

**THE SIGHTSEEING TRADITIONAL VILLAGE: AN OPPORTUNITY!  
THE SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITIONAL VILLAGE - A THREAT!  
- AN ANALYSIS OF THE FAVOURABILITY FOR TOURISM  
DEVELOPMENT OF TWO THEORETICAL  
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE**

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**Abstract:** Still maintaining the traditional architectonic aspects, the customs and cooking (seen as sightseeing resources and opportunities for developing such a village) come, at least this is the case in Romania, “all packed” with a traditional social-psychological profile of the community and with a *traditional type culture*, in the sociological sense of the term, with institutional traditionalism and community traditionalism or a reduced *culture of openness*. This cultural type is defined by variables such as: reduced educational capital, reduced *bridging*-type relational capital, reduced sanitary culture, isolation towards the urban and reduced media consumption, reluctance towards initiatives, resistance to changes, low ability to take risks, opacity to community foreigners, lack of trust. This article also intends to review those variables in terms of impact on the implementation of sightseeing activities in such a village, meant to emphasise the crucial characteristics for the success of the development of these activities and of the insurmountable ones beyond a certain limit.

**Key words:** sightseeing traditional Village, sociological traditional Village, traditional type culture, touristic resource, culture of openness

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**AIM, TEORETHICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD**

The aim in the beginning of this research was first to capture the sociological point of view on the *traditional village* and the viability for tourism of its defining variables and second, to explore how viable as an environment for developing tourist activities is the superposition of the two sets of defining variables of the tourist and sociological concepts,

in practical application. This interest in assessing some aspects related to the conceptualization of the traditional village from two perspectives comes from the fact that from the sociological point of view, in Romania, a locality once labelled as a *traditional* one, the defining characteristics of the concept register it among the worst candidates to the economical and social development, on the other side, the tourism perspective, where the dominance of the traditional in a locality is instantly seen as a sightseein resource and thus, a solid alternative for the reliable development of the locality by implementing the tourist activities.

The analysis of the theoretical conceptualizations in terms of favourability for tourism of the traditional Village represents our involvement in the theoretical research phase of a research grant financed by the Ministry of Education and Research having as main scientific object the conception and design of several tourist re-evaluation integrated systems of the traditional villages, in the most representative Romanian regions.

It is empirically certified, at least for Romania, the fact that tourism benefits such as maintaining a high share of the traditional type habitat, the customs, the costumes and the traditional cuisine, come “all packed” with a socio-psychological profile of the community defined by shortcomings as: *traditional type culture*, *institutional* and *community traditionalism* or a reduced *culture of openness*, none of these being favourable to the development in general, and especially to the implementation of tourist activities.

#### **THE SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITIONAL TYPE VILLAGE AND ITS DEFINING ATRIBUTS**

For the reason of simplicity, we will present here probably the most widely acknowledged definition of the traditional village from the sociological point of view. This was derived from a six type cultural taxonomy (Sandu, 2004) based on a cluster analysis of 12,057 villages of Romania. *The traditional type* (opposing basicly the *modern type*) – characterise about 2592 villages of Romania (21.5 %) accommodating 14.7 % inhabitants. This type label (Sandu, 2004, 190) the villages with the most reduced (of all 6 categories): education stock (7.1), index of village development DEVSAT (-3.7), number of employees per thousand inhabitants (100.1‰), the highest number of live births per thousand women of reproductive age (1,905.5 ‰).

Other defining dimensions of this socio-demographic profile shared with the isolated type village are represented by: the reduced share of the population who generally believe in people (25 % – following the isolated type village population 29 %), the number of commuters per 100 employees and the reduced share of inhabitants who go to town at least once a week (6 % not being overcome regarding the reduced value, only by the isolated village whose basic characteristic is even the rarity of contacts with the urban environment), the reduced demographic average size (571 inh. following those of the isolated type). The most reduced share of the optimistic inhabitants (who think of living better in a year) following the population of the ethnic minority type village (19 % comparative cu 11 %) is added to those.

