

THEMATIC ROUTES – TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. *Thematic routes have become greatly demanded "fashionable" tourist destinations, in recent years. In many countries they gained popularity not only through their value as individual objectives, but also through their attraction, generated by the association of tourist objectives, in a larger region. The main purpose of this article is to analyze the main Romanian thematic routes, as part of the European routes, or as regional/local routes, specific on a national level, their actual condition and knowledge about them, compared to other European regions. As research method we used the qualitative analysis, due to the lack of registered statistical data, based on series of observations from a longer period of time. The research reveals the fact that although we can talk about Romanian thematic routes, advertised on European sites, they are less known by local organizations and specialized institutions. They do not advertise for them on a national level and that is why they are little known and practiced by tourists. Certain non-governmental institutions specialized in the field keep track of sites and advertise for regional/local thematic routes. As a result, foreign tourists are more interested in thematic routes, which they know from "home", among which we can mention the Wine way, Dacian fortresses and the narrow gauge steam railway in Maramureș.*

Key words: *thematic routes; cultural routes; Romanian tourist destination; the wine way*

Introduction

The concern for thematic routes has its beginnings after 1970, in the developed Western European countries. This period coincides with the "touristic boom", respectively the development of mass tourism, more and more specialized and well organized, in order to satisfy the needs of a diversified range of clients. At the same time, there appears the need for particularization of the tourist offer, on social groups, with different preferences, which led to the definition of "thematic" attractions as: *thematic parks, thematic events and thematic routes* (Csapo, Berki, 2008). Once their importance for tourist activities has increased, they have been paid more attention on an international (European) level, on a national, regional and even local level.

Thematic routes are part of the cultural tourism and their main components are: well defined and attractive theme, the geographical dimension and cultural

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heritage. Their popularity derives from the advantages they present: they promote unexploited or little exploited tourist resources; they can be arranged and fit out with reduced investments; can diversify the tourist offer in time and space; are able to generate an increased request for various types of tourism, especially cultural tourism, ecotourism and rural tourism.

Thematic routes definition

The term *thematic* routes appeared and gained definition in modern Western European countries, USA and Australia after 1980, where tourism was extremely developed, and after 1990 in Eastern European countries. In English literature, thematic routes are mentioned with a different terminology, such as: "trails", "pathways", "roads". In Romanian literature they are simply called "ways", accompanied by the pursued theme: wine way, limestone way, the key way, etc.

Geographical conditions, environmental quality and landscape are key factors that influence the appearance and success of thematic routes. They combine natural and anthropic elements, which cover a certain theme, harmonize with a certain geographical space and are connected through different means of transport. They offer opportunities for knowledge improvement, entertainment and amusement, supporting the principles of sustainable development (Puczo, Ratz, 2000).

Types of thematic routes

Thematic routes can vary according to different points of view. From *geographical scale*, thematic routes can be of: *local importance* (Vaser valley cog railway), *regional importance* (Wine way, at the contact of the Curvature Subcarpathian area with the Romanian Plain), *national importance* (Northern Moldavia and Northern Oltenian Monasteries Routes) or *international* (Jewish Heritage Route).

From a *thematical* point of view, they promote different aspects such as: environmental qualities (*The keys Way*); roads that connect picturesque landscapes (*The King's Way*), special interest routes (Wine ways, gastronomy, sports), religious routes (Northern Oltenian Monasteries and Northern Moldavia Monasteries), pilgrimages on holy locations (Cernica Monastery), cultural heritage routes (Transilvanian Saxons fortified churches) and historical (Dacian fortresses).

According to the *means of transport* used we have: *by foot* (mountain paths in Himalaya, Andes), *public transport*, and *motorized transport* (by motorbike

and car in the USA), *by bike* ("The Salt Way"), *by horse* (mountain routes; Maramureş Heritage Trail), *scuba diving* routes (in The Red Sea). Crossing mountain rivers by boats, called *rafting*, can sometimes be part of a thematic route, especially in those areas where it combines with mandatory stopovers at cultural objectives. The most appropriate and famous rafting areas in Romania are on the following rivers: Bistriţa, Mureş (especially because it combines with cultural objectives), Jiu Defile, Crişul Pietros, Nera and Cerna (for the spectacular landscape). The last one is a fast river with an uneven riverbed, recommended only to experienced tourists. According to the *preexisting old geographical routes* we can talk about "The Silk Road", routes developed by following the same thematic objectives, "Jewish Heritage Route" etc. (Orban, 2006).

Thematic routes, an European concern

Europe means culture, history, civilization and environment, but it also means a movement of the population attracted by specific regional features. European institutions thrive to promote these values through international partnership in order to contribute to the development of the concept of "European identity". In a direct or indirect way, tourism can be part of these preoccupations, through its cultural elements. Cultural Routes represent an important element revealing the common cultural and historical heritage. International statistics, organizations and specialists in the field of tourism support the increase of the interest in cultural tourism once with the decrease of the interest in seacoast tourism. Thematic Routes could become a profitable alternative for spending free time (Mihalko, 2004). On a European level there can be observed a series of new initiatives for development of thematic routes. Considerable contribution has been brought by: The Council of Europe, UNESCO, The European Travel Commission (ETC), etc.

The Role of the European Council. One of the declared objectives of the European Council is to promote European identity. In this respect there appeared a series of initiatives with direct and indirect impact on tourism. For example, European Council empowered the *European Institute of Cultural Routes* (established in 1997) to organize *The Program of Cultural Routes* (1998). The EICR is located in Luxembourg and has as main responsibility to review the proposals, to inform developers, to find new partners, to monitor the routes to publish information, to organize conferences. There has been created an *Atlas* which includes the selected themes and proposals. The Atlas

is accompanied by a historical synthesis of the themes settled as destinations, by the attending countries, by the program partners, by the promoters of the new proposals. The Atlas possesses an up-to-date database made up of statistics, biographies, and maps. There has been initiated a series of projects, among which we can mention: *Euroimages, Cultures and Regions* project, and the most important for the present subject, *European Cultural Routes*.

