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Tradition and Modernity in the Romanian Rural Space. Case Study: the Arges Sub-Carpathian Foothills

Abstract

This paper intends to demonstrate on the basis of a case study that rural people's access to modern goods and services is not necessarily a relentless source of deculturalisation, because it sometimes allows a better management and valorisation of the main characteristics of the rural space. Despite socio-economic unrest and successive changes of political regimes that took place in Romania during the last century, the human communities within the Arges foothills have defended with dignity their traditional material and spiritual values, passing them down from generation to generation. In the medium and long-term, the valorisation of the Romanian rural space, in general, and of that belonging to the Arges foothills, in particular, will imply the creation of a balance between the valuable cultural potential and the quality of life of the inhabitants, who are the keepers of rural cultural heritage. At present, the best thing to do to pass on the traditions of this area is to proudly accept the affiliation to this geographical space. This is true not only for the permanent inhabitants of rural settlements, but mostly for those who have left the countryside to carry it in their minds and souls. In our opinion, this fact is a pre-requisite for preventing the loss of material and spiritual values of this cultural-historical space.

Keywords: rural space, tradition, modernity, Lerești, Valea Mare-Pravăț, the Arges Sub-Carpathian foothills.

Introduction

By *tradition and modernity*, we understand two images at various stages of development. The expression also suggests the idea of opposite worlds, characterized by different balances, which reveal different images of society, increasingly *humane*, as the epoch is older (Courville, 1993, p. 213). Generally, tradition means an accumulation of information, saved in one's memory, later passed from generation to generation through interpersonal interaction. In other words, tradition is the dynamic output of an experience based on an aggregate of idiographic (unique) practices, disseminated through non-explicit knowledge. Through tradition, experiences are acquired as a whole, through their external manifestation (Courville, 1993, p. 214). On the other hand, modernity is a state of mind, a worldview, referring to the so-called *modernization* processes. It promotes new knowledge and practices, supported by the advancements in science and technology, which alter deeply the means by which people react to reality (Courville, 1993, p. 215). At present, modernity penetrates everywhere and puts pressure on community spaces generating constraints, previously unknown. Big countries swallow small countries, cultures swallow cultures. Hence, the idea that modernity causes damage by destroying the relationship networks that once supported the local balance (Courville, 1993, p. 217).

Research undertaken during the last two decades on an international scale with respect to the impact of globalization on the life of local communities has highlighted the fact that present processes of economic globalization ignore or even suppress the uniqueness of local life models and cultural identities (Mlinar, 1995, p. 1). The development of modern industry, transport and communication technology have greatly affected the life of rural communities. Globalization, which initially seems to be an external phenomenon, remote from everyday concerns, is actually a dialectical phenomenon referring to the most intimate aspects of life. Modern communication technologies shorten the physical distances and cancel the informational isolation of contemporary societies, including rural ones. Under the circumstances, the individualization of rural communities, as a reaction to globalization, is characterized (among

others) by the rediscovery of traditions, which are then incorporated into everyday life (Strassoldo, 1990).

A link between past and present, rural cultural patrimony only justifies its conservation if it has a future and will be passed on to future generations. The patrimony can be turned from a potential wealth into a product, resource or development factor, thus being integrated into a sustainable development scheme (Maguelonne Dejeant-Pons, 2007).

During the past half-century the Romanian village has been confronted with land confiscation, village systematization, rural flight to large industrial cities during the communist regime, and, in the last 20 years, with problems generated by the low efficiency of agricultural, environmental and sustainable development policies. Despite all these socio-economic difficulties, it continues however, to preserve the genuine values of country life. This national asset has not yet been capitalized so as to stimulate the sedentarisation of the rural population while arousing the interest of those who are curious to discover the charm of living in the countryside. This is especially the case of young people born and living in the city and foreign visitors, for whom contact with the Romanian village may represent a *sui generis* experience and an *in situ* lesson in ethnography and folklore.

The present image of the Romanian village reveals the close link, consolidated in time, between the settlement, the natural setting and the material culture of its inhabitants (Cucu, 2009). The Romanian Sub-Carpathians in general and the Arges Foothills in particular “seem to have been destined from the beginning specifically for sheltering human settlements [...]. The human agglomerations developed on these lands are always reborn from the ashes to surge to the sky like the Phoenix” (Conea, 1931). In the rural space belonging to the Arges Foothills live “people distinguished by stability and aspiration for modern living. Through them, who preserve the traditional occupations and the mastery of the specific households, we find the traditional traits that characterize the value of the Romanian village as a whole. These people, [...] still preserve the indigenous popular art style of the old houses, while adapting it to the new constructions” (Cucu, 2009, pp. 340).

In the last three decades of the 20th century, the attention of Romanian geographers focused pre-eminently on rural modernization problems (Sandru, 1967; Bacanaru and Candea, 1977; Ianos, 1979; Urucu, 1987, et al.). This new trend brings to the fore the relation between quality of

life in the rural space and the preservation of the cultural identity of the Romanian village.

