

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE APPLIED IN RURAL TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN THE MARAMUREȘ LAND: VADU IZEI AND SĂPÂNȚA

Marin ILIEȘ

*„Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Geography, Sighetu Marmăției Extension,
6 Avram Iancu St., 435500 Sighetu Marmăției, Romania, e-mail: iliesmarin@yahoo.com*

Mihai HOTEA

*„Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Geography, Sighetu Marmăției Extension,
6 Avram Iancu St., 435500 Sighetu Marmăției, Romania, e-mail: mihai_hotea@yahoo.com*

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify the multiplying effects released by the implementation of regional tourism development projects involving higher education institutions. For comparison we took into account the evolution of the rural tourism network, OVR Vadu Izei, without direct connection with the above projects. Based on comparative analysis between the two entities we could issue a series of ideas and solutions concerning the successful implementation of new rural development projects in Romania.

Key words: development, projects, rural tourism, examples of good-practice, university implication, geospatial analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism development involves a series of triggering factors: learning and exchange, business and community (Gibson and Lynch, 2007, 108). This article has as main objective the study of the learning/exchange factor upon rural tourism development, and the diffusion towards other effects. The role of research and higher education activities in the field of tourism is assessed by combining the case study with an empirical overlook at the facts and figures of rural tourism development linked to regional identity.

The baseline of the study consists in the idea that knowledge is mainly exchanged according to voluntary “barter” and increased through learning by interacting procedures, within specialized networks (Maggioni, Nosvelli, Uberti, 2007). Săpânța and Vadu Izei, from Maramureș Land (Romania) were selected as villages with the highest number of key-elements, including technology-push projects with the university.

The two villages (figure 1) envisaged by the study have been chosen relying on several particularities:

- they have had a different itinerary;
- in both cases rural tourism was initiated by impulses coming from outside the communities;
- the tourist activities started without connections;
- one of the villages possesses international touristic brands that the other does not

have, but relies solely on those of the region it is part of;

- within the actions that took place in both villages, most specialists and even most of the tourists say that they have dealt with people completely different in mentality.