The traditional cultural profile is also characterised by central attributes such as the highest median age of the population (50.4) and the high level of poverty (explained more by the level of education and implicitly by the number of employees). The reduced education stock, particularly the most reduced share of population who graduated post-gymnasium schools (23.1 %) was revealed by authors in the south and east of the country, the higher concentration of rural population with low level of education being specific to the counties Vaslui, Călărași and Ialomița, to which can be added villages from South Oltenia. Those defining dimensions of the human capital, the symbolic capital of modernity and the relational capital represented the “latent” variables taken into account by the taxonomy quoted above. The manifest variables taken into account are represented by the education stock, religious diversity (share of religious minorities), share of Magyar

population in the village, the degree of isolation of the locality and the experience of internal migration.

In the *traditional village* category, from a cultural perspective, 2,592 of the Romanian localities would fit (Sandu, 2004) representing thus 21 % of the total – and that would inhabit about 14.7 % of the Romanian population. Beside these the author distinguishes from the same perspective the types: *the modern village, the village with high share of religious minorities, the village with high share of ethnic minorities, the village with high share of emigrants and the isolated village.*

In profiling the traditional village with relevant dimensions from the tourist perspective, we add other important characteristics underlined in several other occasions, such as: reduced *bridging*-type relational capital (Voicu and Voicu, 2006), reduced sanitary culture, isolation towards the urban and reduced media consumption (Sandu, 2004).

The analysis of the socio-cultural characteristic in terms of favourability for practicing the tourism activities in the traditional type villages (vs. the modern one) shows that a lot of defining variables will represents real challenges on the implementation of tourist activities (table 1), a few on the neutral to development column and only one secondary attribute on the opportunities. Needless to say that the same analysis in the case of the modern type village (table 2) looks exactly the other way around with a lot of opportunities and a few neutral characteristics.

**Table 1.** The socio-cultural characteristics of the cultural traditional type villages (according to Sandu, 2004) in terms of favourability for practicing the tourism activities

Premises/strengths	Indifferent/neutral characteristics	Challenges /weaknesses
High share of the inhabitants who believe in the government	Low number of commuters/100 employees	Low education stock
	Low number of employees per thousand inhabitants	High average age of population
	High number of live births per thousand of women of reproductive age	A reduced share of the inhabitants who have a generalized belief in people
	Low share of the inhabitants who read newspapers at least once a week	A reduced share of the inhabitants who go to town at least once a week
	High share of the inhabitants who believe in church	A reduced relational capital
		A reduced share of the inhabitants who own a car

Leaving aside the capital type, this cultural typology of the Romanian villages is relevant for the communitarian propensity to adopt acceptance attitudes of social alterity (Sandu, 2004), to the point in which the variables taken into account can be considered even indirect measurements. These attitudes of accepting the social alterity represent relevant elements in the aggregation of an attitude favourable to the implementation of tourist activities since this implies accepting the tourists as a natural presence, at least as ‘visitors’ of the community space (even personal in agrotourism services) and to the role of an active member of the tourist (in the last case).

In the category of *modern village*, from a cultural perspective, would fit 2,456 (Sandu, 2004) of the Romanian localities, representing 20.4 % of the total and that would inhabit about 18.8 % of Romanian population. The data of the study in 2004 revealed that the 6 types of cultural villages appear as regional blocks, in which the villages from Northern Oltenia and Muntenia represent the villages with high educational capital.

In order to structure what, in the end Sandu (2004, 187) labels as “community culture of openness” (characterised by tolerance, diversity acceptance, availability to communicate with the external world, relational capital, high empathy level, and openness to accept the calculated risk) the most probable premises are considered to be represented by: share of population born in other localities, share of population of different ethnics and religion, with a higher education level, better structured in the community with road network, within the area of polarization of an urban center (the bigger demographically speaking, the more accentuated) – inversely, in other words, with the degree of isolation (in terms of communication – not demographically) – of a “*cul de sac*”. These attributes represent the apanage of the modern type villages and do not characterise the traditional isolated type of village, the latter ones developing a culture of ‘closed’ type of social relationships (Sandu, 2004, 194) with reduced social capital and weak participation to the dynamic of urban-regional life, in which, according to tradition, there is a lack of living experience or of contact with foreign elements (either geographically, ethnically or religiously) considered ‘closed’ either due to tradition or to isolation.

