

# Rural Tourism and Economic Diversification in Maramures, Romania

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## Abstract

Maramures is one of the mountain regions of Romania where rural tourism pilot projects have been started. The paper examines the potentials for this business in the western part of the county ('old Maramures') and evaluates the progress made so far through the setting up of local tourist associations, the publishing of accommodation lists and the provision for a range of activities. The resources are very considerable but the area suffers from remoteness and a number of other constraints will have to be overcome if employment in tourism is going to play a significant economic role in the future. However it is very important that initiatives should succeed in view of recent mine closures and the growing dependence on seasonal employment outside the region at a time when the local labour market is still expanding.

Key words: Agriculture, Diversification, Handicrafts, Mining, Rural Tourism, Unemployment

There has been a modest tourist industry in Maramures for a long time (Iacob 1981) with a range of hotels in the county town of Baia Mare complemented by more modest provision in Sighetu Marmatiei (Sighet for short), the smaller towns and the rural areas. The countryside in the southern parts of Maramures - the districts of Codru (beyond the Somes), Chaior, south of Baia Mare, and Lapus in the southeast - is relatively unspectacular but in 'old' Maramures, comprising the Iza and Viseu valleys, the surrounding country is much more attractive and the cultural life is especially rich. The Maramures Mountains mark the frontier with Ukraine, complementing the Ignis-Gutai-Tibles range to the south (Figure 1). The latter culminates in the Rodna Mountains which offer potential for winter sports and it is here at 'Complex Borsă' where most of the accommodation outside Baia Mare has been provided: including the 'Cascada' and 'Stibina' hotels and the 'Hanul Bu-

tinariilor' chalet. Mineral water is available at such places as Baile Borsă, Craciunesti, Dragomiresti, Faina and Valea Vinului but the springs have not yet attracted any significant use outside their respective localities. A small bathhouse at Botiza is appreciated by the locals because of the curative properties of the water but it has no commercial significance. Bathing is available at former salt mines, particularly Ocna Sugatag (also referred to as Ocna Maramuresului), where a modern hotel now operates. Mountain chalets and boarding houses are largely restricted to the effective area for weekend recreation around Baia Mare and although the Puzdrele chalet is available in the Rodna but there is no chain of such hostels comparable with the Bucegi or Fagaras Mountains (Ianos & Iacob 1985). Development of facilities is highly appropriate at the present time and the main purpose of this paper is to outline the potential for rural tourism in the area and to evaluate the progress made to date in the context of constraints and opportunities.

## The Local Context

Under communism the area remained somewhat isolated since this northern border region had no major international transit function and the main line railway along the Tisa Valley (built by the Hungarians in the late nineteenth century), which looped into Romanian ter-



Fig. 1. The pastoral economy of Maramures: a group of boys watch the cattle on the Botiza common grazing

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ritory between Campulung pe Tisa and Valea Viseului in order to reach Sighet, was used only by former-Soviet freight trains after the USSR annexed the easternmost part of former-Czechoslovakia in 1945 and abandoned the arrangements which had previously enabled Romanians to reach Sighet in transit via Satu Mare and Halmeu. Consequently an all-Romanian route to Sighet which has been temporarily held up by the war was pushed ahead with renewed vigour after 1945 and completed in 1949. The principal local roads were improved (crossing the Gutai Pass at 1109m between Baia Mare and Sighetul Marmatiei and the Neteda Pass at 1093m between Targu Lapus and Budesti) but old Maramures remained relatively unknown especially in view of the delay in surfacing the main road from Bucovina over the Prislop Pass (1,416m), between Borsa and Iacobenii, which would have opened the way for tourists to travel by car through the northern regions from Suceava to Baia Mare and Satu Mare.