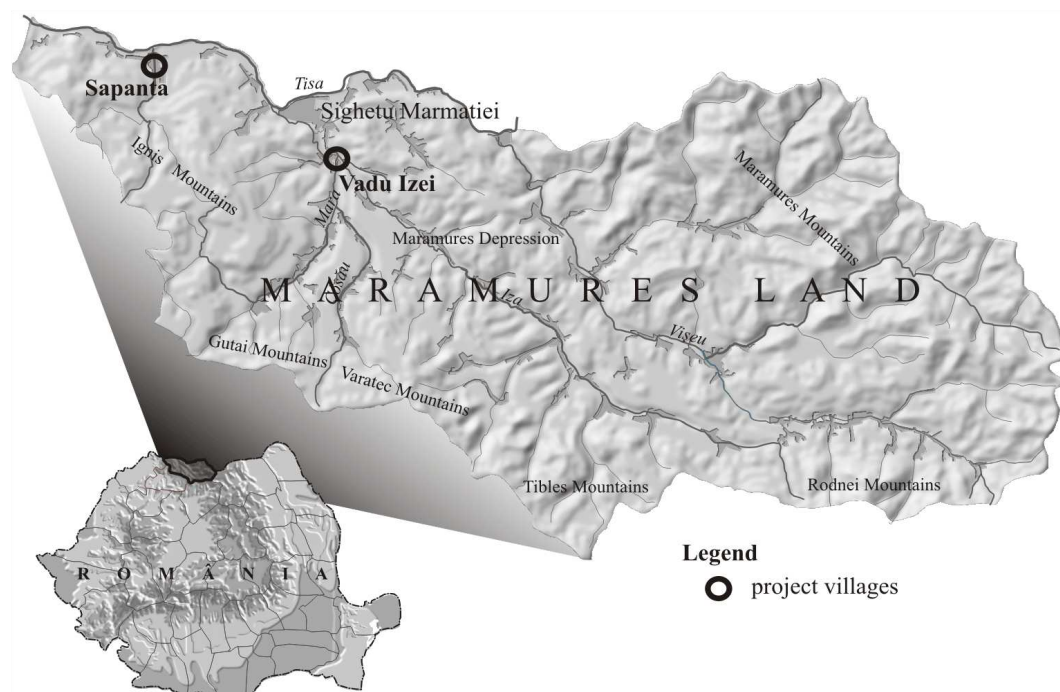


Figure 1. Maramureș Land. Position of project villages

In the period 2003-2004, the Geography Faculty of the Sighetu Marmăției Extension of the “Babeș Bolyai” University, in collaboration with the „Association for Social- Economic development of the Maramureș Land” have run two projects financed by the European Union, having as a target the creation of a new network of rural tourism, in villages without a significant touristic phenomenon within the Maramureș Land. Eight villages were chosen for this purpose, where a team made of teachers, students and graduates of the Geography Faculty have operated a series of actions:

- there were identified and prospected the households of the population that were suitable for rural tourism activities;

- there were organised group meetings and individual meetings in order to determine the owners to adhere to this line of action and to have confidence in what was to come;

- there was offered the necessary logistics to arrange the households- in accordance with the homologation criteria;

- there was ensured the financial support and the ‘know-how’ to get legal personality for each of the envisaged households;

- there were held classes for the human resources to prepare them for the activity of rural tourism;

- there were conceived and organised the touristic products and services;

- a system of touristic signs and promotion materials were designed;

- promotion actions, such as touristic fairs and workshops were run;

- a centre for touristic coordination and information was made in Sighetu Marmăției, and three smaller ones were set up in the representative villages, in order to take care of the setting in place and of the functioning conditions;

- the operative team was initially formed of approximatively 30 students and graduates, from which 10 were selected to become involved in a class of Tourism Industry Management, and which were consequently employed for two years.

The eight chosen villages were: Săpânța, Câmpulung la Tisa, Rona de Jos, Bârsana, Ocna Șugatag, Budești, Săcel, and Moisei. Although Săpânța already had a high number of rural households suitable for rural tourism, the efforts of the operative team to convince the owners to start up such an activity were considerable. Until then, the village only had one touristic pension- of recent date, whereas at the end of the programme, the number increased to 7. As a consequence of those actions, the phenomenon amplified undeniably. Therefore - in order to acquire a better image of the multiplying chained effects of the action started in the years 2002-2003, the current study was made.

The second village envisaged by this study is Vadu Izei - a village neighbouring Sighetu Marmăției, set at the confluence of the rivers Iza and Mara, also comprising a very important circulation knot at a regional level. Its touristic itinerary is quite different from that of Săpânța, since this is one of the pioneers of rural tourism in Maramureş. The phenomenon was initiated in the 1993-1995, by the creation of the OVR (Operation Village Roumain) network, with the support of a Belgian foundation.

Practically, the comparative situation of the two villages taken under consideration presents itself as such:

- in Vadu Izei, rural tourism started in 1995, while in Săpânța in 2003;
- the first impulse was given in Vadu Izei by a Belgian foundation, and in Săpânța by a University programme and a non-governmental association, all institutions foreign from rural life;
- both villages are set at maximum 15 km from the town, on important communication arteries;
- Săpânța owns an international touristic brand (the Merry Cemetery), whereas Vadu Izei has no such thing;
- in Vadu Izei, pension owners started an association of their own, with the adjacent network and an information center, while in Săpânța, some pensions are part of various tourism networks, but it does not have a functional association, nor a local information center.

DATA

Quantitative data available on Romanian tourism is often subject of several institutions. That is why it is necessary to co-ordinate data from different sources and confirm them with field study, using a strict methodology (Ilieș and Gallo, 2008, 132).

The data used in this study fall into the following categories:

- Field information, collected in July 2010, consisting of: name of the pension, its location on the orthophotoplan, the year when it was made, owners, legal forms, accommodation capacity, according to the pattern of accommodation rooms, meal serving capacity indoors and outdoors, the educational level of the owners, their children and their staff, expansion processes and whether it belongs to a touristic network or not. During the field activities all touristic pensions in Vadu Izei (25) and Săpânța (17) were prospected.