The study refers to the Sub-Carpathian space bordering on the Southern Carpathians, between the Argeş and Damboviţa rivers (fig. 1). In order to emphasize the way in which tradition and modernism combine in these parts, two communes lying in the Arges Foothills were chosen as samples. These are situated between the mountains and the Câmpulung Depression, the latter being considered by geographers as the most typical tectonic-erosive Sub-Carpathian depression.

The arguments behind this study are numerous, most important being the following:

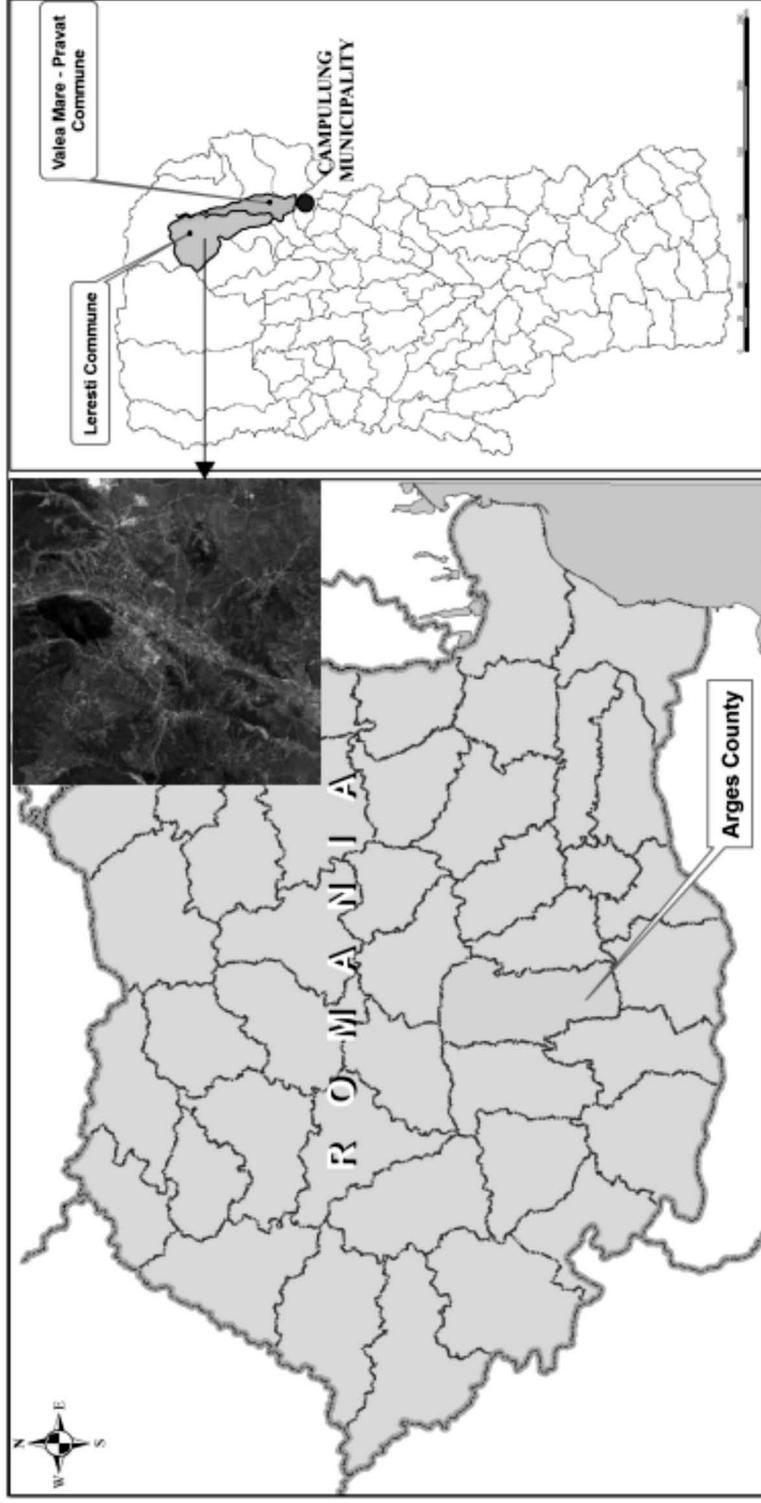
- the last half-century has brought about ample quantitative and qualitative changes, which impacted on the administrative-territorial structure, rural space functions, demographic behaviour, people's mentality and the profile of the activities carried out by the local population;
- the rural space, and especially the villages lying close to the cities, has been confronted with the risk of losing its cultural identity, under the influence of current technological progress;
- the rural space belonging to the Arges Foothills is an example of continuity in the field of ethno-folkloric and architectonic tradition, against a background of constant preoccupation for improving quality of life;
- at present, it is necessary to promote models for preserving and perpetuating the cultural-historical potential of Romanian rural space, as a source and resource with significant economic value (which can be exploited through high- quality rural tourism).