**Table 2.** The socio-cultural characteristics of the cultural modern type villages (according to Sandu, 2004) in terms of favourability for practicing the tourism activities

Premises/strengths	Indifferent/neutral characteristics	Challenges /weaknesses
High education stock	The highest number of commuters/100 employees	
The highest index of village development DEVSAT	The highest number of employees per thousand inhabitants	
The lowest average age of population	The lowest number of live births per thousand of women of reproductive age	
The highest share of the inhabitants who have a generalized belief in people	Medium share of the inhabitants who read newspapers at least once a week	
High share of the optimistic inhabitants who believe in a better life in a year time	Medium share of the inhabitants who believe in church	
The highest share of the inhabitants who go to town at least once a week	Medium share of the inhabitants who believe in the government	
High relational capital		
The highest share of the inhabitants who own a car		

### THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE AS A SIGHTSEEING

Isolated settlements, especially villages not included in the process of cooperativization in the communist period, settlements from the traditional historical regions land-type still preserves a high share of traditional habitat, the traditional architectonic aspects, and the traditional construction materials, the customs, the traditional costumes and cooking usually seen as sightseeing resources and opportunities for developing tourism activities in such a village.

Selecting some of the criterions for assessing the specificity in view of the development of tourism activities in the traditional village (table 3) we notice that a lot of social characteristics represent real problems to overcome.

For example it is difficult to meet the criterions of *warm welcome* and *attention paid to the tourists* in the context of *opacity to community foreigner* and *the lack of trust* both part of the larger concept common for the traditional village: the *reduced culture of openness*.

So, the question is: *Could there be a „traditional” village as an exterior form and modern in terms of cultural profile of the human component?*

Such an example – but a very difficult one to replicate as good practice – Viscri Village (in South Transylvania) has been, as the entire village, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site based on the unique architecture of the houses of the Saxon population and the well-preserved fortified church in the village (figure 1).

**Table 3.** Criteria for assessing the specificity in view of the development of tourism activities in the traditional village (Selection) (EC, 2003)

<b>1. Minimum acceptable standards</b>	<b>7. Management standards</b>
■ Hygiene	■ relation between employees
■ Safety at meals and accommodation	■ relation with the employees
■ Safety of leisure activities	■ satisfaction tests for the clients
<b>2. Technical level</b>	■ marketing
Quantitative aspects	
■ comfort classification	<b>15 Indicators for assessing the regional specificity of the tourism activities</b>
■ timetable of attractions	■ tourism signalling, parking, quality of entrance
<b>3. Services quality</b>	■ quality labels
■ warm welcome	■ exterior aspect
■ attention paid to the tourists	■ use of authentic local materials
<b>4. Authenticity of destination</b>	■ authenticity of landscape design
■ special character	■ interior sets
■ typology of materials to use	■ type of welcome
■ style	■ local products and souvenirs
■ local produce	■ bonuses in the room
■ activities that reflect the traditions	■ shops with local products and souvenirs
<b>5. Capacity of insurance for special needs</b>	■ tourist information
■ for children	■ authenticity of tourist animation actions
■ active holidays	■ available informative tourist literature/newsletters, etc.
■ disable persons	■ local/regional cuisine recipes
<b>6. Ecological standards</b>	■ professionalism of transactions use of cards
■ saving energy	■ availability to work in the net for communication and marketing activities
■ waste	
■ use of renewable resources	
■ other aspects	
■ use of renewable resources	
■ other aspects	



**Figure 1.** Viscri Village (A UNESCO World Heritage Site).  
The unique Saxon architecture (left) and the well-preserved fortified church (right)

In 2008 the locality had registered 10 pensions and was visited by 10,000 tourists (most of them foreigners; Negru, 2009).

