

Personal Networks As a Source for Social Capital in the Rural Communities of Maramureş

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Introduction

THE MARAMUREŞ County, situated in the northern region of the Eastern Carpathians, is considered to be the ancient territory of the “free Dacians” unaffected by the Roman expansion in Dacia (101-102, 105-106). Over time, the region has witnessed the influence of different occupations. In 1688, Maramureş, along with Transylvania, became part of the Austrian Empire. In 1919, the northern part of the region was annexed by the Carpathian Rutenia from Czechoslovakia. The entire region was occupied by Hungary in 1939. After World War II, northern Maramureş was incorporated into Ukraine, which, at the time, belonged to the Soviet Union. The southern part of Maramureş, which became the County of Maramureş during the interwar period, was afterwards ceded to Romania. Having long been the object of territorial dispute between the Great Powers, Maramureş is marked not only by instability but also ongoing influences. Its ethnic composition is rather heterogeneous: up until the mediaeval period, the inhabitants of Maramureş were Romanians, the descendants of the Roman Dacians. At present, nonetheless, a few ethnic minorities like Hungarians, Ukrainians and Roma people add to the Romanians, who form the majority group that inhabits the southern part of the historic Maramureş. The majority group in the north is represented by Ukrainians, who live together with small communities of Romanians and Hungarians. Other communities, such as the Jewish one that began to colonise Maramureş in 1728, have disappeared (Catrina 2012, 44).

The position of Maramureş (which borders on Ukraine in the northern part of the country), its geographical features (geologically complex and morphologically diverse) and the specific climatic conditions (extremely frosty winters) have favoured the preservation of a certain autonomy compared to other areas of the country. This explains why neither the collectivisation of agriculture, nor the industrialisation process that unfolded during the communist period was as massive as they used to be in other parts of Romania. The mining and wood processing industries as well as forest exploitation were the main economic activities in the area. After the fall of communism in 1989, Maramureş has gone through radical economic, social and cultural changes. The enforcement of a democratic political system led to the collapse of the mining industry and

also to a fall in forest exploitation. Under these circumstances, lots of workers have left abroad (especially in Italy, Spain and France). This statement is supported by demographic data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INSEE 2002),¹ according to which the number of the population living in the County of Maramureş is even lower, from 540,099 people counted during the 1992 census to 510,110, as the 2002 census has shown. According to some unofficial data provided by the census completed on October 31, 2011, 38,000 inhabitants have left Maramureş County, which means a 7.5% drop in the number of inhabitants (as Dragoş Hojda noted in *City news*, article on November 02, 2011). Migration is one of the factors that made this phenomenon possible in both Maramureş and Romania as a whole.² On the other hand, rural tourism is the major economic activity which has taken root in this socio-cultural area after the 1989 Revolution.

The local logic of development in the rural tourism domain was built on the reputation of Maramureş as a “traditional” space. This frozen, eternal, unchangeable and idyllic image of the villages of Maramureş built on items of peasant specificity, such as their traditional housing, religious feast days, popular costumes and ecological food, becomes the main characteristic of this region that have been “put into tourism”. The promotion of this image had to meet tourism marketing needs, but also the expectations of the tourists. The guesthouse owners have chosen to build up their identity on elements of “peasant culture” in order to respond to the tourists’ social demand. This identity “manoeuvred” in tourism practices, built on the traditional image of Maramureş, is certainly different from the one of their every day life. Being reflective, the promotion of this image via tourist practices transforms the guesthouse owners of Maramureş into “cultural agents. This entails a reflection of the changes that have occurred in the rural world, of which the guesthouse owners are acutely aware precisely by “putting” regional specificity “into tourism”. Constructed, produced and exhibited as part of the logic of the market, identity gains the function of a “thoughtful approach” (Catrina 2014, 221). Moreover, it is a kind of mask that “the tourist entrepreneur” puts on especially when visiting a tourist. The presence of tourists in the region of Maramureş has led to the rediscovery of the specificities and origin of the villagers living in this region. Having found its roots in the peasant tradition, this specificity has become a “way of asserting their difference and, even, a manner of establishing their authority” (Lenclud 1987, 119) in front of the *other* coming from a different cultural space.