- Information from the experience of previous projects of BBU-MLM¹
- obtained by direct participation in the years 2002-2003;
- Information from the applicants who had the experience of the OVR project;
- Information from bibliographic material;
- Information from contents of the BBU-MLM projects;
- Cartographic material: the orthophotoplans of Vadu Izei and Săpânța;
- Advertising material of the networks, the pensions, the authorities, or of firms specialised in touristic promotion;

¹ „Babeș-Bolyai” University – „Maramureş Land” Microregion

- Statistic data from the web-site of the Ministry that subordinates touristic activities (the list of touristic structures with accommodation functions);
- Statistic data from the INSS, standing in the file of the village and the population count of 2002.

METHODS

a. Methods of tourist prospective research

The data used in the conception of this study was obtained directly from the field in July 2010, by questionnaires, the focus - group method, interview, observation, photo records, location of the information on the orthophotoplan. Traditional anthropological observation methods were combined with modern destination analysis (Macleod, 2006, 111-123). On the side of qualitative research, methods as concept mapping and benchmarking (Phillmore and Goodson, 2005, 152) provide the baseline for the indicators, benchmarking process will orient the validation of theories.

b. Methods of processing and analysing the information

The initial processing of the data arranged in tables and folders on categories of interest, trying to obtain comparable data, that would suit graphic and chartographic representation.

In order to emphasise the means of manifestation of the touristic phenomenon, considering the time and space evolution of accommodation capacity in rural pensions chartographic methods were used, while for comparative analyses between the two villages, graphic methods were used.

All types of data and graphic and chartographic representations were approached methodically by means of the following methods: group-focus, brainstorming, analysis, comparison, space relation, etc. In this respect tourism related literature, analysis and others methods were taken into account (Gibson and Lynch, 2007, 108, 123).

Săpânța. Evolution in space and time

An extremely suggestive emphasis of the way that good practice examples have in space and time was obtained in the case of Săpânța. The data was grouped under the aspect of formation periods, in four waves: 1999-2001, 2002-2004, 2005-2007 and 2009-2010. The first wave corresponds to incipient attempts, when three pensions-classified with two flowers were made, and which had low accommodation capacities. The second wave coincides with the BBU-MLM projects, when 8 rural touristic pensions were made. Possession of an internationally renowned touristic brand as the Merry Cemetery, facilitated the appearance of immediate results, which also determined the third wave. This was the most prolific of all (10 pensions appeared), thus confirming the importance of good-practice examples, and initiating, as expected the imitation phenomenon. The last wave includes the most recent touristic pensions.

The four waves of appearance of the rural touristic pensions, were represented chartographically thus: first of all by using bubbles in different tones, which change gradually in time, and secondly by representing the areas that correspond to each wave. Both the tones of the bubbles, as well as those of the areas could be related in space according to vicinity, circulation axes, location of the international brand, hidrographic network, etc resulting in new information that could not have been observed by any other means.

Vadu Izei. Evolution in space and time

Unlike Săpânța, the information from Vadu Izei presents itself in a completely different manner - fact which leads to the set-up of another type of chartographic representation. In this respect, the pensions were grouped in four waves of appearance as well; however their spatial distribution reveals different ways of manifestation. The rural pensions were grouped according to the distribution of the data in time, having as result

the following intervals: 1994, 1997-1998, 2003-2004, 2007 and 2009. In order to emphasise its territorial manifestation, a dotted line was used to border a certain area.

The numeric evolution graphic of the rural touristic pensions

Only one graphic was used to represent the information from the two villages in order to facilitate analysis by comparison. The representation of the development in the number of touristic pension was made with a broken line, by summing up the values, since it allows the emphasis on the leaps, registered in time as steps. The time interval between 1990-2010 was chosen as meaningful for the emphasis of the time passed, and which was absolutely necessary to start essential actions, ever since the events that took place in 1989 in Romania. Two vertical bends were used to mark the time intervals in which the projects that were to trigger the touristic phenomenon took place in the villages under consideration (The OVR Project of 1993-1994, The BBU-MLM project of 2003-2004).