Methodological Aspects

The study is based on retrospection and the personal experience of some of the authors, for whom the Arges Foothills represent what geographers call *provincial* or *ethnographic mental space*¹ (Cocean, 2002).

¹ Mental space defines the territory, which a community, or an individual, integrates into its own scale of values. The ethnographic mental space includes the territory occupied by a population sharing the same traditions, customs, folk costumes, etc., a population

Figure 1. Geographical location of the Valea Mare-Pravat and Leresti communes



Source: own working.

The study was aimed at analyzing the relationship between the preservation of ethno-cultural tradition and modernization tendencies, especially in the last two decades, at identifying the influence of the Câmpulung town on the relationship between tradition and modernity, as well as assessing the chances for the conservation and perpetuation of the ethno-cultural traditions in the current socio-economic context.

In order to achieve our goals, we employed classical and modern research methods and techniques, such as introspection and retrospection, direct observation (visual analysis), diagnostic analysis and surveys (interviews).

Both permanent and non-permanent residents, irrespective of whether they were born in the area or have come from elsewhere, were interviewed. The subjects belonging to the permanent population were represented by the mayors of the two settlements, two representatives of the local teaching staff, two pensioners, two employees and two pupils. Besides, two persons born in this area, who live part-time in the investigated communes, and two people who were born elsewhere were also interviewed. The research was carried out between July 2008 and August 2010.

Results

Introspection and retrospection, the active participation of authors in different events, and the results of interviews with the representatives of the local authorities and the permanent and non-permanent residents have all emphasized that the investigated area still preserves a valuable ethno-cultural patrimony. Its preservation is encouraged by the favourable geographical location of the studied settlements; the intense spiritual life of the local population; the conservatism or the promotion of various customs from generation to generation; the temporary residents' nostalgia for the ethnographic mental space of the Arges Foothills, and, more recently, the promotion of local traditions as resources for rural tourism. Likewise, for a small part of the population the cause for preserving a traditional and

that creates a genuine rural culture, very different from that of the neighbouring groups. According to Cocean, on the European scale, Romania stands out through the number and consistency of its ethnographic mental spaces.

rather rudimentary traditional life style is, unfortunately, poverty and the lack of access to modern materials.

Direct observations, discussions with the local authorities and opinions shared by members of the investigated communities have revealed in the first place that preserving tradition does not mean the denial of access to modern living means or resources. Consequently, the preservation of tradition does not threaten the continuously growing tendencies of improving the quality of life in the investigated rural space. Secondly, the situation in the field has also revealed a very interesting aspect, namely the tendency to turn to account the material and spiritual assets of the local ethno-cultural patrimony in the process of renovation and modernization of the rural households.

On the other hand, the research has identified the factors behind the modernization of the investigated communities. These are the following: accessibility, natural resources (wood, building materials), economic production units appeared during the communist period within the communes, the accessing of structural funds after 2007, public access to information through the medium of cable TV and the internet and last but not least, the proximity to the urban environment.

Results obtained have offered us the necessary data for drawing conclusions regarding both the premises of promoting tradition in the medium and long-term and the potential risk of degradation of the local population.

Discussions

Favourability Factors for the Preservation of Tradition

A very important role for the continuity of the traditional way of life in the investigated rural space is played by the geographical location, due to the shelter provided by the Iezer-Păpușa and Leaota ridges, on the one hand, and the chain of the inner Sub-Carpathian foothills, on the other hand. The climate, with mean annual temperatures of 7 – 8°C and a precipitation of around 700 – 800 mm, creates favourable conditions for animal breeding (supported by rich pastures and hay fields) and fruit tree growing, especially in the villages of the Valea Mare-Pravăț commune.

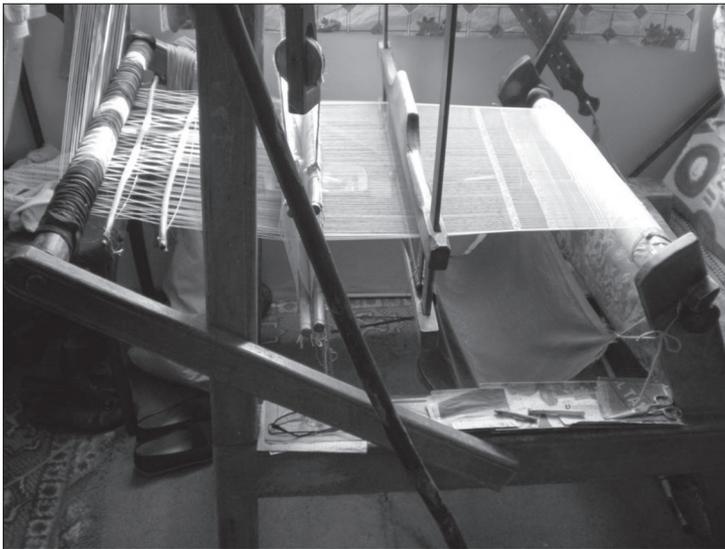
Of the activities with old traditions in the study area, we can mention the following:

- **Primitive gathering** – It was certainly the first occupation of the commune's dwellers, which, although this cannot be proven by documents, is well supported by present reality. Thus, the hills and mountains in the area abound in edible mushrooms and berries (raspberry, bilberry, wild strawberry, rosehip and blackberry), which still represent important foodstuff and income sources for the poorer inhabitants.
- **Fruit tree growing** – According to data at our disposal, fruit tree growing has never been a basic occupation for the residents of the Leresti commune. It is true that the "*The Geographical Dictionary of the Muscel County*" of 1893 mentions that "the plums allowed an average production of 1000 decaliters of brandy", and probably the same was also true a decade or two earlier. This makes us believe that fruit tree growing was not an essential occupation, which could be partly explained by the unfavourable soil (Oana and Oana, 2008). Instead, the apple and plum orchards have been well represented in the Valea Mare-Pravata commune, whose inhabitants use the fruit themselves or make a living by selling it at the market. The people in this area are famous for the *Muscel brandy*, distilled from plums, apples and pears, having a lower alcoholic content in comparison with the strong plum brandy made in Ardeal and Bihor.
- **Stock raising** – In Lerești and Valea Mare-Pravăț stock breeding has been one of the basic occupations of the inhabitants since memorial times. The first written evidence of the number and kind of animals dates back to the 19th century. "*The Geographical Dictionary of the Muscel County*" tells us that in 1893 there were 955 cattle, 19100 sheep, 116 horses and 160 pigs. If we take into account that the communal pasture's area was 664 ha, we can conclude that stock raising has a good tradition in these parts. This is further certified by the fact that the fair of animal, wool and other similar products was held "in the Saint Elias glade, on the hill hanging above the Leresti commune". At present, cattle owners graze their animals on the communal pasture. Hay fields are properly taken care of; the hay is dried and piled in stacks or stored in a barn arranged in the attic (Fig. 12). Sheep raising was the dearest occupation of the people living in Leresti. Over the years, it represented their main source of living. This is certified by the large number of sheep that existed

since the end of the 19th century until World War I, although after 1918 the number of shepherds dropped (because of the growing number of people who embraced the forestry occupation).

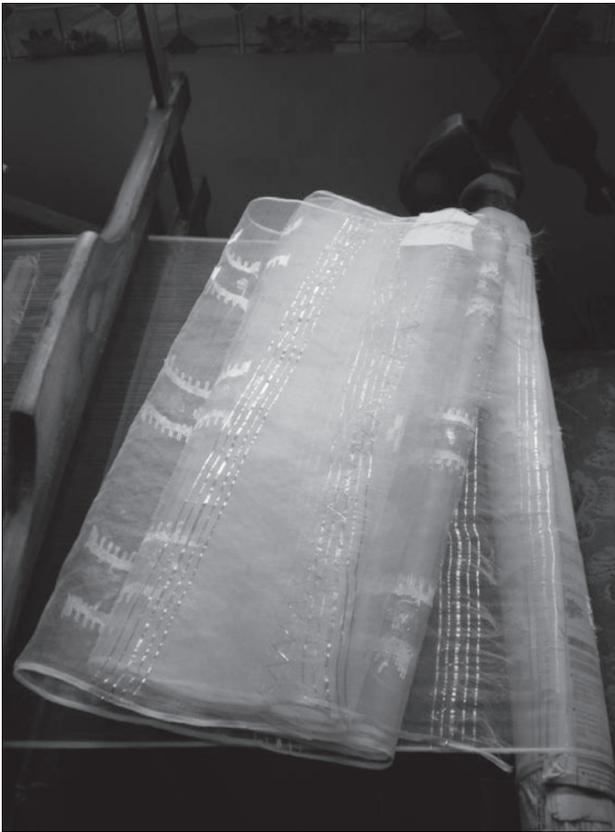
- **Domestic industry** – Based on what their households and farms provide, the local people produce dairy products, which are sold at the Câmpulung town's markets, wool carpets and the nice and famous veils made of gossamer, which are woven by hand. As a matter of fact, in the 20th century weaving was a basic occupation for most women in the study area. In the 1970s, the Leresti commune held more than 500 looms, and the products were sold through the consumer cooperative both in Romania and abroad (Oana and Oana, 2008). Unfortunately, since 1990 this occupation has been declining, the number of women who still possess looms being hard to estimate, inasmuch as many of the retirees fear they may lose their pension money by admitting they have an additional source of income. However, during our field investigations such a woman, 75 years old, allowed us to take pictures of her loom and the accomplished product, namely the traditional veil manufactured in the Arges Foothills.

Figure 2. Loom



Source: own research.

Figure 3. Veil specific for The Arges Foothills area



Source: own research.