The analysis of the phenomenon of identity in the context of the tourist practices of the guesthouse owners from Maramureş by theatricalization of the traditional peasant’s image, otherwise by recovering a mythologized identity and by its mimetic representation in front of the tourists, shows us how the entrepreneurs³ in this field experience the encounter with strangers. Besides, the main purpose of this research conducted over four years (2004-2008), namely to capture how the guesthouse owners construct their identity which is represented to the tourists transformed this way into “actors” that “perform” on the “scenes” improvised on their own properties, we have primarily analyzed the importance of economic factor in establishing personal networks of sociability within the rural communities in Maramureş. Therefore, sociability is studied from the perspective of the guesthouse owners developing relationships with other inhabitants working or not in the same area. We wonder where sociability stops for guesthouse

owners when they relate to other members of their community, being or not “tourist entrepreneur”. The purpose of this study is therefore to discover ways of expression in the organization of rural communities in Maramureş¹ which create work solidarity. We practically seek to identify functional interdependences generated by the rural tourism domain as a source for social capital. We thus demonstrate the role of social capital in establishing links within the rural communities from Maramureş. We consider these interdependencies as relationships established by tourist entrepreneurs with other locals, “acting” or not in tourism field, with a view to meeting their individual needs related to rural tourism practices. We intend to study particularly the kind of sociability used by the *ego* in order to build social networks only for self-interested achievement. By saying this, we assume that the experience of rural tourism as a competitive economic context superimposed on a traditional cultural pattern gives guesthouse owners the possibility to get involved in social networks, seen as a rational choice to meet their needs related to rural tourist practices.

Conceptual background

THERE IS a substantial amount of literature on social networks and how they work as social capital. From this point of view, our proposal to analyze tourist rural entrepreneurs’ networks as a source for social capital requires some conceptual clarifications. The initial approaches of “social capital” in the 90’s were provided by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988, 1990) and Robert Putnam (1993). While Bourdieu talks about the effects of social capital especially at individual level, Coleman refers to the importance of social capital for the enhancement of the community by strengthening social bonds and norms of reciprocity. Emphasizing the role of civic participation, Putnam foregrounds the important contribution of the social capital to social development. As there is no consensus over the definition of this concept in the literature concentrating upon social networks or civic participation, we consider that social capital refers to forms of social bonding, trust and reciprocity norms with consequences at individual level (ability to access resources controlled by others) or collective one (social cohesion).

Sociability is an important form of social capital in rural communities. According to sociologist Dumitru Sandu, the preservation of positive elements established by the community, i.e. “similar value orientations”, and their use with a view to generating sociability could be conducive to social capital (Sandu 2005, 12). Their function is “to promote the positive definition of interaction patterns and reduce transaction costs in the processes of interaction” (Sandu 1999, 71). Similarly, “the elements that represent the social capital are the social networks and the related norms of reciprocity” (Sandu 2003, 19). At the same time, “social networks are relatively sustainable structures of interaction among actors who are involved in exchange relationship, on the basis of specific sets of expectations and resources. The type of network is given by the nature or the support of the interaction (family, neighbourhood, solidarity, fellowship, friendship) or by the functionality of the interaction (interests, mutual aid, solidarity, traffickers, etc.)” (Sandu 2003, 33).

Considering that there are forms of mutual support in any rural community, anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu distinguishes between “mutual aid situations”—“situations where the community considers it desirable to engage in mutual aid relationships”; “duties of mutual aid”—various obligations of reciprocity (social reciprocity practices and gift exchange) arising from the involvement of social actors”; “mutual aid obligations”, which “imply the possibility of an explicit and prior mutual aid intention among partners, established in contractual terms—possibly in a written form” (Mihăilescu 2002, 9).

By taking these elements as serviceable instruments for our study, we consider the relations between guesthouse owners and other locals with a similar or different status from the point of view of a relational approach. Our outlook is therefore built on the concept of “configuration” developed by Norbert Elias (1970). This concept can be defined as a structure of “a relationship of dependency”, the equivalent of “a tension equilibrium” (Cahier 2006) between the parties involved. The emphasis is on functional needs that connect the *self* to the *other*. Such reciprocity is placed at several levels: emotional closeness, material and financial resources, social recognition and other recognized social needs. The answer to these needs creates a relational dynamics, individuals being engaged in a “relationship of strength” (Elias 1970). This is why the individuals’ mutual involvement in social relations cannot be designed on the basis of stable and symmetrical power relationships, but, on the contrary, according to asymmetric and changing relationships as a result of interdependence. This kind of interdependence generates a chain of reactions from the participants involved in the relationship and produces the global structure of their actions.

In the light of these theories, we ask ourselves how the guesthouse owners from the rural region of Maramureș build their networks. Focusing on the set-up of social relations between different actors referred to in this study, our purpose is therefore to analyze to what extent we can talk about a configuration of relationships that define guesthouse owners as “actors” in the economic context created by rural tourism.