Viscri, as a traditional village, successfully meets a lot of criteria listed earlier by chance of avoiding modernity as a natural course, and lately, because of the strict UNESCO norms – no change in to the aspect of the village: forbidden road asphaltting, no window profiles, no modern materials. Houses are rehabilitated only with traditional techniques and materials such as: yellow mud bricks, sand, tile and hamlet mortar (figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Viscri Village. Houses carefully rehabilitated only with traditional techniques and materials.



**Figure 3.** Viscri Village. The mud bricks and tiles manufactory – using local materials and open for visiting

In order to achieve that and for the use of authentic local materials there is a mud bricks and tiles manufactory among other manufactures (a cooperative wool mill, a blacksmith manufactory, a dairy etc). Besides the fact that it had to be placed far deep in the forest (figure 3) and the workers actually have to live there because of the 24 hours surveillance of the oven, the actual work and living there is difficult (humidity, mud, low

temperatures during the transition seasons, social isolation, lack of electrical power etc). The only ones willing to do the work was a Roma family. Similarly, some difficulties had to be overcome, the moment that the talented blacksmith of the village died last year – they found him difficult to replace.

The overall population of 467 inhabitants of the locality is aged, undereducated in some cases, and under skilled when it comes to the implementation of some tourism activities. In the view of a foreigner established in the village, participating in the research and development of the locality activities herself: “However, Viscri faces many serious challenges in terms of development, economy, and education as it moves into the future and it is important to not be too romantic in one's vision of life in the village. Progress is coming slowly – the facades of the houses are being restored, providing training and employment to village residents in building and construction. ... Residents are learning how to sell their wares in the village and abroad. One is reminded that is a delicate balance that what makes life in Viscri unique is that the people who live there are living a life they have lived for a long time now, and not necessarily by choice. The remote, subsistence lifestyle led by most residents of Viscri is a difficult one, and one that I certainly would not be able to undertake without a good bit of training and education. As foreign investment comes into the region, one wonders how closely they consider the problems inherent in too many new aspects of it are certainly worth preserving, but it will be a delicate balance in mixing the best of the "old" ways with at least some ease of the "new" (Klimaszewski, Ch., 2007, “*Tourism, a Double-Edged Sword?*”).

Even as a village included in the project “*Sate de sine stătătoare*” (“Self-sustaining villages”<sup>1</sup>, sustained by The Mihai Eminescu Trust founded by Prince Charles of Wales) – which also include localities with tourist function from Maramureş, with a lot of financial support from other ONG and the Ministry, Viscri still have to face many difficulties in the road of self-sustaining tourism.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF A TRADITIONAL CULTURAL TYPE COMMUNITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CULTURE OF OPENNESS**

### ***The social distance as a premise of implementing tourism activities***

Among students and PhD candidates, have become anthropologist dialogues nowadays collected in the field such as: [Interviewer:] “*Would you agree with the development of the rural tourism in your village?*” [The local citizen interviewed:] “*Let it develop, sure, why not*” [Interviewer:] “*But would you agree that a tourist spend a day with you following you everywhere, watch you working, where you work, the way you milk the cow, or to wish to mow once or twice?*” [The interviewed:] “*Oh, On my land? - No way! What for?*” The tourist, either present/or kept at a far social distance (tolerated in the public space, using common facilities) or closer (in the case of an agritourist pension owner – the distance is reduced more than in the case of a simple rural pension) represents in the rural space an *allochthonous element* – of alterity, “tolerated” in different circumstances – more intimate or more distant – according to the *social distance*<sup>2</sup> the members of that community are ready to tolerate the presence of a stranger.

Without consideration and assessment of this social distance to which the individuals of a community are ready to tolerate the presence of the strangers, of the alterity in their daily life, the planning of a durable development of the traditional village based on tourism development have, with regard of this indicator, more modest premises – even “impediments” – or considerable premises of success.