- **Forestry activities** – Most dwellers of the Leresti commune were forest workers, because there was always a demand for labour in order to exploit the nearby woods. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Italians came to the Leresti commune, as experts in forest exploitation, to build a gutter for bringing down the logs cut from the Iezer Massif. The work was carried out with the local labour force. From the Italians, the residents of Leresti ‘stole’ the craft of harvesting the wood during the five years of exploitation. When leaving, the Italians ‘lifted’ (destroyed) the gutter, and from that moment on, the exploitations were taken over by the dwellers

of the Leresti commune, which was convenient for the state and the great forest owners, because the local labour force was cheaper. In this context, the people of Leresti turned into specialists in this field. Therefore, numerous teams spread all over the Carpathian range, from Moldavia to Maramureş and Banat, where they stayed for months in order to harvest the wood. As soon as the *ARO Câmpulung* car plant came into being, many people abandoned forestry work for jobs there. However, the decline of the car industry after 1990 revived the interest in wood harvesting.

Another factor which contributed to the perpetuation of tradition is represented by the intense spiritual life of the inhabitants. The rural identity, defined as the material and spiritual culture of the residents of a rural community, is determined by the natural and social settings in which they live and interact (Barbic, 1998, p. 7).

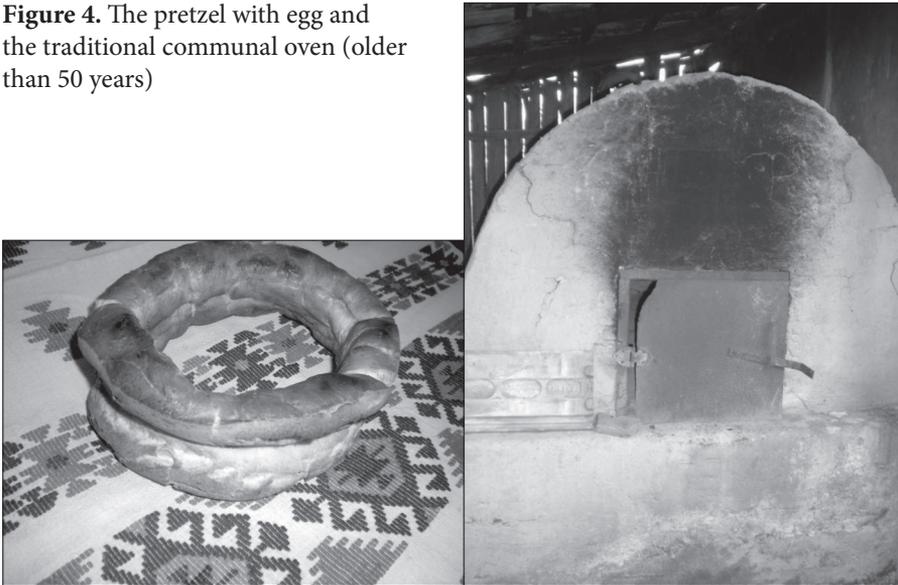
The interviews conducted with the local population confirmed their subjective perception regarding the attitude of the villagers towards religion and especially religious traditions. The people living in the Arges Foothills are believers, religious education and rituals playing an important part in the everyday life of their communities. The church has always been the hub of people's lives, even during the communist dictatorship, which tried unsuccessfully to impose atheism as a unique national doctrine.

Without being fanatical, the people in the Arges Foothills observe both the rituals connected with the main events of life – birth, marriage and death – and those dedicated to the religious holidays of the year. Of the most important events of this kind we can mention the following:

- **The feast of The Assumption of Mary** (15th August). This holiday is celebrated by the housewives of the Valea Mare-Pravăț and Lerești by preparing the *litia*, a rounded, fasting pancake (without ingredients of animal nature), which is then consecrated in church, at the mass performed on the eve. That same evening the pancake is shared with the other family members as a form of spiritual purification.
- **Easter**. The day before Easter, the housewives prepare the so-called *pretzel with egg*, for which the rural settlements in The Arges Foothills hold the exclusivity. On Easter Eve, people bring pretzels and red eggs to church and crack them open in the morning, after mass. The baking is very important for getting high quality pretzels. In this respect, for maximum performance, the women use roomy ovens

made of brick and clay, which are usually placed in the courtyard. In Valea Mare-Pravăț, there are also communal ovens, used by many families for baking their special pretzels for the Easter feast. In order to make the *pretzel with egg* a local brand, in 2009 the first edition of the “Pretzel with egg festival” was organized in Lerești County. The intention of the organizers was to make the event a permanent one, in order to disseminate this particular local Easter tradition.

Figure 4. The pretzel with egg and the traditional communal oven (older than 50 years)



Source: own research.