The region maintained its traditionally high rate of natural increase, but considerable employment was generated by the expansion of mining for non-ferrous ores (Opris 1983) and also in the manufacturing industries of Baia Mare and Sighet, while the agricultural and forestry work remained labour-intensive. Even so there was net out-migration from the area and many young men took seasonal work in farms and forests throughout the country; returning home for the major festivals and at peak times of agricultural activity in areas that were not collectivised (Iacob 1961). But the mining indus-

try, is undergoing severe contraction and unemployment is now a serious problem. The Remin Company of Baia Mare, which operates 16 mining complexes in Maramures and adjacent areas declared some 5,900 redundancies in 1997 (45.5 percent of the total employed). Land restitution is generating more interest in agriculture but the markets are too weak to stimulate investment and intensification. And the latest environmental legislation has had an adverse effect on pastoral farming through restricting the use of woodland for sheep grazing (Idu 1998). Many people have moved to Banat (some 16,000 over the past decade) where the emigration of Germans has made houses available, but economic diversification within Maramures is much needed (Pop 1997). Initially rural development strategies were discussed by a Commission for Mountainous Regions operating within the Ministry of Agriculture and some progress was made in disseminating West European principles of rural diversification and 'mountainology'. This work is now in the hands of the Regional Development Council for the North West Region created in 1998 (one of eight large regions coordinating regional development measures with EU structural assistance) (Guvernul Romaniei 1997).

However, the scale of the problem is such that people are having to leave the district to find seasonal work. This is a traditional response to a situation where peripherality discourages light manufactures and where the modest agricultural potential for arable farming opens the way for casual work in the main cereal-growing areas for payment in kind. But

now that commuting from the countryside to factory work in urban areas is greatly reduced, while a relatively high birth rate continually increases the labour surplus, there are many more young people who wish to earn money outside Maramures through seasonal work to generate funds which can be invested in small farms and businesses back home. The men find forest work in Apuseni, Banat and Poiana Rusca; also in the construction of tourist bungalows and chalets in the Brasov-Prahova area, railway maintenance (especially in Arges and Satu Mare) and in building work abroad (especially in Austria, Germany, Greece, France, Israel, Italy and Turkey) while the womenfolk manage the homes and small farms. At the same time, both men and women seek temporary work in agriculture: haymaking on the Tarnava Plateau, Sibiu Depression and Getic Subcarpathians (where the local population is elderly and resident active men have more rewarding occupations); and harvesting field crops in Banat-Crisana, fruit in the Arges, Satu Mare and Valcea areas and grapes in Moldavia and Vaslui (Popa-Bota & Iuja 1999). Such experience contributes new ideas on architecture and resource management; though customs and traditions are not affected.

In this context rural cultural tourism has surfaced as a new business with considerable local potential which could become part of a programme of integrated regional reconstruction by local interests with significant academic input; notably the 'Schita Propunerilor Destinate Revitalizarii Economico-Sociale a Maramuresului' prepared by a Bucharest-based ge-

