous elements of anthropogenic origin, which are kept from generations to generations, represent an important branch in shaping the tourism offer by the people living here. The Anthropic touristic potential of the Land of Lăpuș is represented by traditional households, specific architecture, crafts, folklore, costumes, customs, traditions, etc. (Puscas, 2009)

Since rural tourism depends largely on these factors, it is imperative to keep them so and is needed an information of the local population on the importance of these resources for the development of rural tourism and to highlight the fact that these elements should remain natural, i.e. not changed by various trends from our days. Despite such risks may arise, Lăpuș currently faces no such problems, here the households (Dezsi, 2006b) appear to have their specific, inside old houses remained unchanged, with whitewashed walls and blue, ornamented with dressers, icons and mirrors with fenced "towels" 1.6 m long and 0.3 m wide with embroidery, with dominant colors red and yellow, and with the famous crates or drawers with beautiful fabrics placed on the "ruda" above the bed, signifying the richness of the house. Also the gates from Lăpuș port, which means a representation of the famous gates of Maramures, is a means to enter in the "world of creation" made by craftsmen's, creations that range from the traditional gates and continuing with the households mentioned above, the organization of these, in the traditional system, therefore, works made in these area are representative and the building material is namely the wood (Puscas, A)

The traditional rural architecture, craftsmen carved reasons, traditional plants represented in particular by mills and whirlpools of water, together with customs and traditions related to different stages of life or to the different times of the calendar can support the development of rural tourism due to their maintenance. The prospective market of these traditions is one important because I believe that many people are interested, for example, how are the holidays here, especially the Nativity (Christmas) and Resurrection (Easter) at the country, or people who are interested in how to perform the famous events such as "barn dance" crack, bee, wedding etc. Also, a custom as "Măsurișul" (sheep milking for the first time in that year) which takes place in early May when they marks the going out to pasture of the sheep and lambs separation, organizing and measuring the amount of milk that each "stânaș" (sheep owner) will receive, these can be an event that is a concern for some people.

A source of attracting a large number of tourists can be given by the manifestations of folklore. Also known as "*țara horilor în grumaz*" (the country with songs in the neck), or the land of „*cântecelor cu noduri*" (songs with knots). The Lăpuș Land can be proud with the characteristic elements of folklore, songs, dance and ballads that are specific to this region and make it more beautiful.

The lăpușnean popular song plays through his lyrics feelings of love, friendship, and also malice, drunkenness or stupidity. "In Lăpuș the songs ("horile") are gently-sloping as the hills, are not staying under the tyranny of the end, they could continue however, as suggest the Brancusi's Endless Column" said the rhapsod Grigore Lese, who highlighted "horea lungă" (the long dance) or " horea adâncă" (the deep dance), helped also by the rhapsod Nicolae Pițiș from Lăpuș.

In addition to these songs, and ballads an important role in the Lăpuș folklore have the witty that can be said by men and women. These are spoken out in weddings, caroling and various other events.

The main ethno-folklore events occurring in Lăpuș are:

Intercultural Festival of Peasant Traditions - " *Pe drumurile lui Leșe* " - takes place from August 14 to 21;

"*Horea-n grumaz*" Festival - takes place in May, reaching a ninth edition;

Stoiceni Festival "*Parada portului, cântecului și dansului lăpușean*" - takes place in June-July, reaching XXX edition;

Winter Festival of Carols and Customs - in week before Christmas (Stoica, Pop, 1984);

These popular items specific to the region, are supported by many religious objectives that contribute to attracting a significant number of visitors. Lăpușul is one of the most remarkable areas in the wooden church architecture and peasant mural painting; most of the monuments were built in the eighteenth century.

The wooden churches of Lăpuș have a rectangular polygonal apse, unlike Maramures where the high roof has only one lap, with wide eaves. The defining element of the building is the high bell-house tower over the nave, with arcade galleries and high pyramid helmet, reminding the reminiscent Gothic spiritual vision. Located on the heights these monuments announced their presence and fit lovely in the landscape. These monuments in the deepest sense, are not only simple church, but ethno-historical meaning signs of situations in the past with high significance in the cultural life of the area (Petrea, R., 2001).

From these churches are distinguished: Rogoz wooden Church at - UNESCO monument (built in 1663 from elm wood), Rogoz wooden Greek-Catholic Church (XVIII century), Cupșeni wooden church (seventeenth century), Libotin wooden church (Century XVIII) Văleni wooden church (XVII century), Lăpuș wooden church (XV century), Dobrich wooden church (XVIII century), Ungureni wooden church (XVIII century), Răzoare wooden church (century XVIII) and Stoiceni wooden church (XIX century). All of them are characterized by specific iconography through the mural paintings in which appear laic elements and portraits.

The monasteries compose architectural ensembles centered on an edifice of worship in churches or cathedrals category. Besides the religious function itself, the convents are also characteristic habitats of producing goods and tourist attractions, craft items, patron's pilgrimage. In their long existence have become frequently cultural and educational centers gathering in their cells primordial values, prints, manuscripts, old books.

Between monasteries stands: "St. Anna" Rohia Monastery (Leșe, 2001), Dumbrava Monastery (Șatra), Șatra Hermitage, Holy Trinity (Breaza) of the Suciul de Sus Monastery, Sfântul Ilie Monastery from Coroieni, Rohița Monastery from Boiereni and Ruoaia Monastery from Lăpuș .

