

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE TOURISM IN MARAMUREȘ LAND

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**Abstract:** *Qualitative Research on the Tourism in Maramureș Land.* The features of tourism researches in Romania lead to questions like: quantitative or qualitative studies for tourism? What is the importance of scale in the choice between qualitative or quantitative research for tourism? This paper aims to bring an outlook on the role of qualitative research in production of knowledge in a specific area: Maramureș Land. The study is based on a set of research results for the tourism activities triggering development project involvement. Each aspect will be filtered by the means of qualitative research. The same data and region will be seen through three perspectives: post-positivism, critical and interpretive.

**Key words:** qualitative research, tourism, Maramureș Land

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### INTRODUCTION

The most dynamic economic sectors are generally those based upon a science-driven sector, upon research and new technologies, like ITC, biotechnology, chemistry, optics etc. Nevertheless, the scientific trends are focused on three engines: economy-driven, science-driven and **tourism-driven** (Geyer, 2003) and a fact- user-led research (Tripp, Todtling and Lengauer, 2007) [o.u]. This brings forward an inquiry theme: can be tourism a small – scale science driven sector? Regions have an *attractive potential* and a *diffusive capacity* (Acs *et al.*, 2002). Knowledge is mainly exchanged according to voluntary “barter” and increased through learning by interacting procedures, within specialized networks (Maggioni, Nosvelli, Uberti, 2007).

In tourism as in most science fields that not apply for the term “hard-science” it is very difficult to draw a line between fundamental research and applied research. New techniques and concepts are almost instantly incorporated to new services or goods. Scientists are simultaneously involved in scientific research and management, where the innovation is the result of a scientific production (Wink, 2008).

The next difficult step is to decide over a specific design of a research in tourism. A quantitative research would imply following compulsory steps (hypothesis, method, testing,

finding, presentation of findings). Qualitative research could be designed as creative, unconventional or even directed by specific rules (Philimore and Goodson, 2005).

The present study is based on a set of research results for the tourism activities triggering development project involvement. Each aspect will be filtered by the means of qualitative research. The same data and region will be seen through three perspectives: post-positivism, critical and interpretive.

### **THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS**

In order to achieve the aims of this study it is necessary to present some of the theoretical and methodological premises. Tourism is a dynamic sector of the economy and also it is considered as a strong pillar of development. Every local community has tourism development in the strategy; most commonly requested studies are tourism prospective reports.

Quantitative studies developed after the sixties, starting with the famous system analysis and integrated models of Isard (1960), followed by Fisher (1998) and Hewings (2004), have been focused on destination management or on virtual enterprises and their role on generating scientific products/knowledge. Statistical data is continuously transformed into representations of the tourism phenomena, apparently without being touched by subjectivity.

Qualitative researches in tourism moved from a traditional moment marked by *depersonalized accounts and researchers seen as "expert" towards a specific delimited local research, where the researcher's voice is one of many* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998 in Philimore and Goodson, 2005, p. 9).

The three perspectives used in this study could be described as the most relevant to the region.

Firstly, Maramureș Land is a land-type region and it has a very strong tourist destination image in Romania and abroad. This could hardly be seen as an objective reality, measured, analyzed. The tourist flows and infrastructures most commonly are studied as having *post-positivist* features, esthetic features are excluded.

Secondly, the land is a historical region and a mental construction of its inhabitants, neighbors, easily recognizable and stated (Cocean, 2002). Relationships are based upon an ancient form of community; its unity is based on cohesion and complementarities. *Critical* paradigm applies well in this case because values, politics and knowledge are interconnected. Networks, nodes, spillovers could be recognized in this area.

Finally, idiographic approach stresses – out a large variety of traditional rural villages, with strong regional imprint. From ethnographical point of view, these regional models created a spatial pattern because they were overlapped with the historical region. The complexity of the tourist phenomenon could be understood only from the point of view of those who operate within it? Therefore a *constructive* or *interpretive* approach is needed.