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<sup>1</sup> Aim of the project: preserving the traditional organisation of the villages; the rectification of the lack of financial resources, reviving of the community spirit (Negru, A., 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The social distance (concept introduced by Bogardus, 1925, 1933), assesses the distance they interpose (between them and the members of another group) following the predisposition to tolerate the presence of a member of the aut-group in different situations from marriages to refusing the citizenship (Curşeu et al., 2006).

Most of times, the social distance or *the privacy threshold* to which the individuals *taken separately*, are willing to tolerate the presence of the strangers is influenced or even dictated by the *cultural community model* (the socially shared model), from which each individual *deviates more or less according to the self psychological construction* result of the different *individual personality factors, socialization and family education and own-life experience* (especially with the alterity). It is very clear though that these deviations are slight, taking place in a certain register (the high deviation different from the medium is nonetheless an exception) – dictated by the *starting level – an anchor level* registered at *the community level*, that the members of the community believe as “*acceptable*”, desirable, “*ought to*” and “*ought to not*”. But out of the interest sphere of the social psychology focused on the individuals, even if they represent an important mass of people, *the starting level is of central interest in tourism studies, or the basic level negotiated at community level – negotiation that is produced as a result of historical regional or local experience of alterity, well defined in the sociological and regional geography literature.*

The social distance kept from alterity by the members of a traditional community vary from historical region to historical region, intraregional, from area to area, event in the same area from social group to social group. For example, we found (Mălăescu, 2009) in the rural area of Northern Oltenia a difference of 1.7 (on a 5 point scale) in the social distance towards out-groups between the traditional *ungureni* group (a social group descending from the Transylvanians migrated in Oltenia in XII and XVIII-XIX) – the group that gives the local traditional touristic flavor – and the autochthonous one. Northern Oltenia represents an interesting exception: even if registers the highest rate of modern type villages (and the highest demographic educational stock) at the national level (Sandu, 2004), the levels of interpersonal trustiness and inter-group trustiness in Gorj and Vâlcea counties are among the lowest (Sandu, 1999) in Romania, and this independently from the familial or area poverty level. This region represents an exception also for the fact that the high level of modernity does not have represented eradicating the old ethnographic treasure – but valuing that (figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Northern Oltenia. Spontaneous snap-shots from traditional (below) and modern villages (above) with tresuring and conserving the old traditional houses in the same household (above and detail on the down right) without any tourism preoccupation

So that it’s an interesting mixture of old corners with high share of authentic and traditional habitat preserved in the rural northern area (for a review see Mălăescu, 2008,



2007) and by consequence this region qualifies herself among the most suitable candidates for rural tourism development registering a modern human capital (who knew to value the tradition and the modernity) in (or at least near by) an “exterior traditional shell”.

The importance of the educational capital in developing tourism activities after the communist period in Romania, was underlined already by Mihăilescu (2005) who had stressed out the fact that after analyzing the successes in agri-tourism a few factors are highlighted and after the existence of the capital and the initiative before the fall of communism, among the most important are the educational level relatively high – the intellectuality of the village having here a stimulating role, appreciating that an important role was played by the teachers and by other intellectuals from the rural society (contracting tourist firms from abroad, organizing some own tourism offices, marketing, etc). At present, the educational level in the implementation, accessing structural funds or for support in order to develop the tourist activities and the servicing the tourists at appropriate standards do not require additional reasoning.

### **The importance of the *community level of general confidence in people in implementing tourism activities***

“Relationships between people require a mutual understanding deep enough to be able to predict the other or the others’ behaviour in a majority of situations that can be generated by the social interaction. This understanding and the power of predicting are transposed in the belief that those persons will follow the existing social rules.” (Voicu and Voicu, 2006, 45). Only by this need of predicting the behavior, of “ordering” and applying some algorithms or reaction patterns underlined (and studied by the cognitive and social psychology), we can realize, for a village without too many contacts with the alterity (such is the case of traditional type village and the isolated type described in the cultural sociological typology) *the ancestral reticence that an inhabitant should defeat when engaged in a tourist service activity which involves free access in the household, the belief that the tourists will respect the reciprocity norm of paying for the services the standard services and the additional ones in a preceding agreement or following an unilateral free initiative* – this being only one example to which are added many other social customs related to what “*ought to be done*” and what “*ought not to be done*” which, most important – differs from a traditional cultural *tourist receiver* region to a traditional cultural *tourist emitent* region.