Since the OVR network started off in 1994 with 20 pensions, out of which only 9 are still functional, a graphic representation was required, using a triangle that decreases in intensity-until it disappears, from 1994 towards the following years. Linkages in rural tourism as described in Caalders (2003, 74-76) were scarce and uneven.

RESULTS

Săpânța. Evolution in time and space

The village of Săpânța with its 25 rural touristic pensions (figure 2 and 3) is a great example of good practice and where the imitation by vicinity is most clearly emphasised in what concerns the space.

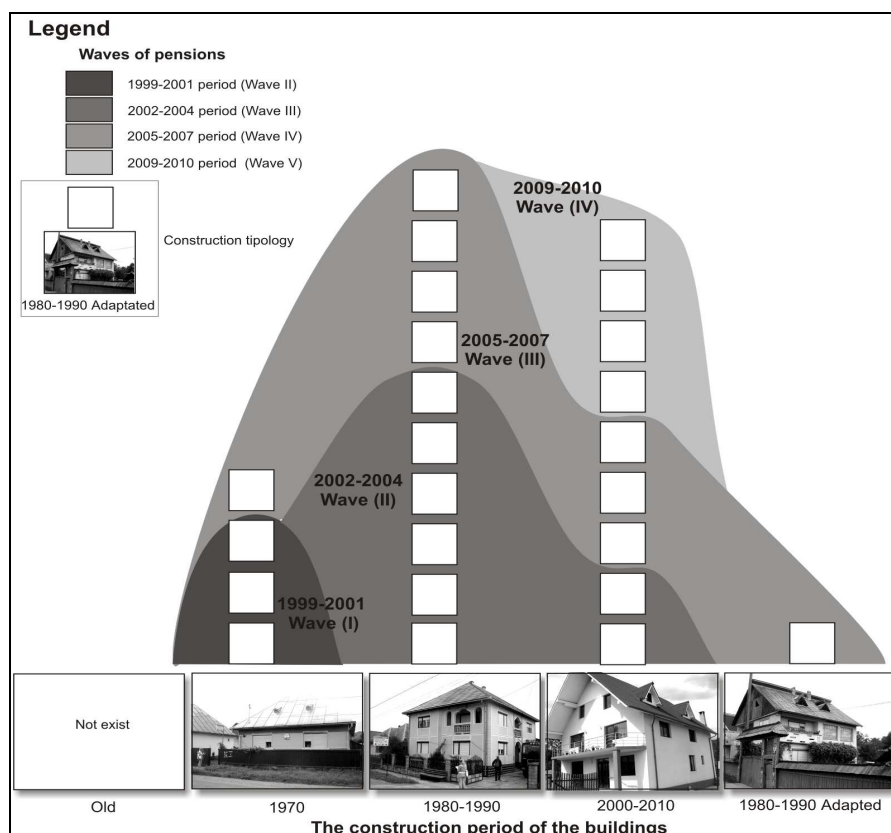


Figure 2. Săpânța. Correlations between construction typology and waves of tourist pensions