This paper is part of a bigger project, a PNII partnership, 91-032/2007, *Elaboration of several tourist revaluation integrated systems for the Romanian traditional villages, aiming to maintain the regional specificity*. Conceiving and designing several tourist revaluation integrated systems of the traditional villages, in the most representative Romanian regions, can be considered as the scientific major objective of the project. One of the regions analyzed in this project is Maramureș Land. Activities in 2008 led to a structured data-base containing information on several topics, highly adaptable to qualitative research. Findings were presented as papers at national and international level and can be organized in:

1. *Models of regional specificity presented as integrated functional systems for tourism (under the logo: That is how the Romanian integrated traditional village looks*

and functions), Prague may 2008;

2. *Strategies for identifying the actions and reactions of Romanian traditional rural communities at stimuli that generate development project involvement, Liverpool, august 2008;*

3. *Key-elements involved in elaborating development projects for the Romanian traditional village. Case study: Maramureş, Romania, Castellon de la Plana, September 2008;*

4. *Indicators which can define the specificity of the Romanian rural space for tourism activities, Timisoara, may 2008;*

5. *Tourism prospective research for destinations and products, theory vs. practice, Busteni, October 2008.*

Findings concerning Maramureş Land from this point of view were filtered and added to the grid mentioned above (table1). Reflexive approaches were presented.

**Table 1.** Major paradigm (perspectives) which apply to the qualitative research on tourism in Maramureş Land

(Adapted from the text of Philimore and Goodson, 2005, p. 35)

Paradigm	Essentials	Findings
Post-positivist	The researcher believes only in the existence of the real world (observable), moral and esthetic issues are excluded. The context associated with quantitative approach.	Flows Infrastructures Resource inventories
Critical	Values, politics and knowledge are interconnected rather than hierarchical;	Potentiality analysis Benchmarking researches
Interpretive	The complex social world can be understood only from the point of view of those who operate within it	Prospective researches Forecasting and prospections

### POST-POSITIVIST APPROACH – THE REAL WORLD – FOR MARAMUREŞ LAND

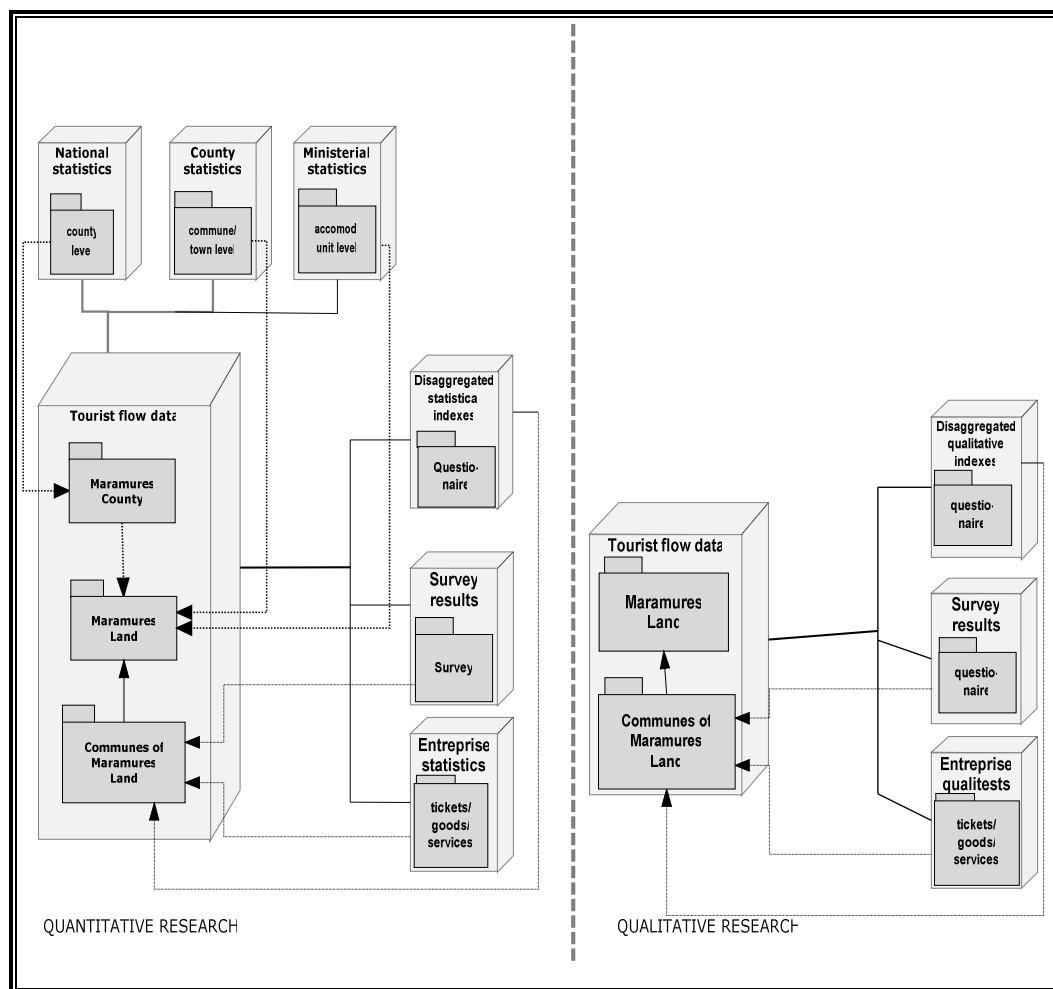
Cold fact-sheets, data, and usual information for tourist activities can be considered post-positivists as long as they remain neutral. Expressions like: the most important, the highest, and the bigger have sense only if comparison data is available. **“The first project in Romania which deals with rural development is....”** **“The first place goes to...”** as parts of press releases or press-conferences, in spring 2008, boosted the number of applications to 2000 in March, statements which are hardly neutral. **“The highest wooden church”** is a most-wanted title because three of the churches in Maramureş (Barsana, Sapanta and Surdesti-outside the historical region) fight for it, each having its own arguments.