European Cultural Routes program (started in 1960) contributes to the knowledge about values resulting from the complexity of the European cultures and societies. The first European route was *the pilgrim route of Santiago de Compostella* (1987), which is today associated with thematic routes (Capp, 2002). An important attention is paid to the most important themes, common to different countries, which can be developed through tourism. The themes are included in a multi-disciplinary network of partnership projects.

In 1998, the European Council established a formal partnership frame, under the form of a *Regulation*, which mention the criteria taken into consideration when choosing a new theme, when evaluating the activity and placing of each itinerary into a certain/specific category. The promotion of international thematic routes has in view the reinforcement of the relationship between countries, the interference between different cultures in order to achieve reciprocal knowledge. Cultural tourism contributes to the achievement of a strong relationship between tourism, scientific research, patrimony and education preservation (Puczko, Ratz, 2000).

Nowadays there are 34 very active European thematic routes, among which half of them are declared main cultural routes. This way there have been brought into public attention a lot of interesting themes: *European week of migration heritage; Route of the Olive Tree; the Hospitable town of Sibiu in Transylvania, or the Route of Fortified Churches* making references to Saxon techniques; *Plovdiv in Bulgaria* and its architecture included Roman ruins; *Priština in Kosovo*, entered into the cultural routes of the South-East Europe. We should not forget about older routes which pass through Mediterranean towns: *the cultural route of the Phoenicians; the town of Kalamata at the heart of the Olive Tree Route; Istanbul; Tetuan; Thessaloniki; Sarajevo; Sephardic colonies of hospitality* of the expelled Jews who did not want to convert to Christianity, and who were able to integrate into the Arabic world of the Ottoman Empire; *Greek colonies on the Mediterranean coast* (Thomas-Penete Michel, 2008).

A series of European conventions indirectly promote, through their objectives, the idea of *thematic routes* building: through *European Cultural Convention* (1954) each country assumed the responsibility to take measures to preserve the common European cultural heritage and to stimulate its development; *European Landscape Convention* (2000) suggests that the diversity and quality of the natural and cultural values of the European landscape represent a common heritage of the European countries; *The convention for the immaterial cultural patrimony safeguarding* (2003) also ratified by Romania, among other 100 states; *Convention on the Value of Heritage for Society* (2005) encourage the consideration of ethics and the presentation of cultural heritage as well as the respect of the diversity of interpretations.

Romania preserved many elements of the immaterial patrimony, the Horezu (Vâlcea), Corund (Harghita) or Marginea (Suceava) pottery art, different agrarian manifestations, or the Căluș tradition (a Romanian men's folk dance, similar to the Morris dance), which is considered a "masterpiece of the immaterial cultural patrimony of the human race". These could be associated to certain thematic routes, built in the respective geographical areas.

International Models

Tourist thematic routes are developed in countries with well organized tourism, known for their international performances. They have "speculated" the presence of natural and anthropic resources, in order to diversify the tourist offer. Many of them can offer development models for other countries with similar resources. France is famous for its international *Wine Way in Champagne-Ardenne*; thematic routes in Cantal (*Route des Fromages AOC*, *La Route Historique des Châteaux d'Auvergne*), *La Route des Mégalithes* (Pays de Saint-Flour). La "Route des Fromages d'Auvergne" crosses a region known for its cheese farms, which organize cheese tasting and sell «Fromages AOC d'Auvergne: Cantal, Salers, Fourme d'Ambert, Saint-Nectaire, Bleu d'Auvergne»; on the Alsacian routes, each small town has a tourist information centre (either at the Town Hall, or in the town hotel, which offer, free of charge, maps with a minimum set of information); *The routes, which discover Roman art. The touristic train GENTIANE EXPRESS* from the French mountain area from Bort-les-Orgues to Lugarde offers an unforgettable trip from the Dordogne valley to Plateau du Cézallier (1012 m). Today we assist at the re-launching of the Silk Road in Cévenne Mountains, in France.

One of the famous European routes, called *the Route of the Olive Tree*, in the Mediterranean region, offers the chance of unfolding an international event of

special importance. For example, “The Routes of the Olive Tree 2008” was completed after 45 days of journey through 12 countries (June 2008).

The route of Jewish Heritage crosses many countries and offers the opportunity to organize, every year, different photos and drawings exhibitions (e.g. Turkey-Synagogues in Topkapi Palace, 2008).

At the same time, an annual *European Week of Migration Heritage* is organized in October, as well as *The Migration Festival* (in Luxembourg, March 2009), events which attract many tourists every year.

European silk roads have been re-launched at the “Cultural and Region” conference, organized in Florence (1987), its chosen theme being cultural route, in 1998. The activity was focused on re-launching craftsmanship and industrial production. The theme drew the attention of a large number of specialists who brought their contribution to the accomplishment of the cultural itinerary.

Cultural Routes of Switzerland represent the new type of discovery, regarding cultural landscape, which is done by means of tourism: carefree hiking, eating and drinking pleasurably, stylish overnight stays. Cultural Routes are based on a network of twelve *Via routes* and an increasing number of *Via Regia* routes, situated on historical paths and roads. They combine local initiatives regarding the exploitation of natural and cultural attractions, at the same time offering regional/local specialties. Tourists are offered tourist packages which include accommodation, information about the route, tickets for the museums, transport tickets, etc.

Among the oldest thematic routes, already known and practiced, one of the most attractive still is *The Silk Route*. It follows an ancient road (opened in the 2nd century B.C., from Xinjiang). The road became an itinerary of great importance for the Euro-Asian continent, both from a strategic and commercial point of view, 2000 years ago, when the Chinese and foreign merchants were trading silk, which they were carrying from Chang’an (today’s Xi’an, the old capital of China), towards Persia and Rome. It opened an important route, connecting the East with the West, which later on became famous under the name of *The Silk Road*. The Silk Route (7,000 km) starts from Xi’an (covers 4,000 km of the Chinese territory), through Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, up to the Mediterranean Sea coast. From the 2nd century B.C., up until the opening of the *Sea Silk Route*, for 15 centuries, this route carried large quantities of silk, as well as Chinese inventions (such as powder, paper,

printing press), while China received the Buddhist and Islamist religions, together with their art and culture, as well as a series of products.

