

TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC AREAS. TOURISTIC POTENTIAL AND ATTRACTIVENESS

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Abstract: The present study aims to check whether traditional products from specific ethnographic areas are influencing the motivation of tourists in choosing that region, which would be reflected in the increase of the touristic attractiveness. Traditional products are part of material culture which, along with spiritual culture, constitutes the cultural-historical potential of an area.

Tourism can be practiced anywhere, as long as there is a motivation to visit, travel or see other places. Almost every area may represent an area with touristic potential.

Ethnographic areas have an advantage from this point of view, because they could provide traditional products and a peaceful environment for tourists who choose to spend their vacation in this manner. Depending on the geographical location of an area, traditions, habits and skills of the resident population, we find different traditional products. The way they are made and their variety can determine the specifics of that area. For example, in mountain villages we find traditional products different from those of the plain or the delta.

Traditional products include not only food products but also other products such as clothes and shoes (traditional costumes), jewellery, musical instruments, utensils for various activities in the house or outside (gardening, field work), ceramics, traditional art products, etc. All these products made by artisans, create a special atmosphere, which is different from an ethnographic area to another, and they spark the curiosity of tourists.

Cultural-historical and natural potential are important in the calculation of the tourist attractiveness index, to which we add the other two components: the general infrastructure and technical-material facilities. The tourist attractiveness index depends on these four elements, and their relative weights determines the type of tourism in the area, which in turn can lead to a sustained and sustainable economic development under the conditions of strong competitiveness in present tourist destinations.

Two Romanian ethnographic areas that have the ability to increase their tourist attractiveness index through the use of traditional products are Neamț and Dorna, and our study will concentrate on comparing these two areas.

Keywords: *tourism, ethnographic areas, traditional products, tourist attractiveness, sights.*

Introduction

Romania has a rich and diverse touristic heritage, including medieval fortresses, castles and plenty of churches and monasteries. It also has legends, myths and traditions which have been cherished and preserved over centuries. Here we still use many old customs, folk music and dances and a large variety of traditional products.

Even since the start of the Middle Ages Romania had many ethnographic areas, called "countries", among which we can mention: Vrancea Country, Loviștei Country, Hațeg Country, Bîrsa Country, Zarand Country, Dorna Country, Olt Country (Butura 1978, p.13).

The present paper will mainly study the similarities and differences between two ethnographic areas: Neamț and Dorna, once known as „Dorna Country” and „Neamț Land”.

We will take a look at traditional products from the point of view of tourism, which could lead to a better valorification of the ethnographic areas and the associated products.

Important aspects of the touristic potential of the two areas are not known well enough and, by promoting these aspects, we could increase the touristic attractiveness of the ethnographic areas.

The paper is structured in two main sections: Section 1 investigates the relationship between ethnographic areas and traditional products and Section 2 looks at the touristic potential and the ways in which it can be used to better promote the ethnographic areas of Neamț and Dorna. To conclude, we give a brief summary of the paper and present the main conclusions.

Traditional products and ethnographic areas

Both notions have a very broad character, including multiple aspects, and we will concentrate our attention only on the relations between traditional products, ethnographic areas and tourism with respect to rural regions.

We have to mention that ethnographic areas are usually different from the geographic and administrative delimitations. They are defined only in terms of common customs and traditions which often cross administrative delimitations and even country borders. According to the “*Dictionary of Popular Art*”: ethnographic areas are territories more or less precisely delimited which present unitary ethnographic characters determined by sociohistorical traditions defined in terms of human settlements, occupations, housing, clothing, popular art, as well as spiritual cultural manifestations and way of life. There is no minimum number of elements to justify the use of this term to denote an area. (Stoica, G., Petrescu, P., Bocșe, M., 1985)

So, according to the definition above, there is no clear, i.e. straightforward, way of differentiating between two ethnographic areas. This is valid also when comparing Dorna and Neamț. Due to the geographical proximity, which gives them similar natural resources and historical conditions, the ethnographic landscape will also present similarities. For example, we can mention the similar traditional architecture which uses wood as the main building material.