Tourist flows are very good examples of this kind of approach: *reality exists but can never be fully apprehended, only incompletely understood* (Philimore and Goodson, 2005, p. 76), due to the scarce methods of data collection. Three sources are involved in data collections in the region: National statistics (data for the county, which is a larger part than the region itself), County statistics (data for each commune/town on accommodation facilities as number of units and number of places, by category – only hotels and motels), and Ministerial statistics (accommodation by units and number of places). The difficulty of finding the right data source for the phenomenon of tourist circulation is linked to the inconsistency of the official data, leading to hard field research and the necessity of applying several qualitative methods.

National statistics show data for: existing (installed) tourist capacity, tourist accommodation capacity in function (expressed in places-days), indices of net using the tourist accommodation capacity in function (%), number of tourist-days, arrivals, departures, staying overnight, all collected through statistic surveys and administrative

sources, only for the facilities with over 5 places (Romanian statistical yearbook, data for 31 July 2005, p. 722). The data for Maramureș County is presented also for an eight year range (1996-2005). Data for units smaller than the county is not available at this level. The choice-range for which could be disaggregated from this data for a relevant and necessary space is very limited.

Qualitative research methods could help drawing a better understanding of the tourist flow phenomenon. Each accommodation unit has or has to have a clear chart on the indices reflecting: the number of tourists, number on overnight staying, and the origin of the tourists by country. An exhaustive questionnaire project in the most important points seems to be the ideal solution. Also a combination between accommodation data and other flow data such as: number of visitors in museums (excluding locals?), data on groups requesting professional guiding, or animations etc (fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Tourist flow data via quantitative/qualitative research, in Maramureș Land

Disaggregated qualitative indexes can offer a wider image over the phenomenon of tourist flow or demand. Data is disaggregated, treating each group as if it were separate. Subgroups may be defined relative to geographic or administrative regions (fig. 2), urban-rural residence, gender or ethnicity.

Survey results are grouped in studies on infrastructures and resource inventories. Indices of net using the tourist accommodation capacity in function (%) were calculated for these studies.