- **St. Dumitru’s Eve** (25th October). On this occasion, in the villages of the Arges Foothills people start “*the Sumedru’s fire*”, for which they use large amounts of dry leaves, fir tree twigs, seasoned wood, and in the last two decades, for special effects, rubber tyres. The young people standing by the fire lit at dusk call the locals to the party crying, “*Come to the Sumedru’s fire!*” The women give the children fruit, pretzels and sweets, while the adults drink boiled plum brandy and *stum*. The custom has its roots in the ancient past, when primitive people celebrated the discovery of the fire by singing and dancing. The Christians superposed it on St. Dumitru’s feastday,

who according to the tradition is the “gatherer of all bread and fruit”. This assumption is supported by the etymology of the name: Saint Dumitru – San Dumitru – San Medru – Su Medru – Sumedru or Simedru. Spread all over the Arges County, the custom is less preserved in the plain areas in comparison with the Arges foothills (Florea, 1994; Tudor, 1997; Manu, 2003).

Conservatism or the promotion of customs from generation to generation stands out as a factor that encourages the preserving of local traditions. Although over time, some customs have been ‘improved’, their essence has survived until this day, allowing us to come into contact with practices and rituals that define the people in these parts. An important part in this respect is played by the consideration that people place on the opinion of others. Thus, “gossip” prevents the people in the study area from abdicating from local customs and traditions, which are connected with different life events: births, weddings, funerals, etc. The most important customs and rituals in the region are the following:

a) **Wedding customs**

In Leresti commune and throughout the entire space of the Arges Foothills, one can speak about certain *wedding periods*, closely related both to the occupations embraced by the people (fruiters, animal breeders, forest workers) and to the observation of fasting periods stipulated by the Orthodox calendar, followed religiously by the locals. The ritual before the wedding, which usually took place on Sundays, had an interesting and meaningful development. The stages of this ritual, largely observed even today, are the following:

- *Pogadirea* (folk term for marriage ‘brokerage’) was the prologue of the wedding, during which the fate of the young pair was destined. Sometimes, the marriage was based on sincere and pure love, but at other times wealth was decisive. At present, due to young people’s access to education and information, as well as to the freedom of movement and the influence of the urban environment, this stage is skipped.
- *The exchange of wedding rings or engagement*. The exchange took place at the girl’s house. The boy came there accompanied by the godparents that he had chosen bringing the girl the wedding rings and four objects at most as a gift. In her turn, the girl offered the boy some objects and necessarily a traditional *napkin*. After all the

objects were laid down on the table in front of the godfather, he offered them one by one to the girl and the boy. On the table there was also a plate of wheat (nowadays with rice) boiled in milk, a spoon, a glass and a bottle of wine. In turn, first the boy and then the girl tasted the rice with the spoon. The glass was then filled with wine from the bottle and the two youngsters sipped in turns in the same order. After that, they all sat at the table for the feast. Nowadays, that ritual has tended to become a memory.

- *The fir tree* – a ritual still observed nowadays. On Saturday morning, the bridegroom's friends come to make the tree, i.e. a wreath of fir tree twigs used to adorn the gate and house poles. In the mean time, the bride accompanied by her girlfriends walks through the village and teaches the girls to make *betelele*. These are small flowers that the bride and her bridesmaids have chosen from her best friends, pinned to the chest of the wedding guests on the day of the wedding. In the evening, the bridegroom leaves for the girl's place carrying the knot-shaped bread that one of the groom's men, usually the bridegroom's best friend, breaks in half above the bride's head. Then, the right half is given to the girl, and the left to the boy. After that, they dance folk dances until midnight.
- *The girl's day wedding*. Sunday morning, the girl accompanied by her closest bridesmaid and the boy accompanied by his closest groomsman go to church to worship God. Subsequently, with pomp and circumstance, they go to the photographer (in the last decade professional photographers have taken pictures throughout the wedding). After coming back, they sit at the table, at the so-called *girl's day meal*. Close to lunch, at the bridegroom's house the *shaving* ceremony takes place. All this time, back at the girl's house the wedding meal gets cooked. Surrounded by her friends, the girl gets dressed up in the traditional white dress by the *druste* (women in charge of dressing the bride). The godmother arranges the wreath with great care, so as to avoid *the tangling of the golden threads*, which indicates that as a wife the bride will be put in trouble by the housework. After the shaving ritual, amidst his *band of courageous people* the bridegroom leaves on foot, accompanied by the fiddlers, to pick up the godparents. Then, the procession heads for the bride's place where they perform the ritual of *forgiveness*. While the

bridesmaids pin the *betelele* (white natural or artificial flowers) on the lapels of the wedding guests waiting in the courtyard, the bridegroom and the bride, together with the godfathers and accompanied by the fiddlers, enter the house and *ask forgiveness* from the bride's parents. Once the forgiveness ritual is completed, the fiddlers begin playing *hora miresei* (the wedding dance) and the bridegroom, godparents and all the people gathered in front of the house *dance in the middle of the lane*. After that, everybody goes to church for the wedding ceremony.