Other similarities are also found in the morphology and structure of settlements, in the diverse ways of exploiting natural resources, in traditional occupations (animal husbandry, agricultural activities) and in traditional products.

There are also an important number of differences between these two regions, determined by natural factors like landscape (height and orientation of local mountains), hydrography (which influenced the accessibility to different regions), and also by social and economic factors like trade between regions and the associated trade routes, access to technical innovations etc.

In these conditions, various spiritual and material cultural elements are becoming specific only to certain areas, and this will give rise to different traditions and customs and different ways of making certain products.

The connection between the rural space and traditional products in Dorna and Neamț comes very naturally, because in the collective mentality the term traditional by itself implies a rural product made and preserved using techniques different than those used in the large scale industry in cities.

In time the rural ethnographic landscape evolved, suffering changes which reflected not only in appearance but also in economy. Some occupations have degraded (like sheep herder), some traditional tools and installations have been abandoned in favor of new

technologies, traditional crafts became isolated to inaccessible regions and were abandoned over time or will be abandoned in the near future due to population aging phenomenon.

In these rural ethnographic areas the tourism can be a good economic and demographic revitalizing factor, because we can still take advantage of the natural potential and the traditional ethnographic inheritance. We can also add the new tendencies of practicing ecological and sustainable tourism.

The connection between tourism and traditional products is evident, but the presence of tourists is conditioned by the general infrastructure and the technical-material facilities, and also on the existence of promotion programs of traditional products.

Unfortunately, at a national level, Romania has relatively weak promotional strategies and policies compared with the rest of Europe. This led to the formation in 2008 of the “National Office on Traditional and Ecological Romanian Products”, whose mission consists in promoting the concepts of “Qualitative Product” and “Ecological Product”, in technical assistance for the elaboration of projects to promote traditional and ecological products, in promoting the image of traditional products etc. This office is governed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Recently, the criteria used in defining the notion of traditional products were clearly defined by the administrative institutions.

So, in the “Guide of Good Practices – Certification of traditional products”, issued by the “Compartment of Traditional Products and Sustainable Development”, we find that a traditional product is a: “food product made in Romania using local materials; which do not contain food additives; which shows a traditional recipe; a traditional production method and/or processing and a traditional technological process, and which is clearly distinguishable from similar products within the same category”. In the same Guide we also find the conditions and eligibility criteria for the certification of traditional products (Order no. 724/1082/360/2013 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Health and National Authority for the Consumer Protection).

Traditional products are seen differently by tourists, resident population and by the authorities. To some international tourists traditional products are European certified products, which guarantees their quality. The certification also protects the name and recipe of that product.

In Romania there is only one out of 4000 traditional products registered at an European level: the Topoloveni jam, it received the certification of Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) from the European Commission in 2011.

The market for traditional products at the European Union level registers 14 million euro annually (Popa, 2011).

In Romania, traditional products are usually commercialized in fairs and markets and only few of them are available on the shelves of large stores. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, traditional products have annual sales levels of over 100 million euro. (Gheorghe et al, 2013). According to Panța (2011: p.8), up to 2011, there were 2653 Romanian traditional products certified at an European level.

In 2013, in Romania, there were over 4 000 registered traditional products, most of them from the milk and dairy and meat sectors, followed by bakery products (milling

industry) and beverage industry, according to the information provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The proportion of Romanian traditional food products is low due to the lack of promotion. For an international recognition the individual producers and farmers need investments in production technology and this fact is unfortunately discouraging. Some of them are not really interested and others may have limited financial possibilities, and there is also the competition with fake traditional products.

The same situation can be found in Neamț and Dorna, where recently associations between local artisans, or between farmers, have been formed. This fact improved significantly the image of the area, going towards the creation of a touristic ethnographic brand, that could compete with similar national and international areas.

The distribution of traditional products in 2013 is show in the map below.