Configuring professional networks in tourism: operating criteria

The kinship

CERTAIN GUESTHOUSE owners tend to develop various forms of aid based on blood relations in order to handle the responsibilities arising from tourism. For some of them, the only imaginable help may come from their families. In several tourist guesthouses from Maramureș, the woman who manages the “tourist enterprise” is very often helped by her mother when she cannot meet the tourists’ expectations by herself: *I may help her: I have a daughter; I have [her] (she said, adding her name). I spend my leisure time helping her with the guesthouse chores when I am at home. I help her (...) cook, clean or wash, make the bed, I help her do everything she needs to do.*⁵ If necessary, the mother of this entrepreneur-lady does everything in her guesthouse, except for being rewarded for what she does.

Sometimes an entrepreneur-lady could benefit from the help of her husband or her mother-in-law. Even her nephew/niece may participate in cleaning and arranging rooms, cooking or serving the tourists:

“Who has helped Ms. [X]?”

“Her mother-in-law, Mr. [Y] (referring to her son-in-law and adding his name), her niece. She has got a seven-year-old niece who helps her. She arranges the forks, the plates [on the table], she serves the tourists.”

From time to time, the “complicity” of all the members of the extended family group determines their multiple functions, as a combination of tasks is required because of their business interest:

“We work as a team: my mom, my dad, my brother, myself, my sister-in-law, all my family are involved, because the family is the union that has made us what we are now, so everyone carries out a specific activity. If my mum is feeling a little sick, then I have to prepare the lunch for the tourists; if I feel sick, my brother has to replace me. Each of us can replace one another. I can serve in the dining room, or he can serve, it is no problem for us. If we go upstairs, we become plumbers. We have to do everything because we have no other option.”

First-degree relatives may be associated to manage their guesthouse better. They may often appeal to the help of their parents because they want their business to remain within their family without any involvement of strangers. This way of acting entails the use of all the possible capital (not only human) existing in the household.

“If I need foodstuff and I don't have any, my mum has a sister who has all these products. Generally, we don't go to the grocery store or to Sighet town in order to do the shopping. We raise sheep, cows, pigs, chickens, all [domestic] animals. And we slaughter them. The idea is to use what belongs to us, not to buy.”

In such a tourist guesthouse, the roles of each family member seem to be well established so that no stranger can penetrate its microcosm. Similarly, we can say that the trend is to collect capital by using resources obtained by themselves.

In several guesthouses in Maramureş, the husband's and wife's roles are well defined, particularly if the business belongs only to the couple, not to many associated relatives, as in the situation described above. Such an example is that of an entrepreneur who is dealing with Internet advertising, while his wife (and sometimes his mother-in-law) does the cooking. The husband has nothing to do in the kitchen, but occasionally he can serve the tourists with food cooked by his wife:

“But who is dealing with the guesthouse management?”

“Here, my wife and I. (...) I'm in charge of advertising it on the Internet, I deal with my computer, and my wife speaks French quite well. (...) My wife and her mother are in charge of cooking. So, her mother helps us. (...) I also help them to serve dinner.”

Self-sufficiency is not an isolated characteristic that defines certain domestic group members who carry out tasks related to their guesthouse management. On the contrary, we can speak about a frequency of this attribute in rural tourism from Maramureş. According to some guesthouse owners, the tasks of either member forming the couple do not seem to be well differentiated, although the husband has his wife do the cooking and the cleaning of the guesthouse, while he undertakes other functions, adjacent to his wife, but indispensable to someone who desires to earn as much as possible from this practice: it is the function of being a tourist guide. Sometimes, he can help his wife with domestic tasks (cooking and cleaning), if he does not accompany the tourists in their journeys as a guide: *“We do everything together. We cook and clean. I give explanations or I answer to the tourists’ questions, as a guide, I deal with them.”*

Tourism practice in rural areas rarely allows any person outside the domestic group to interfere in its affairs. A tourist entrepreneur explains to us that it is a “family practice”: *“The kind of tourism that we deal with is made in the family... and it is a family tourism.”* As agricultural jobs in these rural communities are usually done by the whole family, the entrepreneurs prefer to handle the management of their guesthouse with their parents. The management is related not only to accommodation and meals, but also to food production. In addition, the tourism business and agriculture may sometimes overlap in order to meet one of them, usually “the tourist enterprise”:

“Where do you get the food from?”

“Well, we also have some sheep. We can make cheese, we can slaughter a lamb in May, we have a fair here where we can buy a calf, in the garden we have potatoes, beans, and so we use what is local. We don’t usually buy anything from the store. Moreover, we have milk; we have therapeutic herbs for tea, we have everything we need. We buy only sugar, oil, rice, and pepper. We buy what we cannot produce ourselves.”

Usually, the tourism business relies on agriculture because guesthouse owners use what they produce for the tourists’ cuisine. A husband and a wife, and sometimes their children, are co-participants in this activity, according to their skills and availability. The human capital offered by the couple and children is often sufficient to manage a guesthouse from Maramureş.

