

REPRESENTATIVE RESOURCES FROM MARAMURES. VISIBILITY ANALYSIS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS

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Abstract: *The sustainability of rural tourism in Maramures area is primarily dependent on the attractive potential. Why is this region considered unique and those who have been there want to return? Because the villages of Maramures Country illustrate in an attractive way their evolution over time and the passage through the changes that have occurred. The presence of wooden constructions is characteristic, with an unmistakable architecture, in the form of gates, churches, houses and other household annexes. Then the way of life remained authentic, the locals illustrating daily the specific this particular aspect, which made unmistakable this area. The research carried out in the framework of this scientific approach aimed to analyze the opinions of tourists for resources with specific rural characteristics, or which somewhat mirror the life in the Maramures rural area, respectively: Breb village, Sighet Village Museum, the Merry Cemetery, Mocanita road through the Vaser Valley. The finality of the performed analysis allows the possibility and at the same time the necessity of issuing future proposals.*

Key words: *resources, Maramures rural area, visibility, analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the painful truth is that many of the Romanian rural areas with potential for rural tourism, [7,11,12] are in poverty. [4,5,6,9] Obviously, the question that may arise is: why would a tourist come to the Romanian countryside? Logically because they are unique tourist products that cannot be seen and obtained in other countries. Such a product can be the agritourism product, which combines several resources, thus giving the tourist the possibility to satisfy several needs [13,3] in a single vacation. But Romanian agritourism must discover a niche on the market to capitalize on. The market niche can be made from the multitude of alternatives: [1,8,10]

- The product itself - the Romanian village with its specific way of life, traditional Romanian festivals, the traditional way of going through religious holidays (Easter, Christmas), specific events such as fairs and fairs, Romanian food-popular gastronomy, wines and brandies, painted monasteries, peasant fortresses, the Danube Delta, etc.

- The price-the concept of price for value (the existence of a fair price/quality ratio) must be well understood: it is necessary to offer a tourist product of exceptional value;

- Another opportunity includes the traditional lifestyle and the existence of old villages where the tourist can experience a "time travel". [2,14,15]

The area under study, Maramures, is characterized by a specific which reflects the evolution of the area over time, but at the same time the specific traditionality, even if modernism penetrated this area as well, here it still preserves new, original elements that have the potential to arise the area from anonymity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The area under study is a well-known and famous one both at the national and international level, and this derives from the multitude of comments left by tourists, especially foreign ones, on the various tourism-specific websites. Among the more popular sites, intended for tourist activity, (Booking, Tripadvisor), we considered the Tripadvisor site in conducting this research, starting from the consideration that Booking is mainly

intended for accommodation reservations, while Tripadvisor includes both the reservation, as well as the leisure part, or "things to do in a place".

According to Tripadvisor, a number of 104 tourist attractions can be found in the Maramures area, totaling 2584 reviews received from tourists and 3965 pictures uploaded by tourists in accordance with the objectives visited, during 2003 year (figure 1)

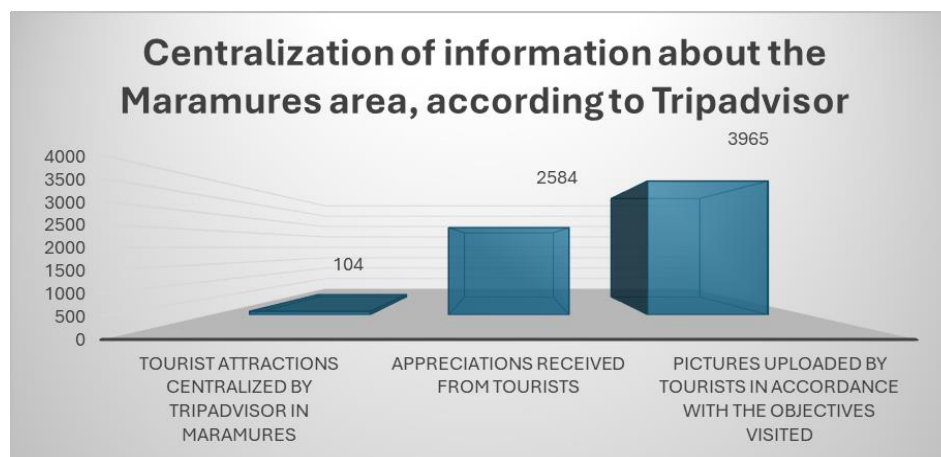


Figure 1. Centralization of information about the Maramures area, according to Tripadvisor

Centralizing the more representative comments of tourists, it appears that the Maramures area:

- It is "an area with a lot of history, relevant for the locals and for the foreign tourist of these places", referring to the Memorial to the Victims of Communism and the Resistance;

- "A place that manages to transform death into a happy aspect", with direct reference to the Merry Cemetery from Sapanta;

- "A place with positive vibrations given by the wonderful landscapes, beautiful nature, waters and waterfalls" with direct reference to the Cascada Cailor;

- Now there are 99 wooden churches here, 8 of them built before 1900 included in UNESCO World Heritage. The atmosphere and the specific architecture of Barsana, Rohia, Sapanta-Peri churches create for the tourist, tranquility and the atmosphere of "traditional and old", and at the same time they support the cultural wealth of the land, existing since ancient times. In fact, the entire existence of the area under study is in a very close connection with the church, which is why it is a tourist objective placed in the rank of honor.

The specific objectives of the research carried out in this study are:

- Breb village - the image of the traditional village from Maramures;
- The village museum from Sighet - a veritable gateway to the past;
- The Merry Cemetery - the emblematic element of Maramures;
- Mocanita route through the Vaser Valley - a way to knowing the area;
- Proposals for increasing the visibility of Maramures and its specific resources.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Hierarchy of representative tourist resources/objectives from the area under study. Regarding the specific elements, which on Tripadvisor are seen as the most representative for Maramures, and which are also motivations that attracted tourists to the area, we tried a ranking according to the number of appreciations found as follows: (figure 2)

- The Merry Cemetery is the objective which attracted the highest number of reviews, 562 in number, perhaps also due to the originality of this objective, of treating death with a humorous touch;
- The Memorial to Victims of Communism and Resistance attracted 340 likes, tourists being attracted by the relevance of the historical facts described here;
- Among the monasteries, perhaps the Barsana Monastery is the most famous among the Maramures monasteries, together with Sapanta-Peri, with a total of 327, respectively 88 appreciations from tourists;
- The Vaser Valley and Mocanita Trail through this area is another objective that attracts tourists to this area, on Tripadvisor there are 282 appreciations for this objective;
- The activities carried out in Breb village, considered the image of traditional village from this area have 228 appreciations from tourists;
- Among the natural attractions, Cascada Cailor is the one that recorded the most appreciations, 101 precisely.

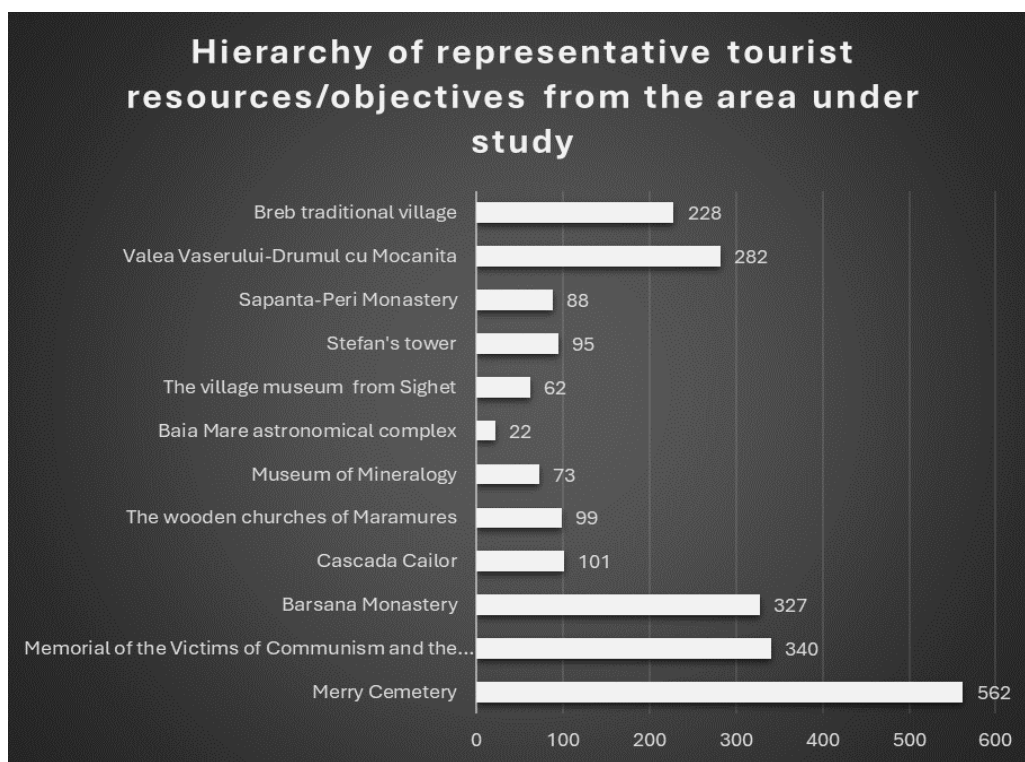


Figure 2. Hierarchy of the most representative tourist resources/objectives in the Maramures area