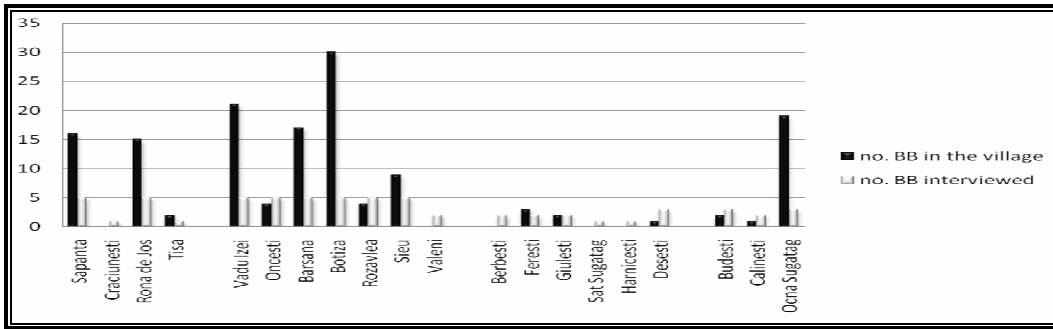


Figure 2. BB in Iza-Tisa-Mara area involved in the study

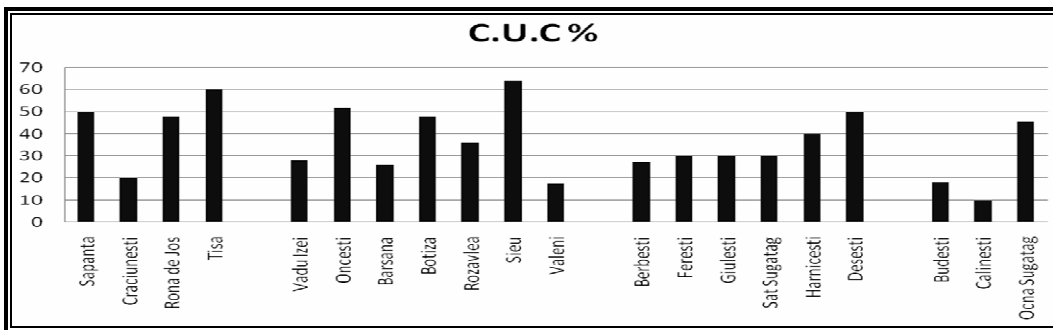


Figure 3. Indices of net using the tourist accommodation capacity in function (%), calculated from survey data

**CRITICAL APPROACH OF THE TOURISM IN MARAMUREȘ LAND**

Values, politics and knowledge are interconnected. In a land-type region there is a strong link to ancient unwritten law system. This leads to a specific way of organizing every-day life, activities, regional decisions and reactions, the way the Romanian rural community acts and reacts at internal and external stimuli. Qualitative researches can help to identify the “pillars” that generate decision and behavior in the rural area, related to development projects (Ilies G. et al, 2008). In this respect we studied the reaction of rural communities at project grant programs, mostly SAPARD, PHARE, and FEADR (fig. 4-5).

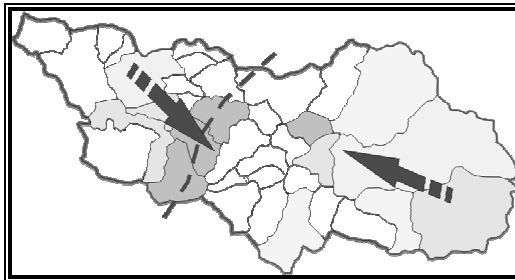


Figure 4. Number of declared ongoing projects

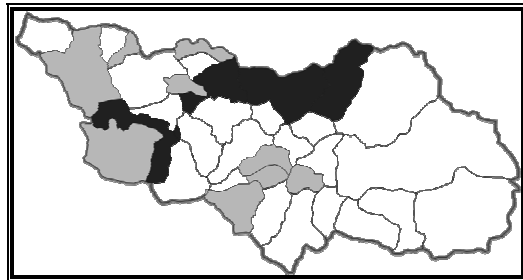


Figure 5. Number of new applications, in March 2008

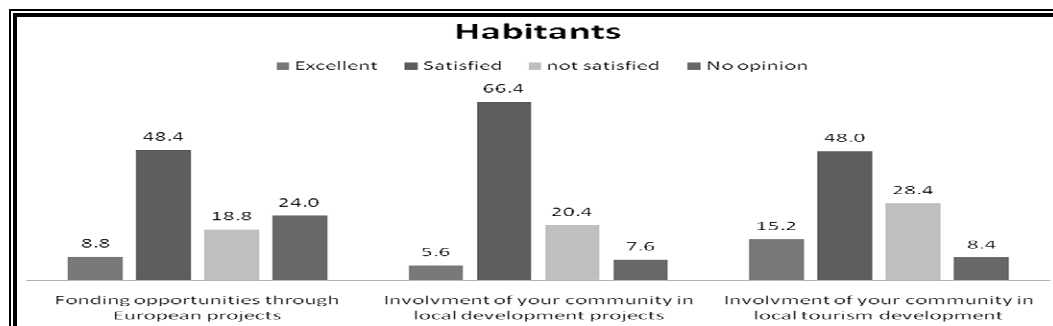
Without using a legend for these maps, the phenomenon of diffusion is very clear; in this case the magnitude is less relevant. Aims, results and beneficiaries of modern tourist prospective research in the case of Maramureș Land stressed out the importance of a critical approach (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Aims, results and beneficiaries of modern tourist prospective research (ADM-administration; ECO-enterprise; NGO-nongovernmental organizations; EDU-education institutions)