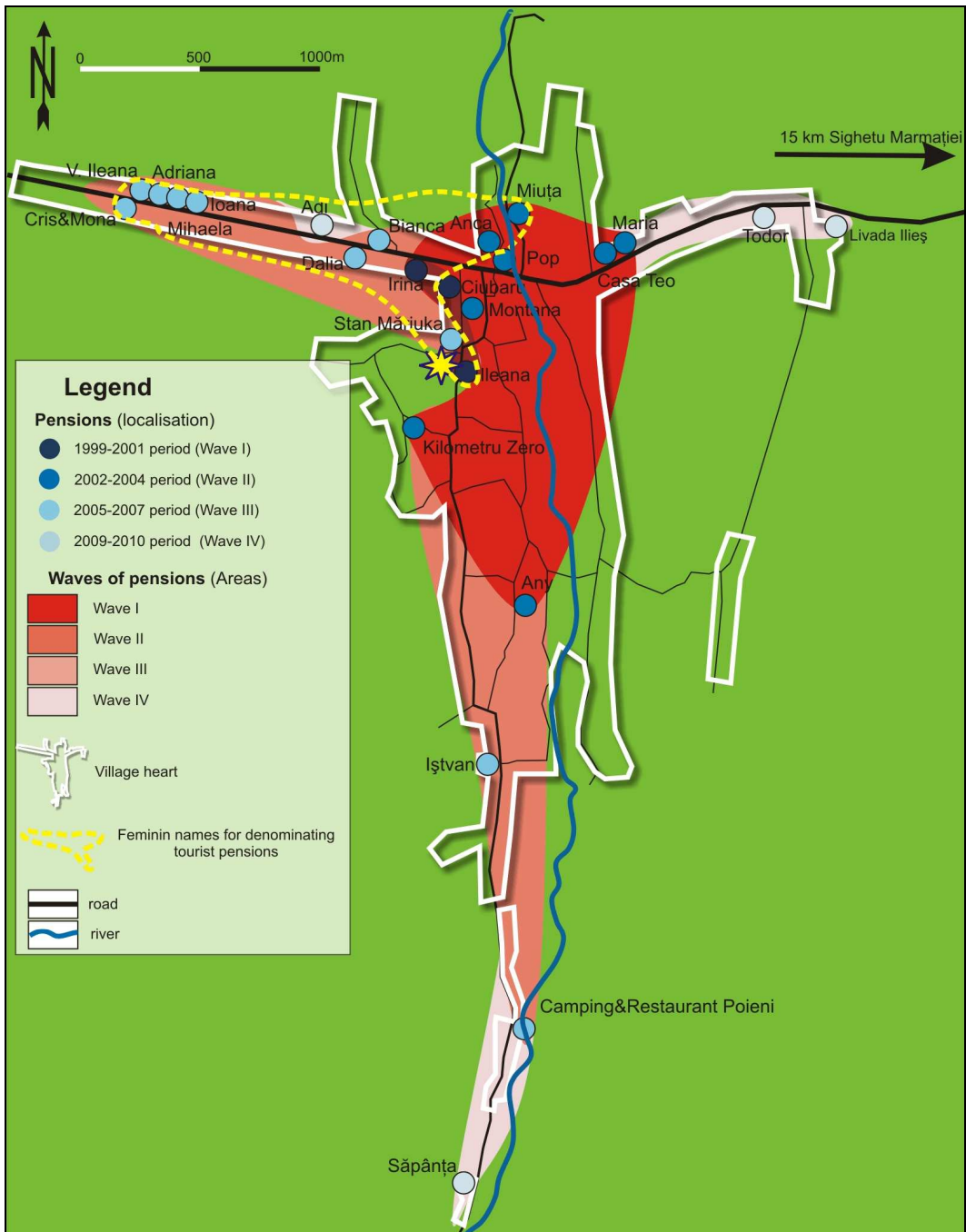


Figure 3. Săpânța. Geospatial analysis of tourist pensions waves

Possession of the international brand, enhanced by the belltower of the monastery Săpânța-Peri, which holds the European record in height facilitated the rapid appearance of economic results, although before the BBU-MLM projects there was a touristic flow with no accommodation facilities. If the cartographic representation of the four waves of the appearance of rural touristic pension with

bubbles does not draw much attention, marking the areas makes obvious a series of aspects. The phenomenon started off with three pensions in the central area of the village, in the immediate vicinity of the „Merry” Cemetery, and expanded uniformly, we might even say „molecularly” northwards.

The expansion continued towards the east and the west in the second wave, then in the third wave towards the west and the south, along the main routes of communication. The final wave comes to continue the second and third waves, towards the east, also following the main routes of communication. The only exception to this scheme is represented by Pension Adi, an uncommon structure of a practical investor coming from outside the community and having a different mentality. This phenomenon of propulsion of the rural tourism is manifested through closeness, rather confirming the imitation by vicinity pattern than that of good practice example.