If the people who make a small family group⁶ are not enough to meet the requirements of rural tourism activities, another human capital represented by the extended family adds to the foregoing one. The retired parents can help their children with a tourist company in various domestic jobs such as cooking or housekeeping. Sometimes, material and financial capital provided by parents can support the “enterprise” of these guesthouse owners. Material capital used in tourism can be the inheritance given by parents (either land on which they may build a guesthouse or that can serve as a farm, or various buildings or objects or woven materials used for decorating their guesthouses, etc.). Food produced at home, in their own household, may be an equally significant capital for entrepreneurs in rural tourism.

For example, a household transformed into a space full of greenery and arranged in this way especially for tourists does not allow rural entrepreneurs to grow animals. In

fact, when they decide to expand the space for tourists, they abandon the role played by the wooden old stable and invest it with a new function. The resistance of the building allow them to rearrange it and turn it into a guesthouse. Apart from the benefits of the new guesthouse designed in this place, there is a disadvantage: once with the conversion of the stable into a tourist guesthouse, their owners cannot keep and grow animals in their household. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs rely on the aid of the parents who helped them find a solution to their problem, growing farm animals in their place, providing them meat, milk and cheese and other local products required by tourists. We notice that generally, there is not a clear dissociation between the goods of the two generations, as parents work for their children. They do not directly benefit from their labour because all that they produce goes to their children. In fact, their only benefit is the satisfaction they have for helping them.

“We don’t really buy it [food]. We have a household; we have pigs, goats, chickens, hens, so, we don’t really buy meat. (...) We offer tourists only what we produce in our household, what we do: our sausages, our cheese, we don’t buy them because we have a lot of goats (and we produce a lot of cheese). My parents live here, they have cows, so, we have milk from them. Well, in fact, we buy what we cannot produce in our household. (...) We buy veal meat, but the calves are from here, from our village; we have pigs, goats (we slaughter a lot of young goats) (...), [we have] chickens and hens.”

This is another case of a self-sufficient guesthouse in which the spouses and their parents work together for their own benefit. Besides family members, very few people get to know the secrets related to guesthouse management. Even if these entrepreneurs don’t have certain skills before opening their guesthouse, they have acquired them without any help from outsiders. The husband, a self-made person, is prepared particularly “to become the guide” for the tourists accommodated in his guesthouse. In addition, he even learned foreign languages in order to communicate with foreign tourists more effectively. Here is a clear example of human capital accumulated in a guesthouse.

However, in the tourist villages of Maramureş, there are entrepreneurs who can benefit from foreign aid without any fear. This is the kind of owners who also deal with other occupations. Some of them even think to hire someone: “*We will hire a woman to do the cleaning, washing, and ironing.*” Of course, in this case, we speak about someone hired temporarily, according to the number of tourists accommodated in a guesthouse at a specific time. However, it is uncommon for the guesthouse owners to use outsiders. To hire someone implies a certain responsibility of the employer for the employee and vice versa: the employer needs to receive various services from an employee who will be rewarded with a sum of money. This mutual responsibility established in contractual terms is not suitable for guesthouse owners, who generally prefer to use another type of capital in order to meet their needs, such as familial capital, a situation described above.

We can conclude this part by saying that most of the guesthouse owners in the rural area from Maramureş often have relatives, such as their parents, who help them unreservedly. Accordingly, they build the management of their tourism “enterprises” on blood ties. Moreover, the association in order to ensure a very good management

for tourism “enterprise” may include all the members of the extended family. The kinship seems to be an important form of association in the field of tourism in Maramureş. Otherwise, the main Romanian Sociological tradition clearly talks about kinship as an important pattern for establishing mutual aid relations, whether or not it is related to similar professional practices. Indeed, the kinship principle is operational within the entrepreneur couple like an important associative form valid for any rural community. But we need to mention that it is usually only a form of unilateral aid, since parents work for the benefit of their children. On the other hand, the help which comes from outside the family is apparently unimaginable. The only possible relationship is established only through kinship. It is the basis for social representations of tourism entrepreneur couples.

The neighbourhood

We have discovered that any couple of entrepreneurs working in rural tourism in Maramureş can have certain relations with their neighbours in order to meet specific needs related to guesthouse administration. For these people, the neighbourhood can be an important factor for sociability. Traditionally, the neighbourhood means a “community of interest arising from spatial proximity”, which is an “economic brotherhood”. It refers to the help given by people according to the normative power of tradition, either as a result of an emotional relationship or under the action of the space factor that coerces a family group to conduct in a particular way in relation to the others that are nearby. In their actions, rural tourism entrepreneurs can cooperate with their neighbours owning a guesthouse, when they want to meet their needs and interests.