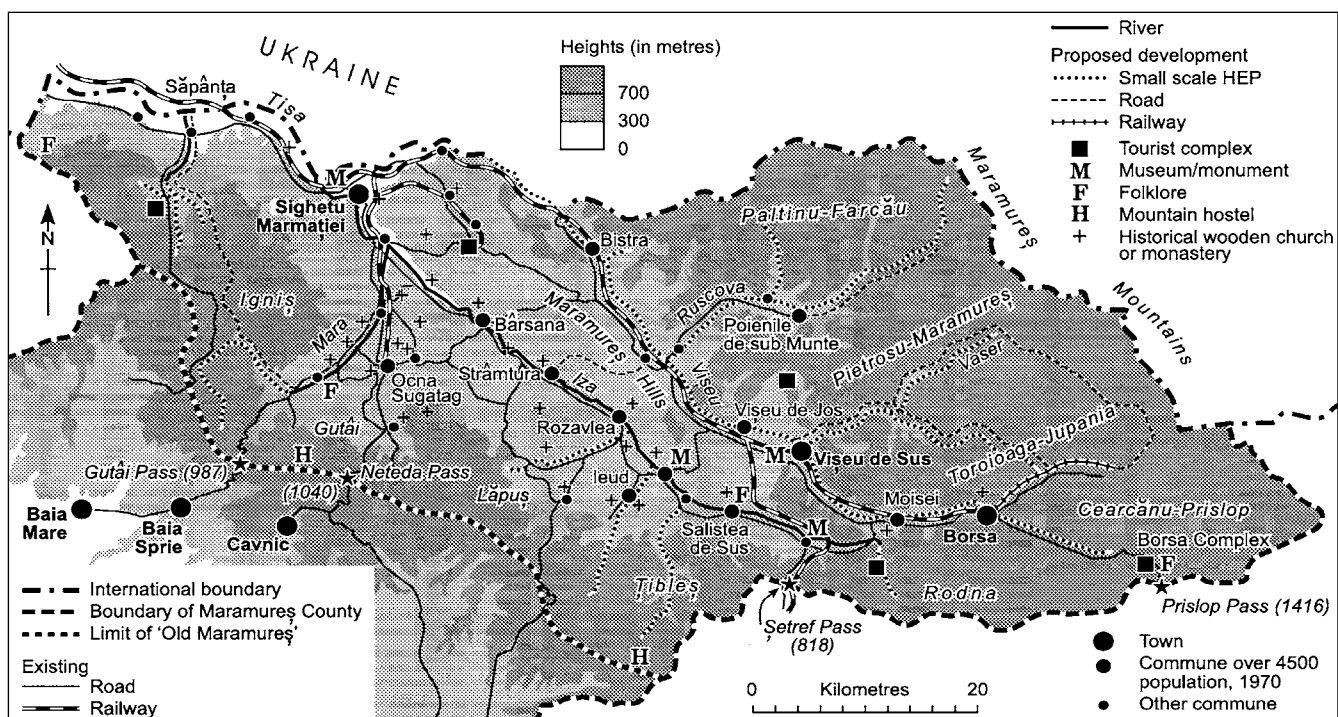


Fig. 2. Old Maramures, showing aspects of the rural development plan by G. Iacob. Source: Iacob 1994



ographer well-known for his researches on Maramures during the last 30 years (Iacob 1994) (Figure 1). He anticipates an increase in the number of chalets and mountain resorts (Costiui, Izvorul Izei, Runc-Sapanta and Valea Vinului) backed up by extensions to the road network. Borsa has been proposed as a pilot centre for the tourist programme of the USA Agency for International Development (USAID) following the preparation of a strategic plan by the Maramures County Council working with consultants in Baia Mare. This would allow expertise from American mountain resorts to contribute to the development of the infrastructure at Borsa, including an airport to handle domestic flights from Bucharest; also improvements in accommodation, roads and telecommunications which could open the way to a resort of Olympic standards (a ski-jump of Olympic standards already exists and there is cable car access to three ski runs).

Rural tourism is a business which attracted both internal and external support in the early years following the revolution. As explained elsewhere (Turnock 1999), opinion within Romania initially orchestrated during the communist period by Radu Rey was complemented by backing from EU PHARE and appreciated by government as one of several approaches to the rebuilding of the tourist industry. National government priorities stimulated interest in the Planning ('Urbanism') Department of Maramures County Council while local NGOs emerged through the activities of ANTREC, the National Association for Rural & Ecological Tourism, and the Brussels-based 'Operation Villages Roumaines' (OVR). Created initially to oppose draconian rural planning in the last years of the Ceausescu Era, OVR was reprofiled for rural development purposes after 1989 through a new foundation ('Fundatia Ru-

rala din Romania') which convened discussions in 1990 on a range of rural issues and considered pilot projects in 1991 with rural tourism identified as a specific objective the following year. In 1993 OVR began to organise a tourist network in 16 villages throughout the country (selected according to history, culture and architecture/national patrimony) and this work was then placed in the context of sustainable rural development - following the Rio de Janeiro Conference on sustainable living.

### The Potential for Rural Cultural Tourism

The mountain scenery is considerably enhanced by a cultural landscape in which peasant agriculture and vernacular architecture is prominent (Plate 1). The area has important historical associations in view of the significance of the eastward migration by Bogdan (a local leader) and his followers for the subsequent founding of the Moldavian Principality in 1359. Organisation of this epic transfer seems to have hinged on political consolidation under a local ruler ('cnez') within the valleys and depressions. The process is exemplified by 'Cnezatele Izei', centred on the fortress of Cuhea (which once belonged to Bogdan) in the upper Iza Valley: hence the village name Bogdan Voda and the reference to Bogdan's country through the early thirteenth century 'Terra Bogdana' which extended over the watershed into the adjacent Viseu Valley. Meanwhile similar village groupings crystallised in the lower Iza and Mara valleys, in the Tisa valley around Campulung ('Cnezatul Talaborului') and also north of the Tisa ('Cnezatul Barjevei'). By the fifteenth century a larger grouping emerged through the assembly of local rulers ('Adunarea Cnezilor') in 'Tara Maramuresului', with a prince

('voievod') performing social-judicial and political functions at the head of the hierarchy. However, although the Romanians have always been clearly in the majority, there is also a history of settlement by Germans, Hungarians and Ukrainians during the last few centuries. Relations have been generally harmonious despite the excesses of the Second World War (when Maramures and northern Transylvania returned temporarily to Hungarian administration) resulting in the virtual disappearance of the Jewish community, previously

active in the timber business and in trade with Moldavia.