Considering the touristic flow of the village in and out of season, one can say that the tourism of Săpânța is the combined effect of good practice example and imitation by vicinity. Although considering all the villages with touristic pensions in the Maramureş Land one can notice abundance in the use of women's names, especially from the family, in Săpânța one can see a rather homogenous area in the north-western part, along the national driveway, where all the pensions have women's names and were created in approximatively the same period. This here is not an example of good practice, but a mere example of imitation by vicinity.

Vadu Izei. Evolution in space and time

The period since the appearance of the first wave of touristic pensions (figure 4 and 5) has allowed a better qualitative selection of the pensions, which was done by the touristic market.

Out of the 20 that existed in the beginning only 9 survived until 2010, and the ones created afterwards depended a lot on the experience of the network and on the financial capacity of the new local investors. Actually, the pension that appeared afterwards do not follow the pattern of imitation by vicinity, but only the good-practice examples.

There is no noticeable manifestation in space under the form of territorial influences. Unlike Săpânța, the pensions from Vadu Izei are better developed in touristic practices- they might even be in a different era- that of touristic products and services, highly improved in quality. An extra argument in this respect is the fact that in most cases of success, pension owners or their children have followed or are following the courses of the Geography of Tourism Faculty of the Sighetu Marmației extension of the „Babeş Bolyai” University. Although certain areas neighbouring Vadu Izei belong to Sighetu Marmației, the touristic pensions gravitate Vadu Izei in their activities, due to the existence of the local network and of the touristic information center. However, as moment of appearance, 4 of the touristic pensions of the third wave (2003- 2004) belong to the urban territory and were created under the influence of the BBU-MLM projects, coordinated by Sighetu Marmației.

THE NUMERIC EVOLUTION GRAPHIC OF THE RURAL TOURISTIC PENSIONS

In each of the two cases there were external triggers - in Vadu Izei (figure 6) it was the project run in collaboration of the locals with OVR Belgium, and in Săpânța there were the projects of the BBU-MLM partnership in collaboration with the local population and the local authorities.

In both cases the starting point is emphasised by an important leap:

- The appearance of 20 pensions in Vadu Izei, in 1994, out of which only 9 survived;
- The appearance of 7 rural touristic pensions in Săpânța - as a result of the programmes run in 2002-2003.

The two triggering elements are set in time at a distance of about 9 years (I and II).