Long prosperity left visible marks on the *Silk Route*, such as historical vestiges and picturesque spots, which still continue to attract Chinese and foreign tourists. Along the route, in China tourists can visit: *Xi'an* (Shaanxi), *Tianshui*, *Lanzhou* (Gansu), Bingling monastery; *Xining* (Qinghai), Dongguan mosque, Beichan monastery, lake Qinghai and Ta'er monastery; Guyuan (Ningxia; *Jiuquan* and *Jiayuguan*; *Dunhuang* (Gansu), Mogao caves, Mount Mingsha, Yueya river spring and Yulin caves; *Turpan* (Xinjiang), Gaochang and Jiaohe ruins, Astana cemetery and the antique irrigation system of Karez; Ürümqi (Xinjiang), Xinjiang, Mount Tianshan and lake Tianchi; Kuqa (Xinjiang): The Cave of the 1,000 Buddha, of Kumtuz; Kashi (Xinjiang).

Research Methods

There have been used qualitative analyses and observations. Quantitative information is very little and discontinuous (which can hardly be separated on a thematic route, if we take into consideration the gathering method), and that is why, based on them, we can hardly draw comparisons. For the qualitative analysis (especially the marketing analysis) very helpful have been the sites of important tourist objectives placed on the analyzed routes. Surprisingly, most of the thematic routes have sites, which are brought up-to-date by their providers. But, for a wider view of today's state of traditional thematic routes, besides the documentary material (mostly sites and mass media publications, with an average degree of accuracy), there was also necessary a trip to the sites, talks with representatives of the local administration, local managers and tour operators, but also with native inhabitants who expressed their point of view about the respective routes' objectives. The interview method was not always efficient, because the answers were based more on personal and qualitative evaluations, than on statistical data. The specialists involved expressed their wish that in the future these routes would be more tightly connected to the cultural tourism, rural tourism and ecotourism objectives.

Romanian Thematic Routes

General information. Romania is rich in natural and anthropic resources, which offer the pre-requisites for the development of national and regional/ local touristic routes. The geographical positioning at the Danube and Black Sea, as well as the crossroad of important European routes (E 60, E 68, E 70, E 79, E 81, E 85) is an advantage for our integration among the European

routes. There is a series of traditional thematic routes, more or less famous, but they are certainly less known among tour operators and tourism agencies.

There are lots of attractive themes which would make possible the existence of independent thematic routes (e.g. Dracula fortresses circuit) or those routes that can be put into strong relationship with European routes (Feudal fortresses circuit, Flocks movement routes). In Romania, as well as in South-Eastern Europe, the preoccupation with the study of thematic routes is of recent date, after the year 2000 (Tunde, 2008). But we can observe certain local initiatives for the promotion of these tourist products (Alba and Hunedoara counties fortress route, Romanian Greenways etc). Some of these initiatives are supported by European funding (e.g. Sibiu, European cultural capital in 2007, which was put in relation with the Fortified Transylvanian Saxon fortresses circuit). Besides monuments and natural sites, Romania can also offer subjects for thematic routes. Romania is active as a UNESCO member, signing 7 conventions in the cultural field and being offered financing for the cultural diversity promotion, especially for the monumental or immaterial patrimony protection. In September 2008, together with the State Tourism Secretariat, and in association with the Mixed UNESCO Parliamentary Commission, there has been organized an international discussion in the Danube Delta, where the possibilities for implementation of certain cultural programs, or cultural tourism programs (Rivière, 2008) have been presented.

For developing cultural routes in South-Eastern Europe were created regional institutes in Romania and Bulgaria (2005). Although Romania has started partnerships with the *Institute of European Cultural Roads*, by opening at Sibiu *The Regional Resource Centre (Branch) of the European Institute of Cultural Routes* (May, 2005), its part in promoting Romanian tourist cultural routes is still minor. And this is mainly due to the fact that we lack a unified tourist product with quality services, as well as due to the lack of environment arrangements. Although the presence of thematic routes is advertised by colored boards (sometimes not very attractive, such as *The Wine Route* in Prahova county), the lack of an attractive infrastructure and the high prices do not convince large numbers of tourists, mostly foreigners (Buzău-Prahova-Dâmbovița *Wine Route*).

For a better knowledge of the status of Romanian thematic routes, a presentation of a list of them is necessary, as well as their up-to-date condition. We cannot say that the above mentioned routes are the most famous (in

Romania), although they are mentioned as thematic routes on European sites, integrated into the “European corridors” as successful national thematic routes.

Thematic Routes integrated into the European corridors

Romanian thematic routes are part of the **four main European directions** (of nine which cross the South East Europe), called “corridors”, which cross the country: **The Eastern Trans-Balkan Road** crosses South Eastern Europe from the north to the south (Aegean Sea); **Western Trans-Balkan Corridor** from Szeged is connected in Arad, Timișoara (includes both Cluj-Napoca and Oradea), Sibiu, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Craiova, moving towards Sofia; **The Danube Road** (Wien-Budapest-Sulina) and **Via Pontica** (on the west and south part of the Black Sea).

The Eastern Trans-Balkan Road connects at the north with *Via Regia* and at the south with *The Danube Road*, continuing towards Bulgaria and Turkey. Inside this corridor we can find the Maramures region, Northern Moldavia monasteries, the fortified churches of Transylvania, the medieval towns of Bistrița, Sighișoara, Brașov, the southern Subcarpathian region, București and Giurgiu.