The richness of the ethnography, with its subtle variations between districts and even adjacent villages is made apparent through the Maramures Ethnographic Museum in Sighet. But it is also very evident in the villages like Bistra, Leordina, Moisei and Petrova where traditional costume is regularly worn on Sundays including the boldly striped apron ('catrinita'), the Medieval-style rawhide footwear ('opinchi') or felt boots bound with thongs (Richardson & Burford 1996 p.241) (Plates 2-3). There is much interest in preserving the distinctive characteristics of local textiles, including blankets, carpets and rugs produced on looms installed in dwelling houses. Small industries operate in many of the villages. They take the form of workshops where woodcarvings are produced and ceramics are manufactured (as at Sacel). The wife of the Botiza priest has rediscovered the authentic vegetable dyes traditionally used for Maramures carpets with their motifs of animals, flowers and dances ('hora') in dark greens and browns and which are thought to originate in Moldavia. The ceramics of Sacel are noteworthy, though most handicrafts are concerned with woodworking and the art is well displayed by the craftsmen ('meseteri') of the Iza Valley. All parts of the Maramures have their customs and festivals which blend pagan beliefs and Uniate rite: the cult of the dead is particularly strong. Note the Hoteni 'Tanjaua' festival in May (a fertility rite celebrating the first ploughman), the 'Hora de la Prislop' in August and the winter carnival in Sighet. The wearing of masks ('mastile') in connection with traditional rituals is a significant interest in itself. Folk songs are a rich resource especially in view of the distinctive technique used by local musicians (Burford 1996 p.252).

Particular mention should be made of the wooden churches which demonstrate the quality of the wood carving tradition perpetuated today by the small



Fig. 3. Costume at Botiza: note the distinctive apron worn by the women.

timber mansions' which are characteristic of new house building by shepherds and woodcutters throughout the Iza Valley, along with the ornate Maramures gateway ('poarta maramuresana'), which often features a 'tree of life' with astrological symbols as well as people and animals. The wooden churches arise because the Orthodox Romanians were forbidden by their Catholic Hungarian overlords to build churches in stone (1278). Much rebuilding occurred after the last Tartar raids (1717). In 'old' Maramures there are many examples including Roza-velea 1717; Borsa and Ieud (the lower or 'ses' church) 1718, Barsana 1720, Bodgan Voda 1722, Surdesti (1724, with a particularly tall spire), Budesti (the 'Susan' church) in the 1760s, Harnicesti in 1770, Calinesti 1784 and Plopis (1798-1804). However Breb church dates to 1531, while the upper church of Ieud dates from 1364. Several churches also date to the seventeenth century: Poienile Izei 1604 (with 'nightmarish paintings'), Sat Sugatag 1642 and Moisei 1672. The paintings are of great interest besides the wooden architecture: reference may be made to the post-Byzantine style of Alexandru Ponehalski (1750s-1770s) displayed at Budesti, Calinesti and Ieud; the 'more imaginative' work of Radu Munteanu (1760s-1780s) in Botiza and Desesti; followed by the nineteenth century Baroque style of Toader Hoder and Ion Plohod at Barsana, Cornesti and Nanesti. Graveyards contain many fine examples of craftsmanship in wood but quite unique is the 'merry cemetery' ('cimitir vesel') of Sapanta (a very successful tourist village supporting a number of handicraft stalls) where the painted wooden memorials each convey a humorous message. The work was started Stan Ion Patras who died in 1977, but his two former apprentices, Turda Toader and Vasile Stan, continue the tradition.