b) *Datul d'a verii si d'a suratele* (roughly, the ceremony of making sworn cousins and sisters). This custom is pretty old in the Leresti and Valea Mare-Pravat. Elderly people say they have learned it from their parents and relatives since the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays, it is considered to be the most widespread custom in the region, people observing the exact day and the specific ritual passed from generation to generation. The custom consists of a pledge made between two or more persons that have no family relationship. This custom is embraced both by the youngsters (even children) and by the adults. We believe the roots of this custom are found in the past, when people tried to build good relations as a premise for a better life. We base this assumption on the fact that the Romanian peasant, usually poor and helpless in the face of hardships, sought support, a helping hand, from his fellows belonging to the same social category. Thus, in order to strengthen this bond he gave it the character of a commitment. With the passing of years, this custom has become a tradition, losing its original scope and being adopted by a lot of people. It is now associated with the second day of The Feast of Pentecost. On this day, a person of the group that intends to make a commitment gives a feast at his place, to which everybody brings a contribution. Porcelain cups must be placed on the table. At the end of the feast the guests exchange the cups and say: *Surată în sus/Surată în jos/Că afară e frumos* (roughly, Sister here/Sister there/The weather outside is fair), if it comes to the girls, or *Vere în sus/Vere în jos/Că afară e frumos* (roughly, Cousin here/Cousin there/The weather outside is fair), when it comes to the boys (Oana and Oana, 2008).

c) The traditions belonging to the Arges Foothills as resources for rural tourism These days, people realize more and more that in modern society traditions may contribute to the economic development of the settlements which have national, but mostly international, tourist potential.

The cultural identity crisis, which threatens the villages adhering to modern socio-economic systems, may be curbed or at least mitigated if the natural setting and cultural heritage will be used as a local development source and as an indispensable element of the local life style. Rural tourism seeks to turn to account the natural and unspoiled beauties of the countryside. For the farmers' families and local communities it represents a promising economic activity, because from this point of view Romania, the same as Slovenia (Barbic, 1998), has a huge potential. At the same time, the cultural patrimony could be used to give Romania a distinct note among the other EU countries, inasmuch as elsewhere the rural traditions have been romanticized and rather turned into a "theatre", with the purpose of entertaining tourists and maybe even the locals (Barbic, 1998).

Encouraging Factors for the Modernization of the Investigated Rural Area

In the contemporary period, the rural population accepts the challenges of urban life. This is also true for those who live on farms and work in agriculture, (Majerová, 2009). In Romania, the fragmentation of agricultural land after 1990 and the opportunities for getting non-agricultural jobs in the cities have turned many village dwellers from full-time farmers and forest workers into civil servants, who practice agriculture only as a complementary activity meant to ensure them a proper living standard. As in the case of Slovenia (Barbic, 1998), the rural population working in the urban setting has brought back home new values and elements of urban life style, which sometimes gradually replaced the rural traditions. Some of these have been abandoned; others have been adapted to the new conditions. As far as the Arges Foothills area is concerned, which is rather stable from the socio-economic point of view, the modernization process has not been a brutal one, inasmuch as the labour force exodus has been lower in comparison with other parts of the country.

The study has reached the conclusion that preserving tradition does not necessarily imply denying people's access to modern living means and resources. It does not threaten either the steady increasing tendency to improve the quality of life in the study area. In many cases, within the same household, past and present coexist through the renovation and modernisation of old constructions, the adding of modern buildings

next to traditional ones, and the integration of traditional elements in the modernisation process (fig. 10). The care of the investigated communities for the preservation and enhancement of old wells is unusual and interesting. They were abandoned three or four decades ago, when the settlements were connected to the water distribution system. In recent years, however, these have been turned into genuine cultural-religious objects (fig. 6 and 7), which again confirms the intense spiritual life of the people in this area and the high regard for their ancestors (in Lerești, for instance, the wells are dedicated to the memory of local heroes).

Figure 5. Preserved wells in Valea Mare-Pravăț



Source: own research.

Within the investigated communities, the modernisation process began in the second half of the 20th century (in the communist regime), with the development of industrial activities (machine-building industry, chemical industry and building materials industry). There are several factors supporting the modernisation process of local communities. One of them is *accessibility* in relation to the main transport routes. From this

Figure 6. Well dedicated to the memory of a local hero in Lerești



Source: own research.

point of view, both settlements have direct access to the National Road 73 (DN 73 or E 574) (fig. 1), which makes the connection with Pitesti and Brasov cities very easy (fig. 2). Another factor is represented by the *economic production units built in the communist era within the communes*. We here refer to the CIMUS cement plant in the Valea Mare-Pravăț, which has recently changed its name to HOLCIM, the ARO car plant, lying between Lerești and Câmpulung City and the Câmpulung Synthetic Fiber Facility. It is important to note that the last two ended their activity in the 10th decade of the 20th century. These industrial production units required the modernisation of the utilities infrastructure and consequently boosted the development of waterworks and modern roads. On the other hand, *access to the structural funds after 2007* allowed for the extension of the existing infrastructure, and thus the secondary road network was modernised, while the Lerești commune was connected to the natural gas distribution system. A factor supporting the modernisation process is *the nearness to the Câmpulung City*. From this standpoint, both communes