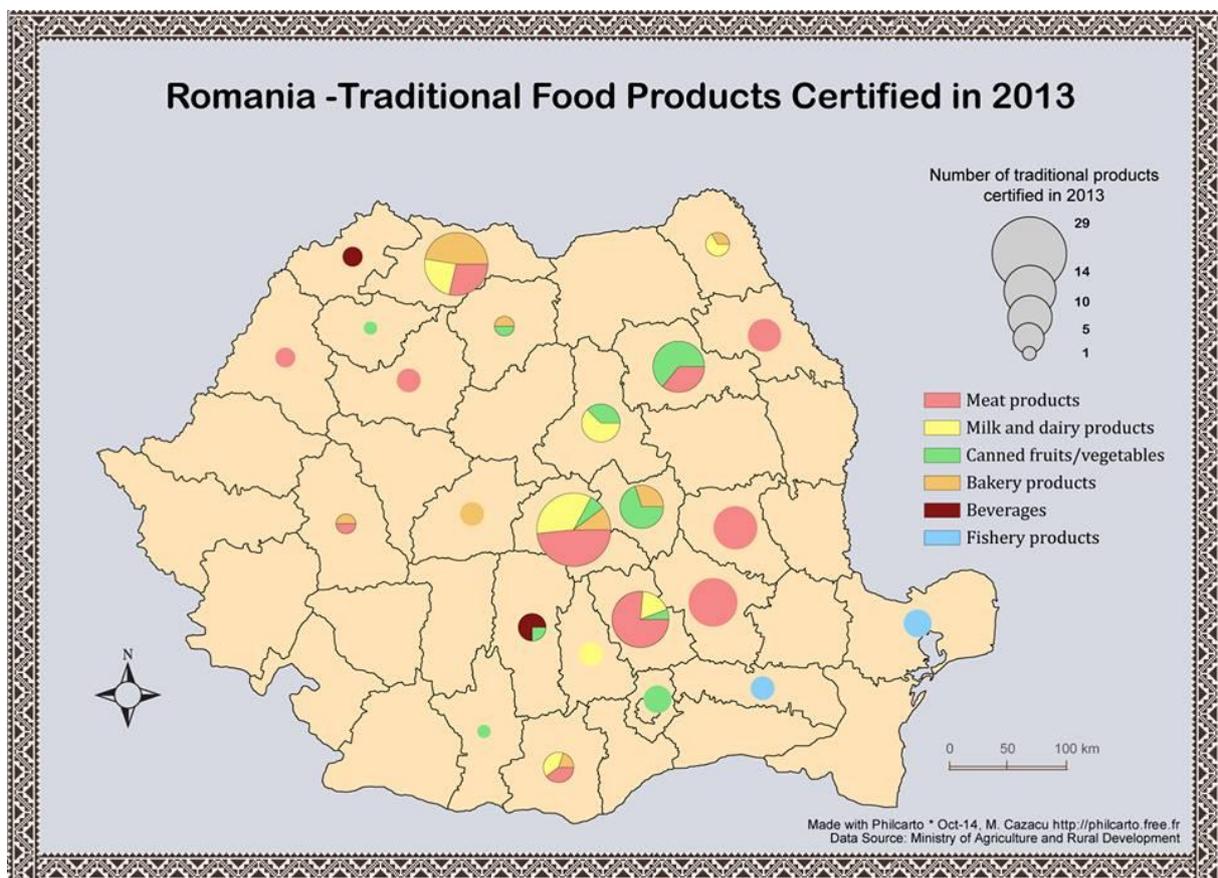


Figure 1: Distribution Map of Romanian Food Products in 2013

In 2013 certified Romanian traditional products were mostly located in the south and central part of the country, with the largest proportion in Brașov, followed by Maramureș, Prahova, Buzău, Vrancea, Covasna, Neamț etc. The largest percent is occupied by meat products, then milk and dairy products, canned fruits/vegetables and bakery products.

Looking only at Dorna and Neamț we see that only Neamț has certified products in 2013, most of them being in the canned fruits/vegetables category.

The most frequently certified food products are: pork (pastrami, pudding with meat (“Tobă”), sausages, pudding with meat and rice (“Chișcă”), sausages (“Caltaboși”), milk and

dairy (different types of cheese (“Caș”, ”Urdă”, ”Cașcaval”, ”Brâză de burduf”). In the bakery products category most famous Romanian traditional products are: Cheesecake (“Poale-n brâu”) and homemade sponge cake (Cozonac de casă). Traditional fishery products are seen only in two counties from the south-east of the country: Tulcea and Ialomița.