For an entrepreneur-lady in the village of Poienile Izei, not only relatives can be potential “actors” in her guesthouse. Her neighbours too can participate in this. But, while relatives may enter the woman’s household, her neighbours do it rarely and sometimes in a material way, which means that they can provide food to this entrepreneur-lady. Their help is possible only in the absence of relatives.

For instance, wishing to make her guesthouse a more powerful attraction for tourists, an entrepreneur-lady wants to decorate her guesthouse rooms in an “old peasant fashion” way with objects, clothes and traditional furniture collected over time. To carry out this project, she could ask for the help of another local, that lives or not nearby: *“I want to decorate it with a loom, all objects belonging to the loom, even with sewing objects and I hope to collect as many old things as possible. (...) Our remaining objects or the ones from my neighbours. Really old traditional objects!”*

However, she does not want to borrow, but to pay for them. In order to give back no more than they received, the entrepreneurs in this domain prefer to limit their social relations to a simple relationship founded on the principle of immediate payment of the products obtained from another inhabitant. The relations between them are thus reducible to obtaining material goods in exchange for a reward, which is often financial. For instance, that is the way in which entrepreneurs try to stock in advance everything they need for their own guesthouse, instead of being forced to seek help from any other entrepreneur: *“We have to supply our guesthouse. We raise ten hens only for fresh eggs. We have fresh milk and cream from cows.”*

These entrepreneurs never hope to lack any products (food or other material needs) in order not to be forced to seek someone else's help, especially if this person owns a guesthouse. We found out that most guesthouse owners may use the help of another person only in cases of stringency:

"What are you doing if you don't have eggs?"

"No, no, no, we have it. We are all the time supplied. But if it is necessary, we go in the neighbourhood. But we have all we need at home."

Usually, when the help of the family, both the wife's and the husband's family is not enough, the entrepreneur goes to another villager, frequently living nearby, to get the product needed in exchange for money:

"Where do you take your food from?"

"Food... Well, I provide the food myself. But I do not keep animals in the farm, as there is not enough space. Instead, I have neighbours. I have also a mother and a mother-in-law. They have cows, chickens and I bring food from them. So, all the natural food is from peasants. I don't buy it from shops. From time to time, I buy a calf from my neighbour, or I take a pig from my mother."

In fact, in this couple, the wife takes care of tourists on her own. Her husband's aid is temporary, as he works abroad. As for her daughters, they come home only on holidays.

The situation is similar in the case of another entrepreneur-lady who manages tourism and agricultural "enterprises" together with her husband and, from time to time, with their son. Sometimes she goes to her neighbours in order to buy food that she cannot produce.

In the rural communities in Maramureş, it is atypical for someone to give something without expecting anything in return. To avoid such a situation, our entrepreneurs prefer to pay immediately for a product taken from any neighbour. The economic factor is more important than the relationship between neighbours.

Once open to the whole community members, the narrowing down of social relationships can be identified even in the discourse of these guesthouse owners who do not want to have anything to do with another inhabitant of the same community located in the vicinity, whether or not they work in the field of rural tourism. An old lady from Botiza, whose children are dealing with tourism practices and who obviously knows everything about what "moves" in their own backyard where the guesthouse is settled, illuminates us through a short explanation: they do not interfere with the tourist so as to recommend a specific guesthouse, regardless of location, owner or comfort: *"We lodge as many tourists as we can afford. We do not send the tourists to our neighbours, to anyone!"* Therefore, we cannot identify any trace of relationship that would be established between the owners of this guesthouse and the others living in the same village. Mutual aid among "actors" in rural tourism is unthinkable outside the immediate economic relationship that rewards such an action often voluntarily. *"If my neighbour does not send tourists to me,*

why should I do?”, some of the guesthouse owners in rural areas in Maramureş may ask. It is about individualism rather than self-help among the various people working in this field. We found out that some guesthouse owners did not even borrow a product from their neighbours that might miss at a certain time from their household. To borrow means to owe something to someone and to be in debt. It is an undesirable thing for the guesthouse owners who prefer to “work” on their own and avoid such an association or networks. We could say that this is a capitalist logic based on a type of competitive relationship rather than self-help community relationships.

Friendship, association and professional exchange

Friendship is another element which contributes to the development of professional rural solidarities and to establishing relationships in rural communities from Maramureş. Guesthouse owners are less based on friendship than kinship or neighbourhood. Because of this, the relations between them seem to be rather weak. For more delicate things, such as borrowing money to develop a guesthouse, people who can provide such help are either relatives or neighbours or friends, not guesthouse owners.

“I wanted to obtain a credit, but we were not granted, because we are not employees. (...) And then we borrowed money from friends, neighbours, relatives so that we could proceed further.”