*The one who should be aware of hence in charge to overcome these cultural differences is the provider of tourism services –not the tourist!* The tourist is on holiday, free of the behaviour conventions, free of the obligation of constantly thinking of what has to be done. Hence, this entire task of understanding and managing elegantly the differences resulted is still the task of the inhabitant in the traditional village. So the modernity factor with its increased level of education, with variable such as the frequency of watching the TV programs and reading the newspapers – the awareness of other cultures – become important variables (if not decisive) besides those implied by the culture of openness to alterity.

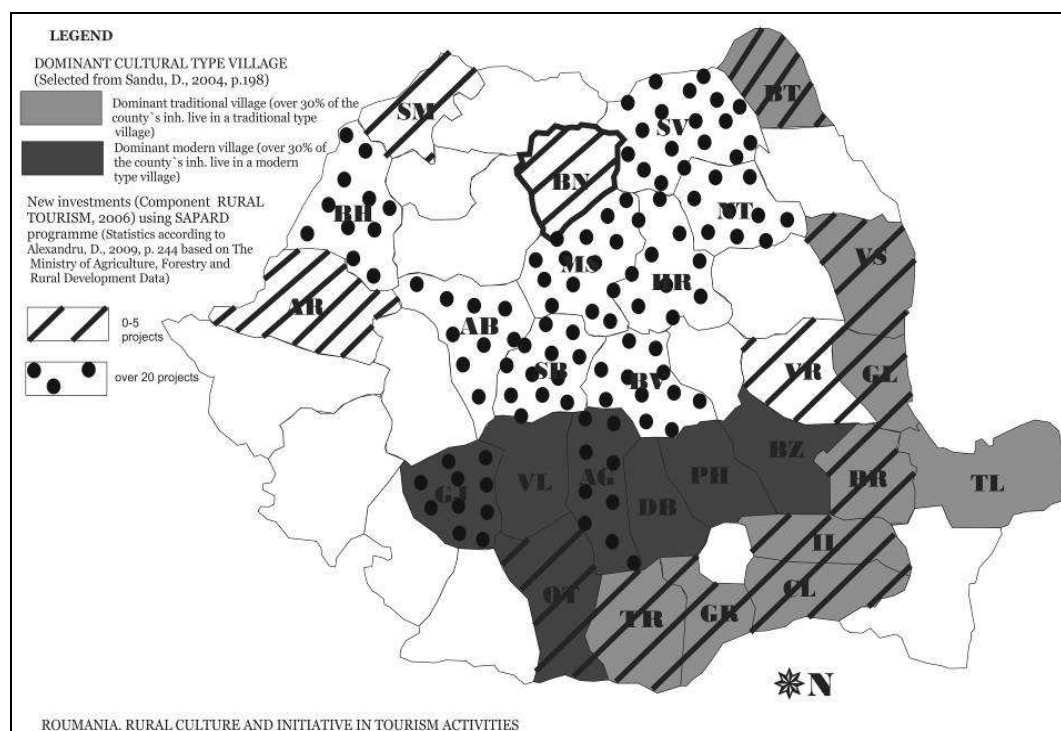
In the traditional type societies people can predict “in general, only the behaviour of those with whom they come into direct contact, with whom they have a long experience of interaction. The strangers, as Simmel points out, are regarded suspiciously. The information about them are rare and do not allow predictions accurate enough of those behaviour (...) Modern societies and especially those which are in late modernity use a mediated understanding, indirect, based on education, on information based on mass means of communication, on the stories of the people who travel in the world tending to globalize.” (Voicu and Voicu, 2006, 45).