In the following we will show a cartographical representation of certified traditional products in Neamț and Suceava for a period of 10 years (2005:2014).

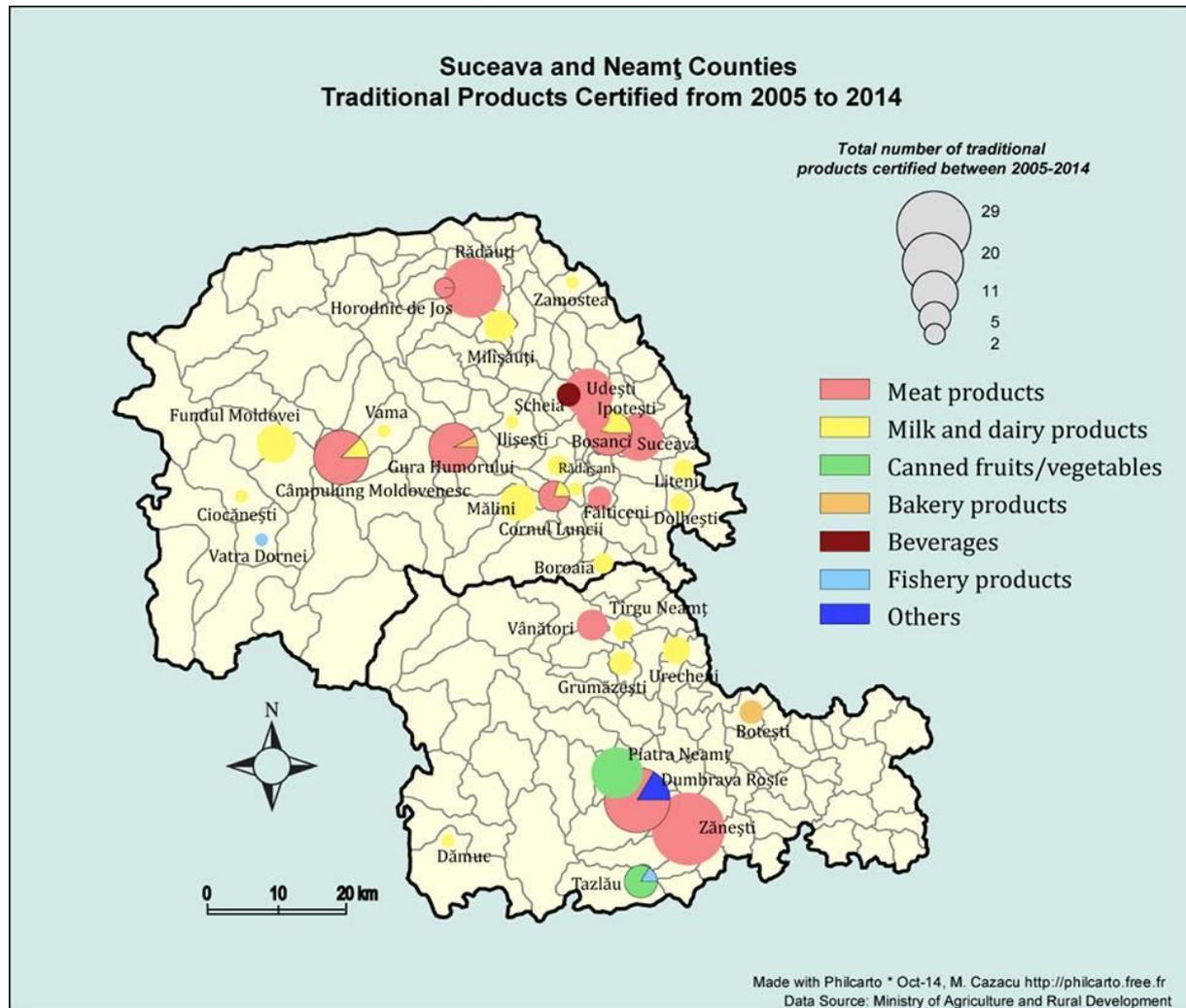


Figure 2: The distribution map of the traditional products in Suceava and Neamț counties, (2005 -2014)

The data are taken from the Ministry of Agriculture and were processed using Microsoft Excel and Philcarto.