We can also add *The Central Pan-European Route*, which crosses countries with a long history and attractive landscapes, full of natural and cultural heritage: Carpathian Mountains, the Great Hungarian Plain, the Danube River and its Delta, and the western beach of the Black Sea. *Central Pan-European Route* is one of the 5 *Ecotourism Pan-European Routes* which connects mainly protected areas (nature reserves, national parks, regional parks, biosphere reserves, UNESCO – MAB), from six countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria). As part of *The Central Pan-European Route* we can mention the cycle-tourism routes, recommended on routes with remarkable landscapes, for shorter or longer distances. The *European Cyclists' Federation* supports and promotes the exploration of Europe by bicycle. EuroVelo initiative started in 1995 and will continue until 2010. A network of twelve pan-European cycling trails was established spanning over more than 65,000 km about half of which are already constructed. Each of the twelve paths has its own character and charm. *EuroVelo 6, the Atlantic - Black Sea tour*, (from Atlantic at Saint-Nazaire to the Danube Delta and the Black Sea) crossing eleven countries of Europe: Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Rep. of Moldova, Ukraine (www.ETC/pan-european/central-europe.en).

Thematic routs - international models

Greenways have been invented, recognized and practiced in the USA and Western Europe, but with certain geographical, political and scientific differences. While ecological networks are common in Europe, greenways are much more an American product (Ahern, 2003). A large number of definitions which have been elaborated and published (the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors in the USA, 1987; Little, 1990; Ahern 1996 etc.) reflected and emphasized the complexity of the greenway concept. Basically the definitions underlined that greenways can be defined as: "networks of land that are planned, designed and managed for multiple purposes including ecological, recreational, cultural, aesthetic, or other purposes compatible with the concept of sustainable land use" (Ahern 1996).

They represent roads, paths or corridors, used for touristic purposes, in total harmony with the environment, offering tourism, sports, and entertainment opportunities. Greenways are an open space connector linking parks, nature reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and with populated areas. The author proposes the term of a *typology of greenways*. Greenways offer benefits for environment, improvement of the quality of life and an opportunity for sustainable economic activities for the local population in urban and rural spaces.

The first greenway in the USA (1880) was Frederick Law Olmsted's "*Emerald Necklace*" plan for the Boston Park System, totally situated within the urban area. *Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy* (1995), (Council of Europe 1996), supported by the European Union has been signed by 54 countries. The strategy proposes ecological network elements such as "corridors", "buffer zones" and "stepping stones".

Greenways is considered a popular international movement which provide a social and political network, integrates people with diverse values concerning land use and planning. This is the most significant characteristic of greenways, and distinguishes greenways from other landscape planning concepts (Ahern, 1996).

In Romania the *Greenways* program has been initiated by the *Environmental Partnership Foundation* (1998). As part of this program they launched projects for 7 local geographical Greenways (2000): *Mineral Water Trail*, *The Golden Way*, *The Limestone Trail*, *Maramureș Heritage Trail*, *The Spruce Pine Way*, *Tur River Trail*, *Salt Way* (<http://www.greenways.ro>, 2008). The initiative is valuable and can also be recommended to other non-governmental

organizations or government institutions which could help initiate thematic routes in other geographical areas, which have a valuable tourist potential.

Information about traditional European thematic routes which cross Romania can be found on different international sites. The official web site *Travel and Tourism Information about Romania* recommends tourists a series of attractive tourist destinations, but there is no section restricted only to promoting the concept of thematic routes. Their advertising on official sites and non-governmental organizations, as well as their continuous up-dating would be an important requirement in the near future.

Regional Thematic Routes

1. The Wine Route

Romania is the country with an old tradition in vinery growing, which is certified by the archeological discoveries (Getic and Dacian tools), many centuries before Christianity. The grape vine grown in Romania is of local origin, with native varieties, achieved from the wood wild vine, through natural selection. Romania is a vine growing country, but it is also a producer of varieties, contributing, from times immemorial, to the enrichment of the world wine growing patrimony. The fame of the Romanian vineyard regions has grown along the centuries, both due to the high quality of the grapes, but mostly because of the fine varieties of wine.

After an evaluation of these resources, the Ministry of Tourism launched in 2002 the program entitled “*Romania – winery country*”, with a sub-program called “*Wine Route*”. The recommended route for tourists is built on the structure of the old *medieval wine route*, being perceived as a network between the vineyards in the Dâmbovița, Prahova and Buzău counties.

The program was targeted at promoting Romanian vineyards and wine cellars as thematic routes integrated into the international tourist round trips. A series of other famous vineyards were eager to enter this theme circuit. Soon after the launch, in the presence of the Tourism minister (at Seciu vineyard), the program has been transferred to local councils which, due to financial problems, manage the program with difficulty. There have remained only the beginnings: the plates and the few fittings for the wine tasting. At the same time, the road system has to be improved.

Up to the present moment, we can talk about two cultural thematic routes, bearing the same name, which are positioned in different geographical areas: at the *contact of the Curvature Subcarpathian area* with the Romanian Plain, in Buzău, Prahova and Dâmbovița counties, as well as in the *Târnave Plateau with centers in Alba and Mureș counties*.

1.1. On the outer Curvature Subcarpathian area, the geographical positioning and varied relief shapes, where we can find vineyards (hills and hillocks with southern and south-eastern positioning) are reflected in the *quality of the varieties of wine* (Fig. 1).

Tourists discover the charm of wine tasting, in famous wine cellars. It is estimated that, at the end of the year 2008, the overall number of tourists visiting wine cellars, will increase with 20%, in comparison with the year 2007, when there were 35,000 tourists (www.ANAT.ro). Among them, more than a half are foreign tourists, who ask for advice from tourist agencies, requiring them as optional tours, besides the Romanian round trips, or as a supplement of the business trips to Romania.

Romanians do not ask for advice from tourist agencies for these services. Most of the wine cellars do not offer accommodation for tourists, just a round tour through the wine cellars and a presentation of the wine processing, which most of the time ends up with a wine tasting, and, on request, with a copious meal. At the end, the most interested can buy bottles of wine from the tested types, or collection wines.