Generally, a cordial relationship seems to be established between the inhabitants of a village without a professional contact between them. Sociability is maintained either by a respectable social status in the community or by friendship or kinship.

As regards tourism practices, the social networks built by “tourist entrepreneurs” are the most common form of mutual aid. This form of mutual aid may be configured as an association of several families from the same village in order to achieve benefits for everyone involved. For example, several families from rural villages in Maramureş may be associated with the purpose of buying animals that are then slaughtered for their own consumption or for tourists. It is evident that these associated families have a high living standard that enables them to buy an animal for its meat even by appealing to the principle of association.

“For example, I do not buy a calf in order to put it in the fridge and use it in two or three months. We ally with three or four families, we divide it among us, and so in two weeks we will buy another one.”

An entrepreneur may engage in his rural tourism “enterprise” a villager who is not necessarily a guesthouse owner. This person still has an advantage compared to other locals. It may, for example, possess the art of producing traditional objects and woven handicraft products. His products can be exhibited in the guesthouse of this tourism entrepreneur. This advantage has allowed the association between a local inhabitant and a person owing a guesthouse. This combination is beneficial for both partners:

“Vegetable carpets are made by women living in Botiza village. (...) More recently, I get them here, in my guesthouse, and I sell them to foreign tourists. If I sell ten, the other women give me one for free.”

In fact, some of the villagers are able to cooperate with tourism entrepreneurs and sell various products in their guesthouse, thus obtaining profit from this relationship. A part of their gain goes to the entrepreneurs who have thought of this project and have managed its fulfilment. The mediating relation between the villagers and tourists allows guesthouse owners to obtain prestige among the inhabitants of the same village. Such aid is finally mutual and equal. It is at the same time a way to attract fame among locals and tourists alike.

However, if an owner possesses such skills in order to produce hand-made items, he will not engage a craftsman in his tourism business, but he will do it by himself, relying on his skills and availability. He can exchange that kind of products with other locals in order to provide his household with as many different traditionally-made exhibits as possible.

“My mother and I make traditional shirts in winter. We make linen shirts and than we exchange them [we give them in exchange].” The exchange of traditional products facilitates the establishment of professional networks which involve sociability and mutual aid among the guesthouse owners and other members of their community.

The entrepreneurs create these networks in order to ensure various types of exchange: exchange of various material elements such as handicraft or intangible items (information) because they are interested in doing this. These mutual networks become professional when the status of those involved are similar or, in any case, comparable.

Not only artisans can be involved in a professional relationship by the guesthouse owners, but also other entrepreneurs too. If it happens to have a tourist surplus, some guesthouse owners (but not all of them) can send tourists to other entrepreneurs. This seems to be a widespread practice, especially if the aid is mutual: *“When we have too many tourists we send them to other guesthouse owners. We are in very good terms with the others.”*

Such networks can be or cannot be modified according to the needs, utility or obligation required by one of the partners. For example, a guesthouse owner may consider it necessary to keep a relationship depending on the achievement of his own needs. Sometimes, constraints may contribute to maintaining a certain social relation: for example, an old debt to another entrepreneur who made a similar act/ gesture for him. If this act/gesture is not returned, the other guesthouse owner may get out of the network. Consequently, networks built on the principle of exchange may change over time, depending on the degree of commitment of those involved.

However, in the rural Maramureş, some relationships can be established between guesthouse owners after a preliminary selection of the co-participants. This selection is always based on economic criteria. If this kind of relationship is not based on a contract, even a verbal one, the initiator of the relationship asks for the application of certain criteria. These criteria may make the other a partner. For example, he may require a similar social status, prestige or similar standing of the guesthouse, in accordance to the criteria established by him.

“If I have my guesthouse fully booked, we trade. Immediately, I call a person: “Please [X] (...), help me, I have some tourists.” I do not let them look for a guesthouse on their own. I send them somewhere else.”

Sometimes, the tourist might ask some guesthouse owners to find them another place for accommodation. Otherwise, our entrepreneur does not show another guesthouse to the tourists out of free will: *“If they leave without asking, I do not say anything. Goodbye, have a nice day!”* In this case, the relationship of this guesthouse owner with another entrepreneur remains “excellent”, especially if there isn’t any kind of collaboration. “Poor and clean”, a Romanian might say, that is “I do not get involved, so no gain or loss for me”. Only a genuine agreement can intervene in the formation of certain obligations of mutual aid. “The existence of an explicit and prior intention for mutual aid among partners set in contractual terms” (Mihăilescu 2002, 9) can make individuals indebted to each other. However, a contract between various entrepreneurs is unthinkable for those guesthouse owners who often want to limit their relations with other people working in the same field, especially because a relationship of dependence established for a long term limits their choice of sociability networks!