Figure 4. Vadu Izei Village. Geospatial analysis of tourist pensions waves

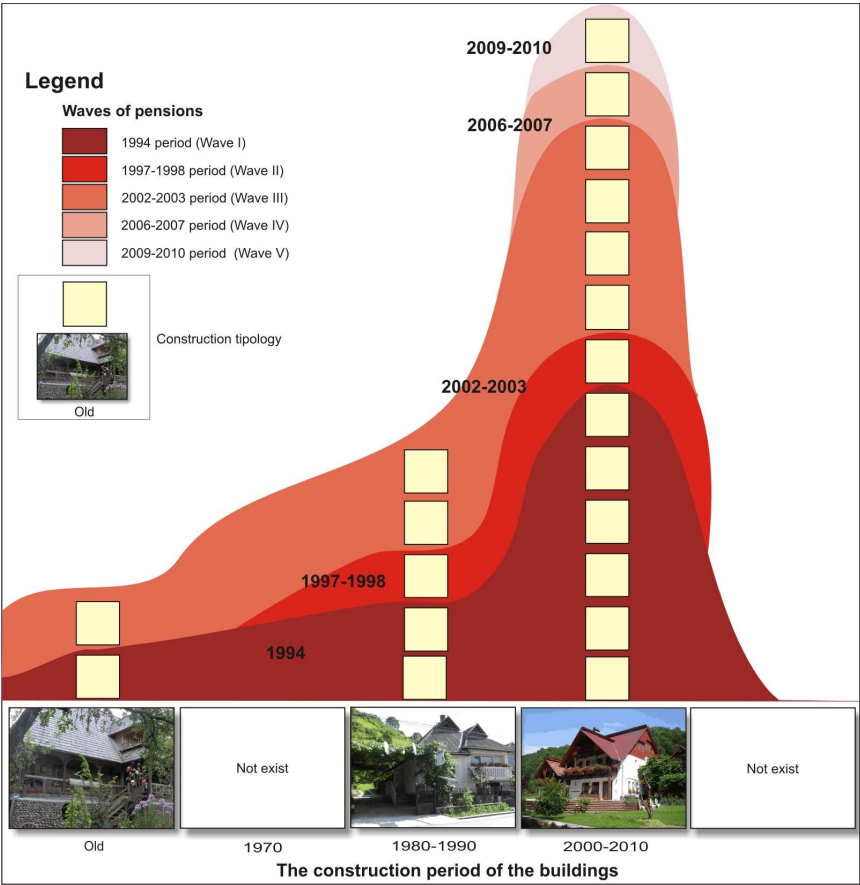


Figure 5. Vadu Izei Village. Correlations between typology of construction and waves of tourist pensions

On a first analysis, the two evolution lines denote two different itineraries, taking place in time intervals differing in length, but partly coinciding as period, recording even a quantitative crossing in the years 2006-2007.

The two situations do have a common aspect, meaningly a peak point- when the actions were started (I and II).

In Vadu Izei, in the time interval between 1994-2003, except for the disappearance of an important number of pensions from those initially homologated, there was one other time interval when rural touristic pensions were created (1997-1998), probably as a delayed or enchainned effect of the actions started in 1994 (Ia).

In Săpânța the situation followed a different itinerary, of small initiatives between the years 1999-2000, and important leap in 2004 - with consequent effects in the following years recording three waves up to now (waves Iia, Iib, Iic).

Interesting is the fact that the actions started in the 8 villages with the BBU-MLM project have had connected consequences in Vadu Izei as well, by the appearance of 5 other rural touristic pensions (II-I). The data from the field confirm the fact that 4 of these are directly connected with the BBU-MLM projects.

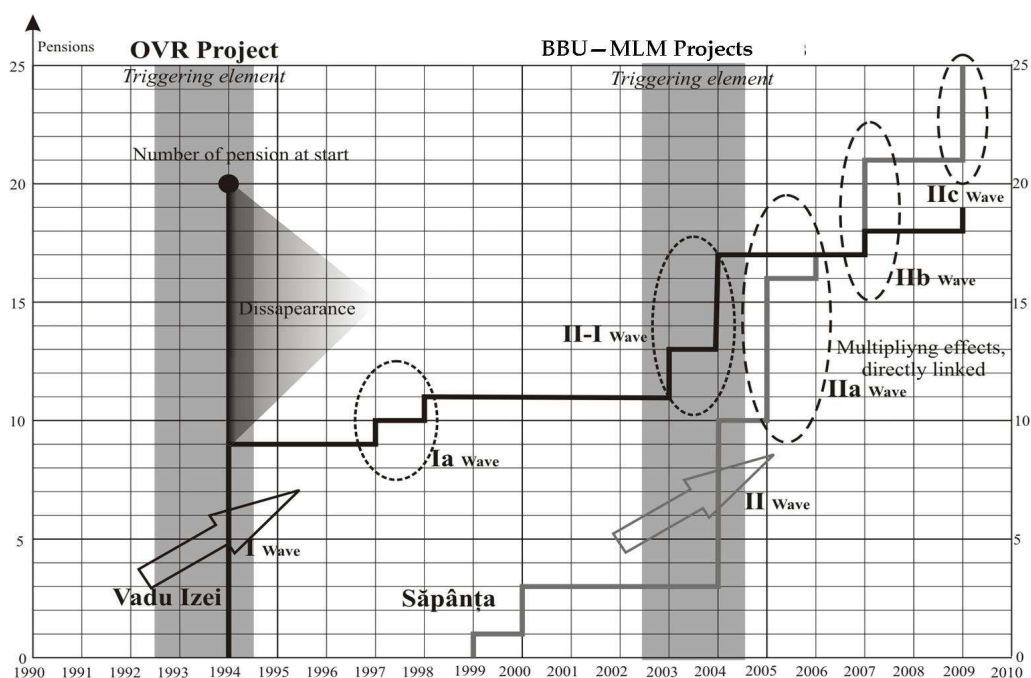


Figure 6. Identifying relevant aspects concerning the evolution of rural tourism pensions, currently active in Vadu Izei and Săpânța, Maramureş Land