A series of vineyards have been turned into private ownership, uniting under a single new name (mostly unpopular to Romanians) many Romanian famous vineyards. This way, *Halewood Vineyards*, in the Prahova county, offer to the interested tourists a tour through the vineyards, cellars and wine tasting. Depending on the chosen destination, tourists can visit the wine cellars and can choose among five assortments of wine, to be tasted (Urlăţeanu Manor House from Urlaţi), or two types of „methode champagne wine” (Azuga, Rhein vineyards). They can offer simple tasting or the standard packages, which include the wine tasting of seven types of wine, two types of traditional food, snakes and soft drinks.

Tourists can be accommodated only in Azuga, where the Rhein guesthouse has been opened in 2006, a guesthouse with 15 rooms, whose names have been taken from the different varieties of grapes (e.g. Cabernet). A five day trip, all inclusive, at Rhein guesthouse, is estimated at 160 Euro. At *Halewood Vineyards*, the visit can be done only by organized groups of tourists, because vineyards are not very close to Urlăţeanu Manor House. Prices vary according to the services offered, that is why wine tasting at Urlăţeanu manor house or Rhein starts from 4.5 Euro/person. It is estimated that in the year 2007, around 9,700 tourists visited Urlaţi and Azuga vineyards, while in 2008 the number of tourists will be around 10,000 persons (businessmen, organized groups occasioned by special events or reunions).

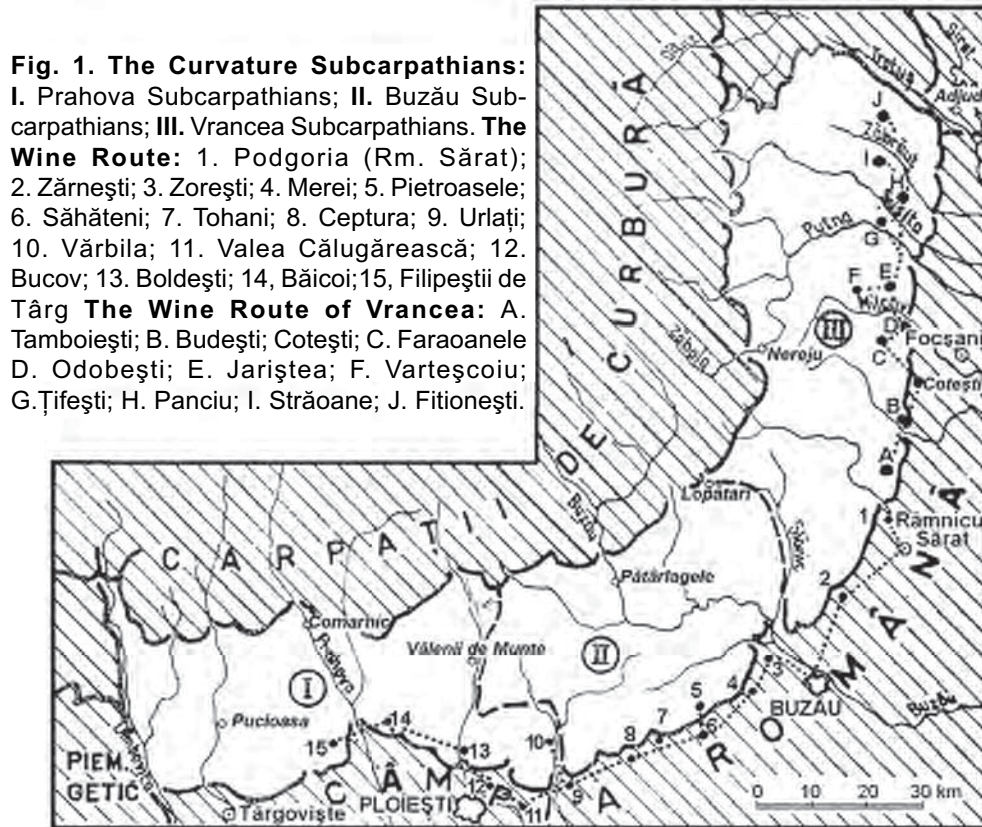


Fig. 1. Wine Route at the contact between The Curvature Subcarpathians and The Romanian Plaine

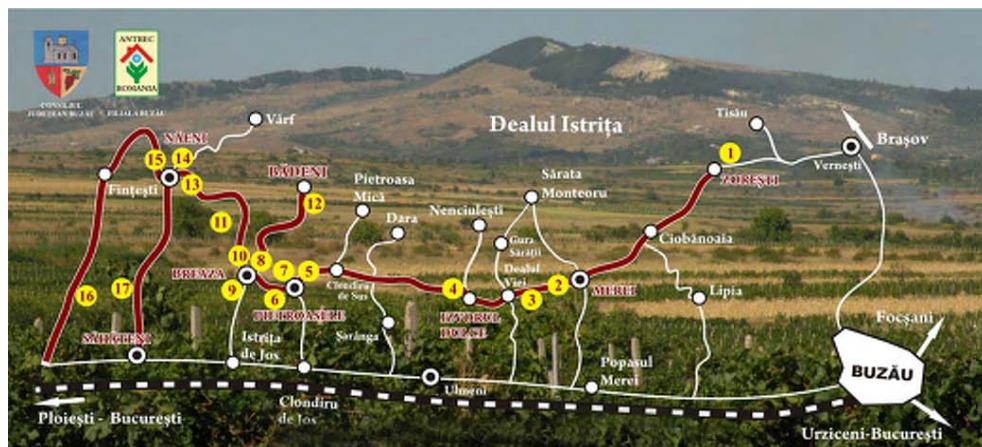


Fig. 2. The wine routes of Buzău
 Source: www.antrec.ro, 2008

Tourist agencies did not pay very much attention to the potential of this type of tourist packages. Certain agencies offer a 5 days trip on the following route: București – Sinaia, with a stop to Urlați - Dealul Mare vineyards. The program includes two wine tastings, București and Sinaia city tour, a night in Urlați. There is another shorter tour, of a week, very close to Bucharest (80 km), which also includes a wine-growing area (Butterfly Tourism). The price depends on the number of tourists and can be negotiated at the agency, because the project has not been developed, due to the lack of interest, although it already exists for a couple of years.

