

ELEMENTS AND ASPECTS OF COHESION IN THE TOURISM OF SĂLAJ COUNTY

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ABSTRACT. - **Elements and Aspects of Cohesion in the Tourism of Sălaj County.** This present research highlights leisure time, through the potential of various cultural resources, offered and practiced throughout history in the current perimeter of Sălaj County. The sites of human settlements in the studied area show that the inhabitants of these lands have found a favorable place here to form developed communities, which is an important perspective in describing the topics covered. The tourist activity is getting amplified at county level also due to the strategies undertaken by the Tourist Information Centers. They are involved in organizing and developing events for promotion and capitalization, offering new perspectives for certain traditional activities, which in their absence would risk being lost due to lack of profitability. Thus, tourism receives a cohesive character, determining the maintenance of local values and their transformation into economic goods. The centers with the highest degree of cohesion are those in Zalău and Șimleu Silvaniei, which have managed to develop a tradition of annually organized festivals.

Keywords: *leisure time, tourism, history, cohesion, Sălaj, Șimleu Silvaniei, Zalău.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The recreational activity is strictly related to leisure time and availability. But in different historical contexts, free time has meant something different for every culture and for every social level.

In this article, I propose to review only a few historical and geographical landmarks of Sălaj County, identifying the potential cohesive force of tourism in the possible maintenance of local values, leaving room to a broader debate for a future approach.

Today's tourism is defined as a distinct economic branch, which develops globally by engaging all environmental components and factors of production. Therefore, tourism activity becomes essential in the elaboration of development and spatial planning policies, shaping a harmonious and sustainable development

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(Ciangă & Dezsi, 2007; Treaty of Lisbon, Article 174). The topic of this approach will include, in the first part, the perspective of leisure time and formal visits, carried out in the studied historical-geographical space.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methods in the realization of this article, serve the authentic presentation of the main aspects of the formation of the tourist culture, identifying the leisure activities as the first forms of tourist activity. Thus, we resorted to the use of the following research methods:

- The documentary and legislative study is used to provide anchored support in the general and particular concepts of the presented topic;
- The historical-geographical description gives the article the identification of the space on the two levels of the research, locating the spatial and temporal axes of the interpretation of the problem;
- The statistical presentation presents the comparative dimension of the debated topic, allowing a qualification of Sălaj County on the palette of the North-West Region of Romania, highlighting the missing interregional elements;
- The applied qualitative research allows the differentiation of the evolution phases of the economic cohesion through the tourism promotion activities, listing the main manifestations transformed into festivals that attract visitors to the localities in Sălaj County.

3. GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE COUNTY AND TOURISM SPECIFICITIES

The administrative-territorial unit of Sălaj County is located in the center of the North-West Development Region of Romania, covering an area of 3864 km², which represents a percentage of 11.3% of the area.

The central geographical position of the county was not enough to determine a polarizing economic development, being surpassed by the counties of Cluj, Bihor, Maramureș, Satu Mare and Bistrița-Năsăud. This ranking is also due to the fact that the localities in Sălaj County are predominantly rural, with a long agricultural tradition, and other poorly developed economic sectors.

From the point of view of the tourism sector, Sălaj County has a number of aspects that are not yet valued, or not properly exploited. Out of the total of the 23 existing tourist information centers, only those in Zalău and Șimleu Silvaniei fulfill a national status, while the other institutions function only as departments of the territorial administrative units, fulfilling the role of promoters of local tourism and instrument of local socio-cultural cohesion.

The National Center for Tourist Information and Promotion in Zalău (www.turismzalau.ro), mainly addresses the county seat, but organizes various events that involve close collaboration with other localities, such as festival events: “Come to us! Open the dowry box from Sălaj”.

Also through the activity of the Tourist Information Center from Zalău, a series of four events are organized with the title “Circuit of the seasons”, which involve circuits on four different routes in each season, including objectives, activities and attractive communities.

The town of Şimleu Silvaniei, located at the foot of Magura Hills, offers a potential in terms of developing a mountain agrotourism activities, with hiking and outdoor activities. The National Center for Tourist Information and Promotion of the town (<https://cniptsimleu.ro/>), organizes the medieval festival “Báthory Fest”, attracting participants from Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Hungary, Slovakia and other countries.

The synagogue in Şimleu is part of the local tourist circuit, being transformed into the Holocaust Memorial Museum of Northern Transylvania, attracting especially the school population in the region, but also many citizens from Israel and the USA. The centers for information and promotion of tourism in the rural area of Sălaj County, include a series of historical, culinary and ethnographic values, such as: houses and folk traditions found in Plopiş, Valcău de Jos, Buciumi, etc.; the house of Iuliu Maniu in Bădăcin; the Porolissum Roman camp in Mirşid; the vine culture represented by the wineries in Camăr, Carastelec and the traditional cellars in Şamşud, Zăuan, Crasna, Vârşolt, Sărmăşag, Boghiş and Nuşfalău; the wooden churches in Creaca, Hida, Sălăţig; Gothic-style Protestant churches, which are found in most localities; the thermal baths in Boghiş.