Through the analysis of the information presented in figure 6 are revealed a series of aspects of extreme importance for the implantation strategies of the new development projects: According to their intensity (force), the projects run there have cosequential effects taking the form of waves propelling in time (Ia, IIa, Iib, Iic, II-I). The waves represent the new pensions that appear in time as effects of the triggering elements:

- in the case of a strong triggering element, such as the BBU-MLM projects, several waves of pensions appeared (waves IIa, Iib, Iic), characterised by increasingly smaller dimensions and increasingly bigger amounts of time as it goes farther from the moment of the triggering effect. This can be considered as a strong triggering effect since the projects were run at the scale of a bigger number of villages, they benefitted from

university logistics, and the human resources were made up of students and graduates from the same field of action (The Geography of Tourism). It must be also mentioned the fact that the BBU-MLM project was run after the OVR project, thus benefitting from the experience and the effects of the previous one.

Worthy of notice is the fact that in Săpânța, a great number of pensions were made in the immediately following year, thus proving once again the good-practice examples, or maybe the imitation ones, while also considering the elaboration of local and regional development strategies.

- in the case of a smaller intensity triggering element, such as the OVR project, the multiplicative consequential effect had as a result another wave of pensions, after an interval of 3-4 years (wave Ia).

The trigger of the phenomena was produced, in both cases, by outside intervention- in Vadu Izei from abroad (Belgium), and in Săpânța from the nearest town (Sighetu Marmației).

CONCLUSIONS

Common aspects

By co-relating the situations encountered in other studied villages it is safe to say that the inhabitants of the villages of Maramureș are more open to the initiatives of people or entities coming from outside their community. The actions that imply the presence of organised groups of specialists - that are easily visible on location, does not determine the sudden adherence of the locals to an idea.

Organised involvement of the specialists from profile faculties generates much stronger effects compared to other entities, increasing considerably the speed of development. The transfer of ideas, logistics and methodology of the higher educational institutions represent another catalyst of rural development.

Operative teams of specialists have much better results compared to the teams formed of different representatives of the institutions involved.

At the level of Săpânța

Any initiative started in Săpânța must be preceded by a previously successful example from the same village. People tend to imitate or to copy the good practice example from their close neighbours, rather than from elsewhere.

Spreading an idea follows the vicinity pattern, without making considerable territorial leaps. Once the phenomenon is triggered it rapidly acquires great intensity and spreads over a large period of time.

Săpânța is still in the expansion phase, and has not yet reached the phase of increasing the quality of their touristic products and services. In this phase the locals do not grant great importance to studies specialised in the field of tourism- as an argument of success, being at the opposite pole from Vadu Izei, thriving for a balance between „globalization” and the local identity of the architecture concerning tourist purposed buildings (Lecourtois, 2007, 819-832).

At the level of Vadu Izei

Some of the touristic pensions advantageously set in what concerns the ways of communication and the touristic flow- already well-known by touroperators, no longer think it is necessary to be part of the touristic network and to pay a fee for the touristic information center to continue to function.

More advanced in rural tourism than Săpânța, the inhabitants of Vadu Izei grant great importance to specialty studies, putting their hopes of higher performance in the level of preparation of their human resources. This is the situation of the pensions that do not have an advantageous location, and which are trying to reduce their handicap by means of professional performance.

Since the activities of rural tourism were started, there has been a process of selection of the rural touristic pensions, by the touristic market according to the quality of their performance.

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