When it was launched there were stipulated 38 tourist attractions (a farm, a restaurant, winery shop) which could be hardly identified on this pattern. Along the trip, tourists can visit Tohani, Seciu, Valea Călugărească, Belu Manor House, Pană Filipescu Manor House, Verbila monastery wine cellars. In Buzău county we have famous vineyards, such as: Buzăului Hills și Dealul Mare (Pietroasa, Urlați, Valea Călugărească). The Buzău county wine route, promoted on the site of the National Association for Rural Tourism and Ecotourism is an attempts to attract new tourists towards rural/ agro-touristic guesthouses. (www.antrec.ro) (Fig. 2). Pietroasele wine cellar, in Buzău county, dates from the 1600, being just a monastery wine cellar, at the beginnings. The oldest type of wine at Pietroasele is dated back to 1942. They have kept most of the varieties of wine, as well as the traditional methods. Pietroasele Thesaurus – „The Golden Brood-Hen with the Chickens”, made up of 22 pieces, has been discovered in March-April 1837, by two peasants who were trying to dig out the vine planted on the Istrița hill (750 m). There have been recovered only 12 pieces of the thesaurus (19 kg.), which have been exhibited at the National History Museum. The Thesaurus belonged to the Visigoths (4th century) or the Ostrogoths (5th century).

Traditions, handcrafts, local folklore festivals, contribute to the development of local tourism and especially of agro-tourism. Standard farms included in the program “*Vineyards Route*”, peasant houses and guesthouses are sought by domestic and international tourists, for their unpolluted products, as well as native inhabitants’ famous hospitality.

Taking into consideration the fact that many famous Vrancea county vineyards (Panciu, Odobești Cotești, Tâmboiești, Blăjani) are very close to Buzău county vineyards, and because they have similar natural conditions and connected roads, it would be a good solution to include them into the *Wine Route* too. “Viticulture could become a real attraction for tourists”, USAID representatives appreciated, on a workshop organized in 2006, regarding the accomplishment

of the *Wine route* program, where they spoke with the tour operators, wine cellar owners and guesthouse owners from Vrancea county. The conclusions revealed the fact that, Vrancea, like all the other three counties included in the program, in spite of the attractive natural potential, are not known by foreign tourists as attractive tourist destinations (Panciu vineyard is one of the largest in Romania). In Focșani, at the end of October, the annual *International Wine Festival*, called *Bachus*, is organized, as an event with a long tradition, by now. The festival attracts producers, specialists in the field, tourists and wine tasters from Romania and abroad. On this occasion there has been observed the need to increase the accommodation possibilities for tourists, especially in guesthouses.

1.2. Târnave Plateau and Mureș Valley in Alba and Mureș counties. *The wine's route* started as a unification program of the Jidvei and Cetatea de Baltă vineyards with the old vineyards from the Târnave area. *The wine's route* in Alba county has been established by the *Alba County Wine Producers Association*, crossing famous wine-growing areas: Alba Iulia, Cricău, Jidvei, Șard, Aiud, Sebeș, Ciombrud, Blaj. The route is famous, due to the annual "*Golden Grape*" festival, which is still an important attraction for tourists and local people. It is a 200 km tour, which is marked with guide posts.

On the *web page*, the *Wine's Route* is not properly promoted as a tourist route, but more as a wine tasting and wine varieties' location. It is necessary a better promotion of the tour, taking into consideration different European examples (the French wine's route). The Wine's Route in Transylvania has two famous cellars: the one from Aiud, and the other one from Cetatea de Baltă Castle, which organize wine tastings, followed by others, which are about to be arranged, in the future.

These two routes, bearing the same name, *the Wine's Route*, should be better correlated, one with the other, and why not, with some other Romanian wine-growing areas: Dâmbovița wine route continues with Ștefănești-Argeș and Sâmburești vineyards, and farther, on the west side of the river Olt, in Vâlcea, Dolj and Mehedinți counties. At the same time, it would be very interesting if we could draw a connection with the Timișoara-Recaș region vineyards, which continue to Hungary, as well as the prolongation of the Vrancea route, towards Iași-Huși, and farther east in the Republic of Moldova. Other possibilities, which could make up wine routes that could unite famous vineyards, would be: Recaș (Timiș)-Lipova-Păuliș-Miniș-Șiria (Arad); Cotnari-Huși-Iași; Rogova-Vânu Mare-Plenița-Cetate-Radovanu-Șegarcea.

There are partnerships between wine-growing areas placed on the borders: the Romanian Mehedinți county area (Vânju Mare și Opișor) and the Serbian Voivodina-Vršac vineyards, which would be interested in valuing the vineyard tourist areas on both sides of the Romanian-Serbian border, through the *Wine Route* project (2007), financed by the European Community, through a Phare program. This would require a quick rehabilitation of the European and regional road system, as well as the development of local communities by attracting Western tourists. A similar project, worth 7 million Euros, has been launched in Alba and Mureș counties.

The development of wine-growing tourism, through the *Wine route* project, would be the ideal solution, on the condition that a specific region *brand* is created. The development of this project would contribute to the sustainable rural development, would launch the oeno-tourism phenomenon, less known in Romania, and would promote local customs and traditions. In the program it is stipulated that representative farms, and certain peasant households, which preserve the specific local nature, should be introduced into the tourist round trips, through a better capitalization of the space, landscape and products offered to the tourists. Traditional handicrafts, commerce, popular art, specific to these areas, would be efficiently promoted, as a result of this route establishment. It would create the pre-requisites for the development of other tourist activities, such as: hunting, fishing, sight-seeing.

Specialists in the field consider that Romania has still a long way until it would be able to have a *wine-growing tourism* comparable to the one in other European countries (France). Although the number of tourists has increased with the years, Romanians rarely come, and just from curiosity, while foreigners come out of passion and with the wish to achieve the wine art. Romanians only now discover this new type of tourism, called *oeno-tourism*.