In Suceava the largest number of certified products is in the meat products category followed by milk and dairy products. In Dorna ethnographic area there are only two certified products: Smoked Trout from Bucovina (*”Păstrăv afumat de Bucovina”*) in the fishery category and a milk and dairy product from Cocănești called *”Cașcaval de Botuș”*, certified in 2006.

In Neamț, we see that a single milk and dairy product is in the west part of the county while all the other are in the central-eastern part. Dumbrava Roșie and Zănești villages have a considerable portion of certified meat products. Piatra Neamț has the largest number of

certified canned fruits/vegetables products, especially jams. Well represented are also Vânători (meat products), Urecheni, Grumăzești and Tîrgu Neamț (milk and dairy products). The only certified fishery product called ”*Hârzob de Brad*” is registered in the village of Tazlău. Here, as well as in Dumbrava Roșie, we also find jams and syrups from the canned fruits/vegetables.

We can see that the locations of different traditional products are well correlated with touristic areas and this can be of mutual benefit.

Touristic Heritage and traditional products

The touristic potential of an area is defined as “the total number of opportunities provided by the natural and social environments for touristic activities, including also the opportunities that are not specifically used in this purpose.” (Muntele, Iațu, 2006: p. 15)

The touristic potential can be divided in: arranged, used and usable. The proportion of these three types differs from one region to another depending on the conditions and the overall importance given to tourism. The touristic potential can be natural and anthropic. The two ethnographic areas studied in this paper have both types well represented.

From a tourists point of view, ethnographic resources are among the most recognizable and attractive components of the touristic potential. Among ethnographic resources we can mention: traditional occupations and crafts, traditional costumes, customs and traditions, traditional art and architecture, traditional techniques and also folklore acts.

The ethnographic heritage is given by the spiritual and cultural heritage of each community, being the result of their spiritual and historical evolution. In each ethnographic area the tourists come in contact with different cultural elements from those in everyday environments, which, combined with events and manifestations, contribute to the creation of a specific, traditional atmosphere.

So, the ethnographic potential is enriched by the presence of ethnographic resources, which are usually the main focus of rural communities and occupy a central part in the anthropic touristic potential of the area.

The attractiveness of touristic resources is well known for the two ethnographic areas in our study, there are many famous mineral water springs (Vatra Dornei, Bălățești, Oglinzi) and also monasteries and churches (Neamț, Agapia, Văratec, Sihla, Sehăstria), museums (Ethnographic Museum from Piatra-Neamț, The Historical and Ethnographical Museum from Târgu Neamț, Art Museum “Iulia Hălăucescu” in Tarcău, Craftsmen Museum Nicolae Popa, Vasile Găman Museum –Vânători-Neamț, “The Ancestors“ Ethnographic Museum- Borca), natural reservations, historical sites etc.

Each region will have a certain specificity given by the interactions among different factors, and, depending on the local or nearby resources, also specific products, which in time can become traditional products with touristic value.

Traditional products are part of the material culture and are determined by the specificity of each area. The factors determining the traditional character of an area also determine the uniqueness and originality of traditional products. This can have a definite impact on tourists choosing one region over another.

Although the two regions have similar natural potential and infrastructure, they also have specific elements depending on their spiritual culture and historical contacts with other social groups.

Besides the traditional food products, in the two ethnographic areas, we also find other types of products like: traditional masks, painted eggs, wood artefacts (utensils, furniture), ceramic artefacts, fabrics and traditional costumes (Romanian traditional shirts-”Ie”).

All of these products, manufactured by popular artisans, are expressions of traditional spiritual culture and have different forms and styles depending on the area. This is also seen in the local architecture, especially for wooden churches like that in Văleni – Piatra Neamț from the 16-th century. Memorial houses also preserve the specific local architecture, like the “Ion Creangă” Memorial House in Humulești – Neamț from the 19-th century.