On a larger scale there is a major mining industry but it does not yet cater for tourism (not least because of continuing pollution problems) but there is coverage in the museums. More serious mention should be made of the tradition of wood exploitation by narrow-gauge railways, with the Vaser Valley system (Viseu de Sus-Coman) as the sole survivor in an area where there were formerly links from Leordina (where a woodyard still remains) to Poienile de sub Munte and from Sighet to the Mara Valley in addition to the salt railways referred to below. The Vaser itself is of much interest for the water attracts fishermen (trout and umber) and kayak enthusiasts while walkers can reach the logging cen-

tre of Macirlau with a trail continuing over the Jupania ridge to Baile Borsa and naturalists can see how "bears and deer drink from the river, unperturbed by the trains and loggers, while in the mountain forests live stags, elusive lynxes and also wolves, a dozen or so of which are shot each winter when the packs become too ravenous" (Richardson & Burford 1996 p.256). Forestry operations include charcoal burning of wood in large conical stacks: a smouldering process is contained during the relatively high temperatures of the daytime by the blocking of air vents which must then be opened up in the evening when smoke can be seen emerging from the sides of the stacks. Transport, now undertaken almost universally by lorry, originally took the form of rafting on the Tisa and its tributary the Viseu: a tradition that is now being re-established in the interests of tourism.

Salt is no longer produced in Maramures, but the landscapes of Ocna Sugatag and Costiui are an impressive reminder of the past when salt was distributed across the Hungarian plain by rafts floating down the Tisa and subsequently through the narrow-gauge railway connections with Sighet. Large hollows created by subsidence are now filled with water. The 'Gavrill' mine at Ocna Sugatag was abandoned 1920s, whereupon some water was pumped from the 'flash' to provide a bathing station ('statiunea balneoclimaterica'). Relocated after the Second World War (when the salt industry was finally closed in 1950), with the addition of baths in 1972 and a hotel in 1976, the economy of the village was rebuilt (though some miners commuted to work elsewhere). After resiting on higher ground to avoid risk of sudden subsidence, further investment Ocna Sugatag's tourist industry followed in the 1980s. It is backed by local industries

for 'artizanat' (clothing and knitwear) - also by a brandy ('tuica') distillery in the old pumping station - and there is now a large modern complex frequently designated Ocna Maramuresului. A surfaced road helped to boost the local market function (whereupon the railway closed in 1975) and prepared the ground for the creation of an urban centre under communist 'sistemizare' (Visovan 1984), though the proposal has not yet been implemented. Meanwhile, the landscape of hollows, shafts and pools is replicated at Costiui where the production of very pure salt continued until 1931 with the narrow-gauge railway link surviving until road modernisation in 1973. A bathing station was also opened at this time, although the business is small compared with Ocna Sugatag and there is no tourist accommodation. However at both places there is scope for further recreation facilities on what is currently waste land affected by subsidence.

Although the wood processing is generally handled at large plants (Sighet Marmatiei and Viseu de Sus) there are smaller water-powered mills which survived the centralising pressures of the communist period. At Poienile de sub Munte the sawmill ('joager') was built in 1964 and, with favourable arrangements for getting wood from the forest, was able to provide sawn timber for cooperative farms lower down the Viseu valley. It was originally under cooperative ownership but has now been privatised. Corn mills were often closed down when factory-milled flour became available but others survived (Poienile de sub Munte and Sacel) as private operations with taxes paid in cash and in kind to the local authority. The number of mills has increased since 1989 because the capital required is modest and the power is cheap where families have the skill to build and install water wheels them-



Fig. 4. Costume at Moisei: a group of women take an evening stroll



selves. The limited restitution of woodlands will also provide more scope for small business. It is already common for farmers to operate their own circular saws while small portable petrol-driven sawmills provide further scope for small businesses.

### The Development of Rural Tourism in Maramures

Rural tourism has developed strongly in old Maramures where restitution has created a large number of very small farms and families are traditionally large, in contrast to the Chioar and Lapus areas where smaller households and greater agricultural potential reduce the stimulus to seek other occupations. A branch of ANTREC is operating in Maramures, but much headway has also been made by OVR in building up a local network ('retea turistica') providing bed and breakfast and guiding services at very acceptable prices (Wortthelet 1997). Premises are inspected annually to check different aspects of performance according to a star system and a local representatives keep records of all overnights and collect a tenth of the income for the local association. OVR publicity highlights the Iza Valley (Botiza, Ieud and Vadu Izei) as well as Sapanta in the Tisa Valley; emphasising the wooden churches; village music; woollen carpet production; seasonal festivals and nature reserves. Vadu Izei is the main centre of the organisation's operations in Maramures, with an information and reservation office (Rusu-Grigore 1993). There has also been input by Maramures County Council (agriculture and planning sections) in collaboration with a local PHARE programme

and the Development Centre for Small & Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Potential has been identified in Borsa, Botiza, Moisei, Sacel, Salistea de Sus and Sapanta on the basis of scenery and human resources (including the motivation and adaptability of local communities), as well as the local infrastructure which is now being improved by the installation of natural gas heating.