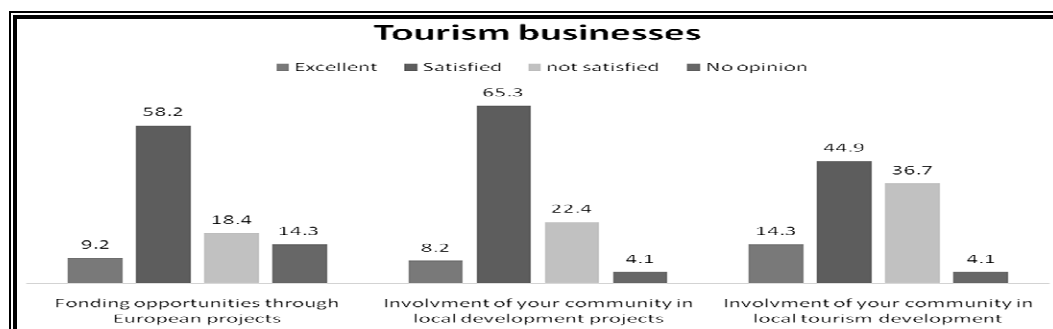
	Prospective reports, appendixes to several official forms	Strategic documents	Territorial database/operational/up dates
Tourism business development	ADM, NGO,	ADM, ECO	ADM, ECO,EDU
Tourism destination Branding	ADM	ECO	ADM, ECO,EDU
Tourism arrangements / attestation / ranking	ECO, ADM	ECO, ADM	ECO, ADM, EDU
Development projects	ADM, NGO, EDU	ECO, ADM	ADM, NGO, EDU
UNESCO and / or national patrimony listing	ADM	ADM	ADM

### INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH ON TOURISM IN MARAMUREȘ LAND

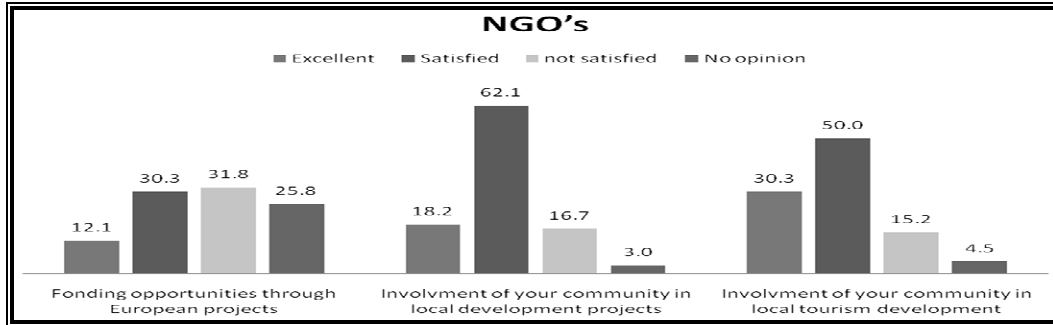
This kind of approach is very well integrated in prospective studies as well as in applied questionnaires. Equerry items are often left to the judgment of the respondent. The results of the test applied in March 2008 could be considered here: locals, associations and entrepreneurs (fig. 6-8).



**Figure 6.** Position of inhabitants concerning funding opportunities, involvement of local community in local and tourism development



**Figure 7.** Position of tourism businesses concerning funding opportunities, involvement of local community in local and tourism development



**Figure 8.** Position of NGO's concerning funding opportunities, involvement of local community in local and tourism development

The interpretation of this kind of *empiric* data has led to a simple conclusion: there is a linear determination between the interests of the respondent and the satisfaction degree, even if in Romanian rural space the pessimistic point of view is obvious. From here, several interpretive conclusions could be strengthened in the future.

### CONCLUSIONS

Studies for the tourism phenomena in Maramureş Land are often one-sided. Qualitative approaches include empiric data collections but the architecture of the system at county and national level details are hard to provide. Therefore, the need to compensate disadvantages through qualitative research is very high. In a land-type region, diffusion of the information and knowledge is important, as well as competition at a small scale, predetermined by several territorial patterns, and qualitative research methods are more appropriate. Few steps are already done; in the future new directions are opened.

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