2. The Alba and Hunedoara Dacian Fortresses Route

The 6 Dacian fortresses, placed in the Hunedoara and Alba counties, called Sarmizegetusa Regia - Grădiștea de Munte, Costești Cetățuie, Costești Blidaru, Luncani Piatra Roșie, Bănița and Căpâlna, are in a terrible state of degradation, and should be integrated into a preservation and protection system (Fig. 3). A reinforcement and restoration program is absolutely necessary, as well as a current maintenance, research, preservation and valuation program (Daicoviciu, et al. 1990). Dacian fortresses are less known to the public than to the specialists in the field. Although a UNESCO monument, Căpâlna fortress

is not widely promoted and known by the tourists (Glodariu, Moga, 1989). Piatra Craivii fortress would be worth introducing among the UNESCO monuments.



Fig. 3. Dacian Fortresses from Alba and Hunedoara counties

For a better valuation, starting from 2006, there has been organized the *Dacian Fortresses Festival* (in Alba county, at Cricău, Piatra Craivei, Cugir), where both natives and tourists take part. The festival program included equestrian stunts, folklore performances, while in the evening have been brought the piles, symbols of the Dacian fortresses, a usual ritual during Dacian times. On the third edition of the *Dacian Fortresses Festival* (in Cricău, 2008) a special attention was paid to the culinary part, also including the wine in the festival program. The festival is targeted at attracting people's attention on the tourist potential of the region, by transposing to actual times different Dacian traditional rituals and customs, such as the restoration of a Dacian village, with a pottery workshop, a smithy and a sanctuary, as well as the reinforcement of different elements of the war atmosphere during that times, through the *Dacian Decathlon* contest. By promoting Dacian fortresses, rural tourism is encouraged, focussing on the return to simple nature and traditions. Dacian fortresses can become important tourist objectives, when the access roads will be improved.

In Hunedoara county, *Sarmizegetusa Regia* is the name of the pre-Roman Dacian capital, which is in fact a complex of sanctuaries, placed in the Orăștie

Mountains, 1,200 m high, where the *Big Round* Sanctuary (looks like Stonehenge but a smaller size) can be observed, as well as the *Andezit Sun* (something similar to the famous Maya calendar). Nearby the Dacian fortresses we can also find the ruins of *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, the former capital of the Roman Dacia, the most interesting tourist objective in the area, offering tourists the image of a Roman town, with the forum, Augustan palace, thermal baths, the amphitheatre, public and private edifices. In 1982, there was opened a museum exhibiting gold and bronze objects, pottery, Roman gods statues, coins, funeral monuments, medals, mosaics, fibulae.

Other tourist objectives in the area are the Colț Fortress, Mălăiești Fortress, Densuș Church, Strei Church, as well as the Hațeg Fortress. Tourists can reach these places on the DN 68 national road, from Hațeg to Caransebeș, or by train, on the Petroșani - Subcetate or Simeria – Subcetate routes. At the same time, tourists are offered multiple accommodation possibilities, due to the tourist guesthouses and tent camps. On the fortresses tour, tourists can benefit from fabulous landscapes, as well as visit different keys, caves, monasteries, etc.

3.The old steam trains called „Mocănița”

Narrow gauge railroads are known as “Mocănița”, and they exist in different mountain areas of the country (some of them still functioning, others, forgotten for a long time) serving for the raw materials transportation (wood, stone), as well as for passengers from isolated regions of the country. They have remained tourist attractions for isolated mountain regions with a fairy tale landscape. There are only a few places in Europe where we can still find fully functioning constructions like these. Among those that have been used in Romania we can mention: Moldovița steam train in Suceava county, Covasna-Comandău in Covasna county, Zlatna-Brad in Alba county and, still in function on the Vaser river valley in Maramureș county.

Although they no longer function, some of them have been temporarily put into service by foreigners passionate with the traditional technique and perfume. Covasna-Comandău Mocănița, has been put into service again in 2005, on a 7 km route, through the financial efforts of an Austrian businessman. It has been declared a patrimony technical monument and saved from being thrown to garbage (10,000 Euro/year to be kept in service). The old narrow gauge railway „Mocănița” from Moldovița, called “Huțulca” has been repaired and temporarily put into service on a 3.7 km route, again by an Austrian, in 2005.

The Apuseni Mountains “Mocănița”, was temporarily put into service. The old, 2 wagons, narrow gauge railway train, called “Mocănița”, with steam locomotive, travelled in 2007 on a 12 km distance, from Abrud to Câmpeni.

Until 1997, the train was a connection between the town of Abrud, in Alba county, and Turda, in Cluj county, again a project initiated by an Austrian businessman. He repaired the narrow railway on the Abrud – Campeni section. The trip takes more than an hour, meanwhile the tourists being able to admire the natural beauties of Apuseni Mountains. The wagons and the steam locomotive were built in 1957 and repaired in the last few years. In the past, the train also had a restaurant-wagon, where tourists could listen to old famous music. The railway was built between 1891 and 1912, on the Turda and Abrud sector. The line had 4 railway stations and 21 small stations, but it was able to stop on the way, whenever necessary. The range has no longer been used by the Romanian Railway Company (CFR) since 1997. “Mocănița” has been introduced on the list of historical monuments, which allowed saving the railway from being melted. In the last few years, when the narrow steam trains have been put into service, they have been besieged by a large number of natives and tourists.

The most beautiful narrow gauge steam railway is still preserved in Maramureș, on the Vaser Valley. „Măriuța” steam locomotive pulls the log wagons and a passenger wagon. Maramureș is famous for its big forests and the large number of rivers. Along Mara, Iza, Vișeu and Vaser valleys we can find extremely beautiful landscape, and picturesque settlements. Vaser Valley (60 km), in the form of a defile, has steep slopes and forested peaks. The access is done through Vișeu de Sus (a forestry station), where the train starts, pulled on a narrow railway, by a low speed steam locomotive. “Mocănița” is the local train, the only means of transport for people and merchandise, on the valley. As a means of transportation, it preserves one of the oldest types of steam locomotive in Europe, and the last one in Romania that carries wood from the mountains. Built after the First World War, for wood transportation, it is still in use, with the same purpose. At present, Mocănița is more like a tourist relish today, both for Romanian and foreign tourists, many of them being there for the first time, to experience the unique feeling. Travelers can reach the destination by train, or can get out of it on any stop, continuing their trip by foot. Because it has a low speed sometimes, when the slopes are steep, the travelers have to go down, and continue their trip by foot, parallel to the train, which is very amusing for the tourists. Along the way, tourists can admire forests, steep slopes, keys with riotously waters, also crossing a series of tunnels. But they cannot find luxury accommodation.