However, local initiative is making a difference. At Botiza the community appreciates the importance 'adding value' through provision of handicrafts and guiding services and facilities for cart/bike rides and fishing (Plate 4). In 1997 OVR ran a folk violin festival ('Mara Muzical') based at three Iza Valley pilot villages (Botiza, Ieud and Vadu Izei). This 'European Festival of Fiddle & Countryside Music', seeking to boost rural tourism and authentic handicrafts, was the idea of a Frenchman Bernard Houliat and was realised with the support of the Ministry of Culture in Bucharest and OVR, along with 'The Museum of the Romanian Peasant', the 'Maramures Land' association and the EU PHARE. Various foreign guests attended, plus numerous local fiddlers from 'historical Maramures'. This festival is now to be an annual event integrated into the European cultural itineraries and combining with other local festivals, with local cuisine and with other events organised by the churches. Local facilities are being improved (the former forest railway in the Mara Valley is now a cycle path) and some special tour companies have started up. An initiative at Viseu de Jos offers donkey safaris covering 10-25kms/day with overnight camping. A seven day itinerary takes in the Vaser Valley,

Prislop and Rodna (with the option of an extension for another week in order to reach the Bucovina monasteries). Other destinations are the Bargau and Caliman Mountains.

The first national guidebook for rural tourism was published by ANTREC in 1998 and it featured eight centres in Old Maramures with a total of 81 agrotourist farms (ATFs) and 554 rooms. A local ecological organisation ('Societatea Ecologista din Maramures' SEM) has produced a brochure with help from the PHARE 'Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societati Civile' (Table 1). It has cooperated with the 'Iza' Touist Association which is active in Borsa, Dragomiresti, Rozavlea and Salistea de Sus and Sieu and the 'Solovan' Tourist Association in Barsana, Campulung pe Tisa, Desesti, Oncesti, Rona de Sus, Sapanta and Sighetu Marmatiei. Neither booklet is comprehensive: for example neither contains entries for Bocicioiu Mare although rural tourism in this village has been described very positively in some Western tour guides (Josse et al. 1999). Generally all houses have bath, shower, kitchen, heating, with TV, a washing machine, private open space and childrens' activities (though some do not have a washing machine or lack a shower in addition to a bathroom). Most take pets but there are frequent exceptions in Botiza, Rona de Sus and Vadu Izei. A majority of the ATFs are accessible by telephone and offer foreign language skills. More EU support may be forthcoming in the future through 'Special Action for Pre-Accession Measures for Agriculture & Rural Development' (SAPARD), providing ECU500m/yr for Romania from 2000) and an agricultural consulting agency, operating within the Ministry of Agriculture, will start working on a pilot basis to stimulate business projects covering all aspects of farming and food production linked. There will also be PHARE-funded training for agricultural extension.

Reference should also be made to the cross-border dimension given the present government's priority for the cross-border cooperation and the existence of a Carpathian Euroregion which now includes Maramures as well as three other counties in the North West of Romania (Bihar, Salaj and Satu Mare). Since Romania's immediate neighbours (Hungary and Ukraine) are both enthusiastic members there are good prospects for enhanced accessibility, once the old attitudes associated with the closed frontier regime and the former Soviet threat have been overcome. There will be posi-



Fig.5. The village of Botiza with a number of two-storey houses (encouraged by communist 'sistematzare') among the traditional bungalows.