In general, it can be mentioned that at the county level, local tourism has received a positive boost due to specially arranged places, but also due to the appearance of restrictions imposed by the pandemic, looking for nearby destinations with short programs, one day stay or for an end of the week programme.

4. ELEMENTS OF HISTORICAL IDENTITY - VISITS AND LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

The current perimeter of Sălaj County has a rich history in terms of the development of ancient civilizations, including prehistoric sites, legends about dragons, forgotten trails, abandoned mansions, re-equipped castles and many people who with their smile restore the charm of multiethnic and multicultural civilizations.

The tourism of Sălaj County is a living one, managing to attract throughout history various personalities who stopped or spent the night at the noble courts, enjoying the hospitality of the hosts and the beauty of the area.

It is difficult to establish exactly how and when the first forms of tourism-like activities began to develop. However, we can assume that the first visits, which included leisure programs, are identified with the development of the native Dacian civilization. According to the customs of the time, they made regular visits to strengthen their political, military, religious or family relations.

The victories of the Roman wars, during the reign of Emperor Trajan, started waves of Romanization of the lands of Sălaj County. Therefore, the transport infrastructure has undergone a wide development, attracting merchants, central authorities, doctors, craftsmen and cult figures. On the occasion of the various holidays, in the arena of the amphitheater at the Porolissum camp, games, competitions, celebrations and other events were organized to honor the visitors. The memory of these times is capitalized and promoted through the involvement of the Tourist Information Centers in Zalău, Mirșid and Creaca.

The mountainous areas of the Sălaj lands strategically ensured the development of some fortifications, maintaining the development of a degree of civilization for the people who settled on this territory. If the camp of Porolissum was a Roman fortification, then the heights of the nearby hills provided the place for the fortified settlements of the Dacians, who learned to live and maintain themselves despite elements of Romanization. This heritage is a valuable resource for the Tourist Information Center in Șimleu Silvaniei, through the Dacian fortress Dacidava.

The peaks of Măgura Hills near Șimleu Silvaniei, with their steep slopes, favoured the development of an important settlement of the Gepids. In time, they became part of the Hunnic Empire, accumulating many riches. The gold pieces, discovered in 1889, are adorned with precious stones, executed with great precision and a special elegance, found only in the elite class of Rome. Today, the treasure from Șimleu is on display in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, proving that the Gepids had connections to Europe's top civilization. (Hajnal Zsuzsanna, 2021).

During the medieval period, the town of Șimleu is known as the residence of the Báthory noble family. The first documentary evidence of the fortress of Șimleu appears in 1351. However, due to the well-being of the area and the wealth of the family, Báthory Miklós, at the end of the 15th century, started the construction of a castle on the right bank of the Crasna River, modernized by new fortifications (Emanoil Pripon, 2017, pp. 19-21). The fortress of Șimleu sheltered the population of the belonging localities during the invasions, ensuring protection for the people in Cehei, Uileac, Giurtelec, Bădăcin and Pericei. Also

here, in the castle courtyard, hunting parties, balls and official meetings were organized, hosting the visits of the captains and the nobility who were passing by or visiting. (Petri Mór, 1906).

Leisure time was the exclusive privilege of the nobility. However, on holidays the peasantry too benefited from this right, in some limited form. During the holidays, serfs could visit holy places, go to religious services, stay with family, or visit their next of kins. The fairs were a great attraction for the world of peasants. Various leisure activities were organized here, fiddlers came, groups were formed that spent time, and at the end of the fair a messenger was paid to be lucky with the new acquisition. The boys and girls came to the fair to get to know each other and to court.

In Jibou, Baron Wesselényi Miklós senior was preoccupied with creating leisure activities, organizing a theater in the castle garden, allowing serfs to take part in the show. At other times, he organized carriage rides for visitors who came to see the family's famous stud farm. Thus, although tourism in Sălaj is not highlighted as a historical economic branch, it still exists as a recreational activity with an evolution from ancient times.

Among the personalities who visited Sălaj at the beginning of the 19th century is the Englishman John Paghet, who refers to his time in Jibou and Hodod, publishing his experiences in his travel diary entitled "Hungary and Transylvania".

The municipality of Zalău, as a historical city of residence, hosted travellers, poets, students, apprentices, politicians, nobles and merchants, who in their free time were preoccupied with spending the leisure time through various activities in the casino, in parks, libraries, churches, inns and the famous fairs where local guild products were capitalized, offering high quality goods and services compared to certain products in the region.