The wood art is very well represented in the Neamț and Dorna ethnographic areas. We can see for example adorned porches at the houses in Crăcăoani, Vânători, Pipirig. Even the main gates, doors and windows are sometimes sculpted, a good example being the house of Neculai Popa from Târpești and that of Vasile Gaman from Lunca-Vânători – Neamț, which are good examples of an excellent ethnographic promotion of the Neamț area. We should also mention the houses from Tazlău, Căndești and Costișa, which also have specific architecture and wood art.

In the Dorna ethnographic area wood art is also well represented. At the Ethnographic Museum Vatra Dornei we find a large number of traditional products, among which we can mention: two “scafaie” (small wooden vessel) taken from Broșteni, which are considered unique; a wooden milk vessel from Gura Negrii; clay vessels and painted eggs from Ciocănești. In the Gurmăzești and Vânători-Neamț villages we find many traditionally sculpted artefacts inside churches (iconostasis, crosses and chapels).

In both areas, traditional costumes were manufactured by women in their households. They worked each clothing piece individually, thus assuring the uniqueness of each costume. As traditional fabrics we can mention, for old households: rugs, tapestries and carpets and for more modern households: blankets and carpets (vibrant colors).

Important sewing centers in Neamț were at Ghindăoani, Pipirig, Borca and especially at Agapia and Văratec where they had their own style and coloring methods. Now there are only specialized weavers manufacturing carpets and tapestries in traditional patterns. Well known weavers are in Pipirig (Rodica Ciocartau) and Bălțătești (Maria Mihalachi).

Traditional masks are among the most well-known traditional products, with famous manufacturers spread out over the entire county of Neamț and also in Dorna. With different shapes and sizes, they are used mostly in rituals (fertility, rain etc.) and most often they are associated with winter holidays. Traditional craftsmen use mostly goat and sheep skins, bark and metals in manufacturing masks.

Among the most famous masks craftsmen we can mention Neculai and Elena Popa from Târpești, known at an international level for their originality and diversity. They made hundreds of masks with human appearances (old man, old lady, doctor, gypsy and tradesman), animal faces (bear, ram, goat, bird) and others.

Another mask manufacturer is Albu Ion from Timișești who’s making masks for large groups of Christmas Carols singers participating in traditional rituals during the winter

holidays. Other traditional masks manufacturers are found in Răucești, Pipirig, Ceahlău, Borlești, Doljești and Gârcina.

In the past, masks had a very important and powerful emotional role, but in the present their functional value and playful character have almost disappeared, becoming simple decorative objects. This evolution also led to a change in the manufacturing methods.

Summary and conclusions

We studied the complex relations between traditional products, ethnographic areas and ethnographic heritage within the context of touristic potential and attractiveness with specific references to two ethnographic areas situated in the north-east part of Romania: Dorna and Neamț.

The main conclusions of our study can be summarized in the following list:

- a) The two ethnographic areas have a very well defined ethnographic potential which can be used in promoting strategies for ethnographic tourism.
- b) Romania in general, including Dorna and Neamț, has not only a good ethnographic potential but also a large number of well-established and famous traditional products.
- c) Out of 4000 certified traditional products in Romania, only 1 is recognized at European level. In order to increase the number of European recognized products we need to increase the tourist attractiveness of an area by better promoting the ethnographic touristic potential.
- d) Recently, due to the establishment of several local associations, the degree in which ethnographic areas are promoted has increased, and this can also be seen in the increase of the number of certified traditional products.

The ethnographic heritage registers an apparent paradox: in well developed, industrialized and urbanized countries it has almost disappeared while the most beautiful, richest and unaltered ethno-folkloric heritage is still found in developing countries. This is due to the fact that real popular culture is found only in rural areas, with well-kept customs and traditions, and this is only possible in areas in which modernism did not completely replace traditionalism.

Acknowledgments

**This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/159/1.5/S/133652, co-financed by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013.*

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