When it comes to other rural tourism entrepreneurs, other guesthouse owners do not prefer to interfere in their affairs, even if sometimes the number of tourists requesting accommodation exceeds the capacity of a guesthouse. Some of them prefer to let travel agency representatives decide to transfer tourists to other entrepreneurs:

“If they have better accommodation conditions, we transfer them. We talk with them and we negotiate with the travel agency people. (...) But first they should come to the agency to check the rooms.”

The potential transfer of tourists from one guesthouse to another may be based on negotiation, such as *“We talk and we reach an agreement.”* The direct result of such an “agreement” involves a financial advantage for those who facilitate the transaction. The economic factor prevails once again over the professional mutual aid relationship in tourism.

For other entrepreneurs in rural areas, the tourist transfer from one guesthouse to another is possible if the person is a relative. It is also the case of a villager in Botiza who is sure that his daughter would send him some tourists if she has too many.

Sometimes jealousy sneaks in not only among entrepreneurs, but also among them and other villagers who are unable to open a guesthouse because of their poor financial situation: *“They saw the tourists together with us and they tried to lure them. I tried to explain to them. At the beginning, my neighbours were envious because they do not deal with tourism. I explained it to them. And they realized it would be an affair. Most of the neighbours that showed a rug to a group of German tourists, for example, sold their product. If a neighbour has eggs, milk, cream, they sell them to others working in the field of tourism. They could sell their agricultural products too.”*

Obligation

A different status of the people who maintain a relationship requires “a balance of power” within the network. Authority exercised by a person having a superior status leads to the obedience of the other involved. If people with higher reputation in the village, as a mayor or a priest, own guesthouses, they may require help from another entrepreneur or any other person living there so as to carry out activities for their own benefit. This kind of people, who often play a decisive role in their community and thus have an obvious superiority, use their status to ask other persons to use his resources for their own benefit.

In this case, the aid given in the form of human or material capital has little chance of coming back to the donor. This capital may thus have a symbolic movement within the social networks created under the power of a higher social status of the person who made the request. It is the reflection of the social relations of subordination. The aid granted to certain rural actors can be interpreted as a “duty of mutual aid” (Mihăilescu 2002, 9), deriving from “different reciprocal obligations (...) arising from the involvement of social actors”.

The case of another “entrepreneur”-lady is framed in this line of aid deriving from a “kind of obligation”. But, this time, it is the power of tradition, not the professional status that determines her to take advantage of another person. In general, this entrepreneur-lady carries out the management of her guesthouse on her own. Her family support is a temporary one (her daughters come back to the village during the holidays and her husband who works abroad most of the time can help her only when he comes back home). In this case, the support comes from a relative in-law. In fact, this is a goddaughter. She is a person who has “entered” the family of this entrepreneur-lady because of this alliance and has gained her trust in this way.

“(...) I have now a goddaughter who comes to help me. So, I ask for help occasionally, because not everyone can help you. I ask for help from people who know my needs.”

It is clear for us that this relationship is based on “traditional” patterns still operating in the Romanian rural communities. According to these unwritten “laws”, which persist in people’s memories of Maramureș, the godfather / godmother are particularly moral (financial too) guarantors of a couple. Aid offered by the goddaughter may be regarded as an obligation, because it seems that she has to feel obliged to her godmother, once she accepted her. Her godmother’s status indirectly shows her authority over her goddaughter.

Conclusions

ANALYZING SEVERAL tourism enterprises in Maramureș, we realize that tourism particularly generates a change in status and position of the rural guesthouse owners in their community. The growth in the tourist entrepreneurs’ income, as opposed to the financial situation of other rural people who could not join this profession due to lack of resources has led to an increase in social differences. The economic factor is so important for guesthouse owners that they rationalize their entrepreneurial actions in order to augment their revenues. For this reason, the relationships built by them

map new ways of sociability, new cleavages respectively, due to the purpose they often look for, i.e. money. Because of this competition meant to attract a large number of tourists to their tourism properties, guesthouse owners primarily care for themselves, leaving aside the others acting in the same area. They may be interested in a relation with other tourist entrepreneurs if these persons could help them achieve their goal. Nevertheless, aiming to increase their income by means of tourism practices, rural tourism entrepreneurs prefer to act in the name of their own interest, placing their destiny on an individual axis. Their individualization appears as a result to a constraint given by the economic factor. Money affects “the construction of the ego, in its staging, not only in personal experiences, but also in moral, social, and political ties...” (Beck 1998, 21). Money seen as a limitation in personal achievement leads entrepreneurs to building and directing their social relations according to the accomplishment of the best possible financial state. Besides, the economic principle as a fundamental life value for guesthouse owners seems to govern their relations with other tourist entrepreneurs and even to be stronger than the social relations based on mutual aid.