are on the outskirts of the city, in its hinterland area (fig. 1). The link with the city, which has always existed, has intensified during the last decades. Practically, at present, most of the population resorts more or less to the goods and services offered by the city. This applies to the procurement of industrial processed foodstuffs to diversify the traditional staple food based on products obtained in people's households and farms (eggs, milk, meat, beans, potatoes, apples and pears); the purchase of electronic and electric appliances; the engagement in recreation and leisure activities (especially young people); and the use of sanitary and education facilities. The city also leaves its imprint on the behaviour of rural communities, especially when it comes to the young people, who adopt the urban fashion, even though sometimes they look ridiculous. Fortunately, even Cămpulung City is not faced with an exacerbated modernisation that would imply radical structural change, because local industry is on the wane and its citizens are more and more involved in agri-tourist activities. The pensions in the city offer tourist programmes that often consist of taking guests to the nearby rural space. In this context, we may say the city stimulates the local traditional economy.



Figure 7. Folk costume specific for the Argeş Foothills area

Source: www.google.ro/images

The ethnic-cultural elements particularly affected by modernization are *the traditional costumes* (fig. 8), which began to be replaced by modern attire, as soon as the labour force was absorbed in industrial activities. The use of autochthonous clothes has proliferated after 1990, during the transition to the market economy, and has got worse since Romania's integration in the European Union. Nowadays, the owners of folk costumes are over 85 years old and hence fewer and harder to find. Nevertheless, our research has highlighted the fact that in the investigated areas there are still people, permanent or non-permanent residents, who cultivate the typical atmosphere of the village in the Arges Foothills at the beginning of the 20th century, in the context of family parties. On the other hand, the descendants of some old and famous families in the area are coming back to their home villages, where they restore and make the most of certain traditions (fig. 9, 10 and 11).

Figure 8. Turning back to the time of grandparents and great-grandparents – family meeting, Valea Mare-Pravăț, 1993



Source: own research.

Figure 9. The capitalization of ethnographic elements in a modern household



Source: own research.

Figure 10. Traditional curtain made of homespun cloth in the Valea Mare-Pravăț



Source: own research.

In their turn, *the traditional human activities* are also affected by the modernisation process. Access to information and the expansion of the consumer goods market have replaced the traditional tools used in the household with some modern ones. For instance, the motor scythe has often replaced the traditional scythe, while the ox and horse cart for carrying hay has been replaced by terrain vehicles with trailers. Yet, modern households still preserve the traditional dependencies for storing hay during winter (fig. 12) and cellars for the storage of fruit (apples, pears) picked from the orchards (fig. 13).

Figure 11. A house with hay barn in the Valea Mare-Pravăț



Source: own research.

The last decade has seen a tendency to simplify customs and traditions related to the main social and religious events, which is explained by the access of the young generation to science and culture, especially through the influence of mass media.

Figure 12. A typical house in the Argeş Foothills with high ground and cellar for fruit storage



Source: own research.

Conclusions

The contemporary realities of the investigated area reveal, on a small scale, the tradition – modernity relationship, which has changed permanently throughout the entire Romanian rural space. In the medium and long-term it is only up to us, all interested stakeholders involved in territorial development (public authorities, economic agents, representatives of education and cultural institutes and plain citizens), to harmonise our aspirations towards emancipation with the preservation of our cultural legacy and identity, seen as sources of inspiration, retreats and testimonies of our affiliation to the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space.

At present, the countryside is facing a personality crisis generated by the multitude of experiences that upset its natural historical evolution. During the last years, more and more voices have been heard at European level asking that rural patrimony be preserved and turned to account. This study confirms that nowadays the enhancement of the Romanian village

depends both on the emotional, but mostly financial, implication of the local and national decision-makers, and on the interest and participation of every citizen. The modernisation of the Romanian village must lead to its economic development, as a competitive territorial system, capable of creating surplus value and offering viable life models. The lack of interest in the future development of the village and the scarce investments in tourist infrastructure and agriculture, in conjunction with informational progress and globalisation, will affect the behaviour of young people, who will inevitably migrate to the city or even abroad. The absence of concrete programmes for preserving and encouraging the capitalisation of the ethno-cultural patrimony will generate in the medium and long-term a tendency of simplification or even abandonment of the cultural models passed on from generation to generation.

As a reaction to these potential risks, several strategic directions can be identified, which may contribute to the preservation of the Arges Foothills area as a provincial and ethnographic mental space of the young people who settled in the Romanian cities and abroad. On the one hand, this may help these people decide to return to their places of origin and on the other, it may draw all those interested in discovering the authenticity of Romanian rural life. From this point of view, it is important to invest in transport infrastructure, accommodation and especially in recreation facilities. On the other hand, the retraining courses in marketing and tourism may play in the long-term a very important part for the sustainable development of rural tourism activities. This point of view is supported by the job crisis, as well as the tourist potential of the entire area in which the two investigated settlements lie.

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