tive benefits from the literal rebuilding of bridges in the Tisa valley and the reintroduction of through rail services serving both the Ukrainian side of the valley and the Romanian districts of Satu Mare and Sighet. An agreement with Ukraine aims to develop tourism through Halmeu (a border crossing near Satu Mare, lying to the west of old Maramures) as part of a programme of closer contacts between northern Romania and Zakarpattia. Currently the border is used for freight and local cultural contacts. There is also a daily passenger train which runs through Ukraine in order to connect Satu Mare with Kosice (part a service from Constanta to Krakow). There are already commercial contacts dating back to 1994 between organisations from Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine: Zemplen Local Enterprise Development Foundation (Satoraljaujhely), the Regional Enterprise Development Centre (Velke Kapusany) and the Economic Management Association of the Carpathian Society of Hungarian Intellectuals (Uzhgorod). The aim is to help develop SMEs in the border region with a database to provide information; to establish entrepreneurial zones and customs-free areas (Zahony and Zemplen for example); and provide middleman functions to help establishing contacts. Indeed a tri-border customs-free area is recommended for Dobra-Damoc-Salamon. Romania could mesh into this network and benefit from a long-term development in accessibility involving regional airports and telecommunications as well as road and rail. But there is a need for more institutions to supply contacts between local government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Romania the neighbouring countries.

## Constraints on the Growth of the Business

Most of the issues here concern rural tourism in Romania in general because of a range of organisational barriers (Roberts 1996). Although legislation is in place to moderate tax burdens and simplify the path through the bureaucracy, launching into rural tourism is still a daunting prospect for families with virtually no experience of modern business. Furthermore, success is not just down to the individual ATF but hinges on the attitudes of the wider community and the availability of a range of local services and facilities backed by signposts, leaflets and information centres. At a regional level there should be effective coordination and mobilisation of grassroots NGOs active in tourism, many of

which have a strong interest in conservation and ecology, along with community groups and the private sector. At national level the coordination of traditional activities through an 'events calendar' could attract visitors at different times of year. ANTREC should be able to improve its performance in this respect but because its perceived close links with the Ministry of Tourism tend to compromise its NGO status, 'top down' coordination needs to be complemented by 'bottom up' training, organisation and local control. Finally, attracting tourists in the first place requires better information and marketing at home and abroad including a website. In turn, there is a need for a clear identity for Romania's rural tourism product to help gain the confidence of tour operators who are easily diverted by the glossy professionalism of their competitors' marketing efforts: tour operators need new destinations but they also need evidence of quality management.

However, within the local area preservation of the unique cultural resources must be an important priority and it is evident that the planners are cooperating with advisors in several fields (including ethnography) to ensure that the character of the region is not adversely affected by the development of tourism. An important consideration here is the renaissance in religion since 1989. This has seen the reformation of the Uniate Church which was suppressed in 1948 through a forced merger with the Orthodox Church. Where a village has two churches one may now be Uniate and the other Orthodox and where there is only one building it may be shared (as at Manastirea Giulesti). However, the sig-

nificant point is that this development adds momentum to a general desire by congregations to build new churches in which everybody can be accommodated. In the past it was often necessary for people (frequently the women) to stand outside during services because of the limited space inside the traditional wooden churches (the length of the service being such that it was not feasible to have more services during a single day). However, this poses a threat to the old buildings which will need to be well looked after when they are superseded. As Burford puts it (1996 p.110), it should be a responsibility of visitors "to encourage the preservation of traditional customs" including wooden churches "because just about every village has outgrown them and built huge new concrete basilicas in 'identikit' Romanian Orthodox style" and there is a risk that the old churches will fall into disrepair. Equally, while harnessing of the cultural resources, the development of agriculture should not be overlooked: pastures could be improved through the application of fertilisers and woodlands could be renewed by mixing species so as to reduce windblow damage.

There is also a drawback arising through pollution associated with non-ferrous metallurgy. There is already a large complex at Baile Borsa and further expansion in the area in the future cannot be ruled out given the possibility of further mineral prospecting east of Borsa and the extension of the railway to mining complexes in the Burcoaia area has been suggested although the high cost of mining makes any large-scale development unlikely (Iacob 1995). Already environmental damage



Fig.6. An isolated farm between Viseude Sus and Moisei; retaining its own building perimeter while making concessions to communist systematization through the partial construction of a second storey.



is substantial with "brutal anthropic intervention...partially destroying the forests...[and tending] to dominate the entire evolution of the environment" of the Torioaaga Massif (Mac 1993 p.88). Since 1954 54,500m of exploiting galleries and 25,950m of opening/preparing galleries have been driven in this area at such places as Burloaia, Dealul Bucatii, Gura Bii and Magura. Waste has been displaced into valleys, sometimes blocking rivers, communications and settlements (Mac 1990). Dams must therefore be reinforced. Dust is also a problem, arising from open silos and transport in open lorries from the flotation plant to the railway in Borsa, and water is polluted by rain and melting snow. The damage relates not only to the landscape but to public health especially where children are concerned: the importance of a good diet is stressed, including protein and vitamins.