Therefore, through the historical exploration of leisure activities and visits to the lands of Sălaj, it can be seen that tourism in essence has been practiced since ancient times. However, nowadays, these activities are an economic branch, which involves a complex set of professionally performed services.

5. LOCAL ACTIVITIES, TRADITION AND RELIGION IN TERMS OF TOURISM

The development axes of the localities in Sălaj County have focused over time on different branches of the economy such as: agriculture, horticulture, livestock rearing, mineral extractive industry, wood processing, food industry and animal products processing, spa and religious tourism. However, due to

the economic conditions and development policies, the localities of the county have developed disparately compared to the neighbouring counties, generating particular characteristics and unique local versions, which can be transformed into tourist curiosities.

The national stages of industrialization during the communist period, atypically formed the architecture of Romania, considerably reducing the characteristics of local concerns, causing the replacement of crafts with serial work of skilled workers in production segments. Thus, the guilds in Zalău, which were established since the 16th century, dissolved due to the policies of centralized economy, causing at the same time the disappearance of the practice of trades (Elena Muscă, 1988).

The activities of the county museologists managed to save an important part of the objects left from the guilds' activities, thus forming a collection that represents a part of the exhibits in the County Museum of History and Art in Zalău, offering an important tourist attraction to the city.

At the same time, the activity of craftsmen has become unprofitable due to technological changes, lifestyle and modernization. Thus, the trades characteristic of traditional societies can survive only if they are included in the visiting programs of tourists, and the products made are also used as souvenirs. This aspect is achieved through the County Museum of History and Art in Zalău, through the activity of Tourist Information Centres and entrepreneurs.

The workshops and tools used in the crafts characteristic of the localities in the county are mostly preserved in rural areas, due to the survival of the traditions defining the culture of the population, which through an authentic existential way, managed to keep alive the demand for small craftsmen.

The traditional occupation that has turned into an authentic tourist product is that of wine growers, materialized through professional wineries arranged within the KemSilvanum Agrotourism Pension in Camăr, within the homonymous vineyard, the sparkling wine factory of the brand "Silvania" in Șimleu Silvaniei, next to the traditional ones introduced in the tourist circuit of Bocșa commune.

The professional tourist resources are completed by a series of places, people and facts that connect this space with other tourist destinations in the country or abroad, among which we mention:

- related to Șimleu Silvaniei: the King of Poland, Stephanus Bathory (origins and fortress), Iuliu Maniu, political personality from the generation of the Great Union of 1918, Ioan Ossian etc.
- related to the cities of Zalău and Jibou we could mention Baron Wesselényi Miklos jr. who was also a liberal reformer.
- related to Zalău, the poet Ady Endre;
- related to Nușfalău, the poet Arany János, etc.

Also, at the level of Sălaj County, an impressive number of 66 small wooden churches continue to be preserved (LMI *, 2015), serving exclusively parishioners from rural areas. These wooden churches were built between the 16th and the 19th centuries. The one in Bulgari, Sălățiș commune, built in 1547 (LMI *, 2015), is considered to be the oldest. Their repair and maintenance show the diligence of the folk craftsmen and the religiosity of the community. The value of the small churches in question is part of the ontological heritage of the Transylvanian Romanians, who at their construction formed a community united in the national values formed through the prism of religion.

A visit to the wooden churches in the localities of Sălaj will give the tourist the insight into an ancient space, in which every Romanian was present in the main moments of life, such as: celebration, baptism, marriage and funeral. In this way, the inclusion of the churches in the tourist circuit will also involve saving the cultural, confessional and ethnographic heritage of the Romanians in the researched geographical perimeter.

These are joined by the tourist potential displayed by the stone churches, such as the church of the former Benedictine monastery in Uileacu Șimleului, built between 1260-1300, the synagogue in the city of Șimleu Silvaniei transformed into the Holocaust Museum in Northern Transylvania, but also the monasteries: Bic, Strâmba, Voivodeni, etc.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Sălaj County coagulates the rich history of local communities, through public and private management of specialized resources, in real tourism products suitable for leisure.

The main cohesive contribution of the administration, beyond the maintenance of heritage elements (buildings, vestiges, events, traditions) in the Sălaj tourism sector, lies in capitalizing on the opportunities created by the structural funds of the European Union, the establishment of Tourist Information Centres. They also assume the role of marketer of the administrative-territorial units they represent, building and promoting the image of the tourist destination through marketing products, communication and specialized guidance services. The lack of this contribution, over time, would affect the existence of most cultural resources to support tourism, either through degradation or by abandoning traditions and activities.

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