These limits encourage the relative closure of some domestic areas according to principles and criteria set by those rural entrepreneurs who initiate, maintain, and consider it appropriate to end a social relation. However, this does not prevent guesthouse owners from building social relations. But the professional solidarities in the tourist rural communities of Maramureş operate differently, most often by reference to the financial condition. This element determines the choice of a specific network within a tourist practice over others. Choosing a specific socialization network means focusing on a factor over another, such as kinship, neighbourhood, friendship, and status, according to the interest pursued by every participant in the social relationship. There are exceptions to solidarities achieved within a small family group where the interest is mostly unilateral. We refer here to the parents’ role in setting up various types of capital for the benefit of children owing a guesthouse. Thus, rural tourism leads to the establishment of a strong family solidarity, which generally replaces another kind of solidarity. Nevertheless, the kinship may narrow down their other social relations. The kinship relations emerging in tourism practices maintain the guesthouse owners’ individualization guided by personal gain, rather than by the association of many couples in order to achieve mutual benefit.

The involvement in the same area of activity of people living in this rural region limits their ability to built professional networks of sociability with a view to getting mutual aid. “Making tourism” entails a competition among local actors who work in the rural tourism area so as to obtain greater benefits. Thus, a kind of envy or competition arises among guesthouse owners who strive to attract more tourists to a certain location. The relationship, if any, between tourist entrepreneurs can be established according to their specific needs and interests and also to the availability of the other to answer positively. These criteria determine the choice of some people over others. Otherwise, the competitive economic environment for those who have the same occupational status controls the professional relations by an immediate settlement on the part of the beneficiary. It is not the case of family solidarity. On the other hand, the access to social relations with people who have a higher status and work in the same professional area is done

according to the demand and aim to meet the needs of those people. The entrepreneurs in rural tourism in Maramureş initiate a relationship with other villagers with the same profession and a comparable or even lower financial condition merely for utilitarian reasons that often serve their own interests. A “power balance” seems to be established between entrepreneurs if the status of one of the participants in the relationship is superior to another. In this case, we speak about obedience.



Notes

1. <http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/voll/tabele/t01.pdf>, accessed December 22, 2011.
2. According to data provided by INSSE (<http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/voll/cuvvoll.pdf>, accessed December 22, 2011), the decrease in the number of inhabitants is a phenomenon characteristic of the entire country. Between 1992 and 2002, the population of Romania went down by 1.1 million people, a demographic collapse caused both by “the accelerated drop in births and emigration.”
3. “The tourist entrepreneurs” are guesthouse owners living in the rural region of Maramureş and providing family-type lodging and boarding. Their actions are called “tourist enterprises.”
4. Our choice to circumscribe this analysis to the region of Maramureş situated in the northern part of Romania depends on its quality as an important tourist destination thanks to the appropriation and capitalization of specific resources, such as location, historical references, local know-how and empirical practices, attitudes, values and particular representations. Thus, our analysis is mainly based on the criterion of tourism dynamics in Maramureş, as opposed to other Romanian regions.
5. For objective reasons (as we refer to relatives, neighbours, friends, villagers ...), we chose not to mark the extracts from the interviews in any way. In some places, we can find in the text information on the gender identity of the interviewees.
6. Traditionally, in the cultural field of Romanian approaches, the term “domestic group” is used in connection with “household” (Stahl 2000, 192–193). Instead of Paul Stahl’s concept, we have used the expression “family group,” which is similar to this one. We have considered the “entrepreneur” couple acting in the tourism area as the first community level of social organization. In addition, we have taken into account children and often their grandparents, which leads to the idea of “a broadened family group.”

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Abstract

Personal Networks as a Source for Social Capital in the Rural Communities of Maramureș

The purpose of this paper is to analyze personal networks developed by guesthouse owners from rural Maramureș as a source for social capital. We are questioning the relevance of the economic factor to guesthouse owners and the role it plays in establishing borders and openings of their personal networks. In trying to identify functional interdependencies, we wonder whether the rural tourism from Maramureș subjects the relationship among rural guesthouse owners to an exercise in reflexivity. To test this argument, we want to know whether the rural world is able to align itself with modernity by assuming the power of individual action, by a rationalization of the actions of tourist rural actors called here "tourist entrepreneurs". Where does a relationship end for guesthouse owners when they relate to other tourist entrepreneurs? Does tourism generate conflicts among these people, exclusion, and antagonism or, on the contrary, solidarity? Can we talk about solidarity born from professional practices? What element prevails in establishing personal networks: kinship, neighbourhood, friendship or obligation deriving from a superior status?

Keywords

"tourist entrepreneurs", personal networks, social capital, entrepreneurial strategies, Maramureș.