Finally, while reducing pollution a greater effort in conservation is required through reserves to protect the flora and fauna and other monuments of nature. This priority must be seen in the context of massive deforestation over the last three centuries; reflecting the rigorous climatic conditions (wind and frost) but also human pressure on forests through mining (heavy consumption of beechwood at Baiut for example) and through domestic needs and agriculture. Reference should also be made to the drying problem for oak (Fecser et al. 1962) and the destruction of brushwood, especially mountain pine which has an important stabilising function at high levels above the main tree line (Chereches 1997). Protected areas should be extended (Popova-Cucu et al. 1982) and good progress is being made in the Rodna Mountains through the reintroduction of the black goat in the reserve of Pietrosul Mare. An interesting project is currently going ahead in the Upper Tisa Valley (the frontier between Romania and Ukraine) since the local ecological society (SEM) has been networked into the Szolnok-based 'Tisa Klub' linking NGOs in Nyiregyhaza ('Fundatia Tisa Superioara'), Kosice ('People & Water') and Uzhgorod as well as Maramures.

Finance has been provided by the Romanian office of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central & Eastern Europe to safeguard an almost continuous belt of land with natural attractions and limited intrusive activity. Conservation of the flora and fauna of the Tisa islands and dead channels will be important in the context of bird migrations. And better management of the valley will enhance its value for tourism, already evi-

dent through fishing (including the fish farm or 'pastraverie', parkland (Livada at Sapanta and Gradina Morii at Sighet) and open air museums (the ethnographic section of 'Muzeul Maramuresului' and 'Muzeul Satului Maramuresan'). For although the area is relatively unspoilt with a largely traditional economy, some floodplain woodland as been cut and conversion for agriculture has followed, while other areas have been transformed by the planting of exotics (including Douglas fir and Sitka spruce). Other threats arise from the tipping of industrial waste, the promotion of small hydro-power plants (e.g. Teceu, close to boundary with Satu Mare) and new international road schemes (SEM 1997).

At the same time Maramures has benefited ecologically through its remoteness. There has been only limited transformation of the countryside by reservoirs linked with the generation of hydro-power and future transformations may well remain modest since only small hydroprojects are being advocated. Iacob (1994) suggests development only in the secondary valleys of Baicu, Ieud, Mara, Novat, Runc, Ruscova and Sieu (in the case of the Mara there would be diversion of water southwards through a tunnel to augment supplies to Baia Mare). It is also significant that the infrequent visits made to the area by the late President Ceausescu enabled the local authorities to apply the rural planning laws in such a way as to avoid any draconian restructuring of rural settlement patterns. The old building perimeters were retained and insistence that new houses should have two stories was modified to one storey and an attic: a formula that could be reconciled with traditional designs and building systems (although asbestos roofing material has tended to replace both wood and metal) (Plate 5). Timber walls may be used throughout if the material is available or alternatively bricks and/or blocks may be used to support a wooden superstructure. The blocks may then be washed over with lime or cement in contrast to the traditional option of daubing a lathe structure affixed to wooden beams.

## Conclusion

Maramures is one of Romania's most attractive mountain regions, particularly the northeastern part ('old' Maramures) comprising the Iza and Viseu valleys. Although urbanised through the market town of Sighet and the small towns of Borsa and Viseu de Sus, the rural character of the area has not been significantly compromised. The economy retains

many traditional elements concerned with peasant agriculture, the woodlands and ancillary activities including a range of handicrafts. The vernacular architecture, the local music and other art forms are well displayed through customs and festivals which could well sustain greater outside attention; especially at a time when the ample human resources of the area are in desperate need of new outlets. The rural tourism initiative is now well-established on a modest scale but a series of barriers will have to be overcome if tourism is to play a more central role in the rural economy; a situation that is highly desirable in view of the contraction in the mining industry coupled with continued expansion of the labour market and heavy dependence on seasonal work outside the region.

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