Returning to the necessity of accurate conceptualization and of properly serving the “alterity” – the tourist came to spend a few days in Maramureş (an area which

according to many studies still preserves a traditional mentality) – trying to assess the tradition in the tourist practice in the village Botiza in Maramureș, Hristescu (2005) advances in order to make the (necessary and accepted) changes of the mentality and life style of the inhabitants imposed by the practice of tourist services, even the label “*the new peasants*” speaking about a self construction relating to (and as a result of the interaction with) the tourists, underlying that the “contact with the Romanian and foreign tourists has deeply transformed the life of the villagers of Botiza” determining the villagers to rethink their relationship with the exterior of the region or of their country leading to transactions both between the tourists and the services providers and the other villagers who, although “do not house tourists cannot stay beyond this event” (Hristescu, 2005, 87).

**The social choice behaviour, the ability to take risks and the reluctance towards initiatives.**

In the theoretical founding of the cultural typology established by Sandu (2004), the author points out that such a typology should have relevance for wider classes of behaviours and attitudes, “variation of opinions, attitudes and social actions in the rural world could thus be related not to “factors” but to community “contexts” (Sandu, 2004, 180), among which the most relevant is *the social choice behaviour*, which, in the tourism service’s case, became (as it is the case of rural agri-tourist pensions) a *strategy, or a way of life*.



**Figure 5.** Romania. Dominant rural traditional culture and the initiative of investing in tourism activities (Sapard Programme. *Rural Tourism* Component) using European (*Sapard*) funding (typology extracted from Sandu, D., 2004, 198; statistics according to Alexandru D.,2009, 244)

Knowing such contexts and the prior understanding of possible opinions, attitudes and social actions – if some patters and their variability can be discovered hence can be predictable within general limits (be they only in nominal categories type “*opaque/open*” to

the idea of innovation, entrepreneurialism or the presence of alterity elements in the daily life of the community), would be decisive in the steps previous to the suggestions and implementation (without the foreseen success) by projects and development strategies in some rural areas. A closer look at the differences from this point between different rural localities where some policies and strategies were implemented, may explain already post-factum at least at present, why, in some localities, these have recorded greater success, in other a more modest success and in others have not recorded durable results – when other economical factors, political or local can not explain the registered variance.

*The social choice behaviour and the ability to take risks and the reluctance towards initiatives* from the culture of openness, as *the resistance to changes, lack of trust, opacity to community foreigners, culture of niceness, personal choices according to the traditional norms and not according to efficiency* represent relevant characteristics to the tourism activities development. The first are central to the investing-not-investing initiatives. In some cases, the low ability to take risks and the reluctance towards initiatives derived from a reduced culture of openness characterising the traditional community of a traditional village is not necessary an impediment not to be overcome in the development of tourism activities. In the case of Maramures region – where rural tourism is well developed – that was'n an impediment: "tourism development in the region wasn't the result of paysans'n initiative it was the state's initiative" (Hristescu, 2005, 88).

Yet, the superposition (figure 5) between the map of the traditional type village as a dominant type in the county, and the lowest total number of SAPARD projects adjudicated in rural tourism map, for example, in the case of Romania, can conduct in the direction of further confirmation of a general co-variance at least, if not causality.

In conclusion, traditional villages with traditional type culture have critical shortcomings to overcome when developing tourism activities due to the traditional characteristics mainly of the human capital. Those factors can account for explaining the variance in the differences in success of the development of rural tourism in different regions, so far. Besides highlighting the impediments in developing the sightseeing activities coming from a traditional type culture, our aim was to provide those who are thinking of an eventual implementation of tourism activities in a village with some general empirical clues for the shortest and less costly way of "pre-diagnosing" how reliable is that village for developing such activities not vice versa – the classical step (and natural one) of the classical studies in tourism. Some of the attributes thought, if they have critical values are not to be overcome (critical mistrust culture, critical size, critical age average, critical education level, critical aversivity towards alterity, poverty etc.).

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