Proposals for thematic routes building

The Castles and Fortresses Route. Many of them are visited as individual tourist objectives, without being part of a thematic route. The building of new thematic routes would create advantages both for tourists and local

communities. Castles and fortresses, princely residences or defense constructions, built along the years, now in different states of preservation (deterioration) could become tourist objectives of certain thematic routes, grouped according to geographical criteria. Alba Iulia – the Union fortress (18th century), Suceava fortress, built during Stephen the Great times, the ruins of the Deva fortress (13th century), placed on a volcanic cone, arranged on a cable means of transport up to the hill peak, where a very beautiful scenery unfolds to the tourists, towards Mureş corridor and the surrounding mountains. Neamţ Fortress (Târgu Neamţ), (14th century) was glorious during the times of Stephen the Great. Braşov fortress (14th century), Făgăraş Fortress (13th century) still preserve the water ditch which surrounds the building. Râşnov Peasant Fortress; Bran Castle famous due to Dracula's legend, The Huniad Castle (Iancu de Hunedoara and Matei Corvin). Sighişoara Fortress (13th century) among the few European fortresses still inhabited, and probably the only entirely preserved, is remarkable due to its towers: The Clock Tower, the Tanners' Tower, the Tin Tower, the Blacksmiths' Tower, the Furriers' Tower, the Tailors' Tower, the Butchers' Tower, the Shoemakers' Tower.

The King's Route. "The Royal Route" or "The King's Route", (DN 67C), connects Novaci and Sebeş, crossing Parâng Mountains. The road has been built by Traian's Roman armies, in the year 101 A.D., to reach the Dacian fortresses from the Orăştie area. King Ferdinand, the unifier of Romania, discovered, in 1914, the strategic potential of the area, and that is why he ordered the construction of a rock road, which even today is hard to cover, between the Sebeş Măceşului valley and Râncă. On this route, during the First World War, the western battlefield was being supplied. The road competes with the Transfăgăraş road, because of its beauty, but it is hardly to cover on the alpine area (The Urdele pass, 2,145 m). Passionate mountain tourists can cross it by bike. This type of tourism is favoured more by foreign tourists (German, Austrian), than by Romanians. The access on the national road DN 67C can be done either from Novaci and Sebeş, or through Olt river valley, Brezoi, Voineasa, Vidra, Obârşia Lotrului, or from Petroşani towards Obârşia Lotrului. Accommodation possibilities can be found at Vidra (three hotels), or on the hut and houses in Obârşia Lotrului. Although nowadays it is announced as a closed route, more and more tourists venture on the route, the same way as King Carol II did. King's Route could continue the Dacian Fortresses' Route from Orăştie.

The Flock Moving Routes. On the old roads crossed by shepherds with their flocks from the Carpathian Mountains to the Tatra Mountains, there is a large number of "marks" which talk about the history of shepherd craftsmanship. The same geographical names and names of persons, popular suits, songs and traditions, multiplied in different geographical areas.

Other new routes. A new and unusual round trip, opened between Sibiu and Rășinari (22 km) is crossed by a tram, through Dumbrava forest, Zoological garden and *Village Museum*. The second tram wagon has been arranged as a restaurant. The cost of renting the tram is 280 RON and there are 52 seats available (2008). Trams that move on this route have been built in Switzerland in 1950 and have been rebuilt since then. The distance is covered in 30 minutes.

Conclusions

Thematic routes offer the possibility of attracting in the tourist circuit of cultural and natural patrimony values, belonging to a certain community, where tourism has never been a main preoccupation. They could contribute to the raising of the living standards of the population, in the places integrated into the circuit, by obtaining complimentary revenues, education, cultural preoccupations, revival of the traditional trades, almost forgotten until that time. The elaboration of this kind of complex tourist products, integrated into a cultural theme, requires ideas and thoughts, organizational spirit and financial resources.

The analysis of the *Thematic routes- tourist destinations* subject reveals the fact that in Romania we can find many categories of thematic routes: thematic Routes integrated into the European corridors; *thematic routes - international models (Greenwais)*; *regional thematic routes (Wyne route, The Route of the Dacian, The old steam trains called „Mocănița”)*. The authors propose their multiplication and building of new routes, on the already known ranges which have no amenities, in the sense of the concept: *The Castles and Fortresses Route; King's Route, Flock Moving Routes*, etc.

Among the thematic routes presented, only a few of them function accordingly. Cultural routes do not have their own organized sites, according to the specific theme, which could reveal the organization and functioning process; the sites present, in a fragmentary way, only certain elements of the routes.

The promotion of thematic routes into the tourist round trips is not made on a national level, by specialized institutions, but only by a few tourist agencies or companies involved in selling tourist products (*Halewood Vineyards*). And that is why they benefit from a reduced set of information (except for the sites which mention local festivities and events: *Fortresses' Festival*).

Romanian thematic routes are known locally, but less known by tourists coming from other regions of the country, and that is why national request is very low. Traditional routes are discovered and practiced mostly by foreign tourists.

Although we have the Regional Resource Centre (Branch) of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, recently opened in Sibiu, its activity does not manage to radically change the status of the Romanian cultural thematic routes.

A better connection with the European thematic routes is necessary, which can be accomplished as part of national border project, supported with European funding (as the Voivodina – Vârsač with Mehedinți-Vânju Mare program has been made). In the future we could talk about the Jewish Heritage Route, The Silk Route, Routes to the Parks and Gardens etc.

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