In addition to the objectives of worship, a special place in the hearts of people living here occupies the monuments dedicated to local heroes, exposed in Târgu Lăpuș ("December 5, 1918", "Eroilor" bust of "Petru Rareș") in Baba ("Statue of the Romanian Soldier") and in Lăpuș ("Eroilor").

Another important factor to be considered is the accommodation of infrastructure. It plays an important role in tourism development, and currently Lăpuș is a step backwards in terms of this factor. Following an investigation of the field surveys was observed a decrease in the number of guesthouses along the last years, from 31 boarding houses recorded in 2003 to 9 guesthouses recorded in 2013, with a total of 125 beds. These are distributed as follows: three hostels in Târgu Lăpuș (Mirescu, 2006), two guesthouses in Răzoare and one hostel in Rohia, Suci de Jos, Groșii Țibleșului and Băiuț. Despite that in the area are 9 forestry chalets with a total of about 95 places, but only the pensions mentioned above are meeting the conditions required to be included in the touristic circuit (Rus, Bott, 2000).

The most important leisure and recreational facilities are those around Lighet Lake from Târgu Lăpuș, where are facilities for water sports, the lake is used by locals as a swimming pool equipped with boats. Also, there are ways of recreation for tourists on the artificial lakes in the Lăpuș, Dobricel, Țuli, Rohia and Borcut, where is a possibility of fishing and swimming.

In terms of access, Târgu Lăpuș is an important road junction because of the link he has with other areas (Baia Mare, Țara Chioarului, historical Maramures or Țara Năsăudului), ensuring a flow both toward and from Lăpuș Land. The country's road network is converging toward Târgu Lăpuș to Lăpuș Land, where intersecting county roads 182 (Baia Mare - Copalnic Mănăștur -Cernești - Targu Lapus - Rohia - Măgoaja (Cluj county) over Peak Breaza by Măgoaja to homes and 109F (Jud .Salaj - Baba - Coroieni - Vălenii Lapus - Beds - Targu Lapus - Lapus - Strâmbu Băiuț - Cavnic over Rotunda).

## Conclusions

Country of Lăpuș is a place that leaves a nice reminder to everyone who visits it, both by its natural resources, and human, cultural or religious. Places like Țibleș Mountains, Șatra Mount, Lăpuș Gorge, Babei Gorge and traditional elements like folk costumes of people living here, traditional architectural elements and many traditions that happen here, creates a true emblem of these area.

Even if all the villages are integrated in this "country", each has its ethnographic and cultural or mental specific. Nowadays these specific items of archaic culture are in many cases combined with elements of modern culture. Thus, there are increasingly more changes on domestic architecture, in particular the way of life of the villagers, their behavior, especially the traditional port. The fact that some people wear costumes of other areas can be certainly considered a bad thing, but can neither be appreciated because each area has its own specifics that must be respected and appreciated.

As we mentioned in this paper, Lăpuș has a varied natural setting with outstanding volcanic landforms with gorges and ravines, caves, numerous lake areas, springs, mineral springs, etc. All these attractions of the Land of Lăpuș are recognized not only in the region but also abroad, the most prominent example being Stoiceni mineral waters, and some attractions as

protected nature reserves, flora and fauna. Thus, because of touristic potential, both natural and anthropogenic, can be created a diversified tourist offer, these rural space have many resources to be integrated in a touristic market.

The only problem that persists and that is a big disadvantage for this area is that the territory is not arranged properly in order to develop tourism and exploit local resources. Unfortunately, at present there is great emphasis on developing tourism, but they try to introduce Lăpuș in the tourist circuit.

Protecting the specific elements of the village in conjunction with the development and promotion of rural tourism is an opportunity for villagers to design and sell the specific products, making them known to tourists, and adding another source of income in addition to existing ones. Villagers are the key actor's which can develop rural tourism because they are the ones who know the local traditions, local customs and traditions; they are the ones who from generation to generation have kept alive the traditional village memory, they are the ones who can keep intact architectural elements, cultural and why not gourmet.

Tourist visits in rural areas benefit the area because they can help to maintain trade, in the creation of new jobs, to promote and support local industry and folk arts and crafts, and attracting new investors.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

- Butian, F. (2004). *Țara Lăpușului*, Galaxia Gutenberg Publishing, Târgu Lăpuș.
- Dezsi, Șt. (2006 a). *Țara Lăpușului. Studiu de geografie regională*, Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing, Cluj-Napoca.
- Dezsi, Șt. (2006 b). *Patrimoniu și valorificare turistică*, Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing, Cluj-Napoca.
- Leșe, Gr. (2001). *La Obârșii*. Charmides Publishing, Bistrița.
- Mirescu, C. (2006). *Țara Lăpușului*, Etnologică Publishing, București.
- Petrea, Rodica (2001). *Turism rural*, Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing, Cluj-Napoca.
- Posea, Gr. (1962). *Țara Lăpușului. Studiu de geomorfologie*. Științifică Publishing, București.
- Puscas, A (2009). *Ascultări din lumea satului: introducere în etnografie*, Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing, Cluj-Napoca.
- Rus D. (1995) *Munții Țibleș*. Corvin Publishing, Deva.
- Rus, D., Bott, R. (2000). *Țara Lăpușului*. Corvin Publishing, Deva. Rus, D., Bott, R. (2000)
- Simion, S. A. (2011). *Turism rural în Maramureș*, Cluj-Napoca.
- Stoica, G., Pop, M. (1984). *Zona etnografică Lăpuș*. Sport-Turism Publishing, București.