In the rural area of Maramures, the existence of resources from all categories, from natural resources to cultural resources, is a certified fact, and the positive aspect that comes from this certification is the fact that not only an awareness of the existence of these resources has been achieved, but also it was taken in consideration their inclusion in different categories of tourist products and their promotion at the international level, a fact that finally led to the recognition of the area especially by foreign tourists.

Visibility analysis of rural specific resources from Maramures area

Among the objectives of this area, which tourists have placed in the rank of honor, I have chosen to analyze the visibility of those objectives with rural specifics, or which somehow mirror life in the countryside, respectively: Breb village, Sighet Village Museum, Merry Cemetery, Mocanița Route through the Vaser Valley.

- *The Breb village - the image of the traditional village from Maramures.* Why is Breb village a representative tourist objective for the Maramures area? Because it still mirrors the traditional way of life, bringing to the forefront of modern life the ancestral life of long ago, when the traditional gates were still used at the entrance to the household, when the crats such weaving were still practiced, or food was still prepared on wood stoves using simple recipes with products from your own backyard. These could be just a few of the possible answers.



Tripadvisor centralizes 228 appreciations for Breb village, 211 being framed in very good and excellent category and 17 in average, poor and very poor category, in general here the possibility of access, or poor signaling, is charged. (figure 3)

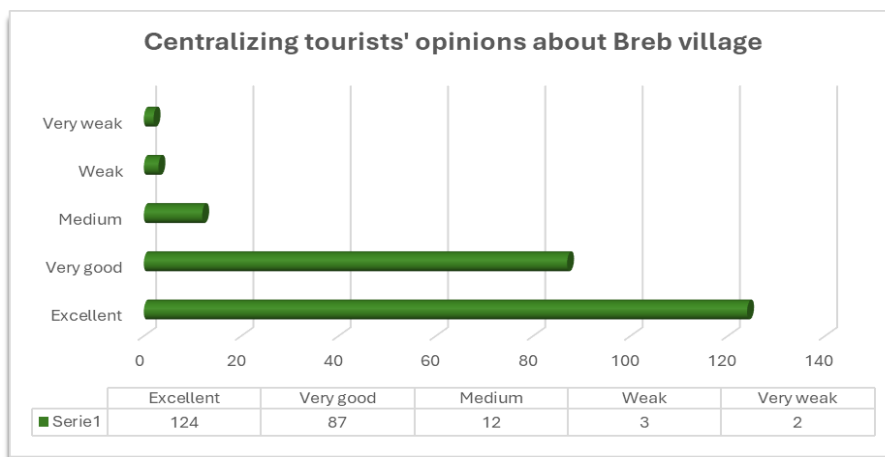


Figure 3. Centralizing tourists' opinions about Breb village

The fact that the tourist has the opportunity to make direct contact with the rustic, from accommodation in barns or restored wooden houses over 90 years old, is seen as an opportunity to go back in time, to change conceptions and why not perceptions related to modern comfort. All these aspects make the village of Breb a "magicland" that comes with the possibility of offering for the tourist the connection with nature and with the world and rural civilization.

- *The village museum from Sighet - a veritable gateway to the past.* According to the tourist, this objective is "a corner of heaven", which preserves the cultural heritage of a typical village from the Maramures region, through a collection of 50 houses and a wooden church. These relocated houses try to recreate the old atmosphere of the Maramures village, being distributed on both sides of a wide main street, converging towards the spiritual center of the community, meaning the church (dating from 1621). Along the main street of the village, wooden houses are built from hand cut timber, illustrating how the houses, barns and outbuildings, typical of the traditional household of the 17th and 18th centuries, looked like. The houses are well preserved and are furnished with original

wooden furniture. The church has its interior surfaces almost completely covered with simple ecclesiastical murals, painted directly on wood, by local artists. In fact, the entire museum exemplifies the fine and ancestral craftsmanship of the locals and why not illustrate their way of life. The visit to this museum is rightly considered by tourists to be a true history lesson.

On Tripadvisor there are 62 reviews for this tourist attraction, of which 51 are placed in the excellent and very good category. (figure 4)

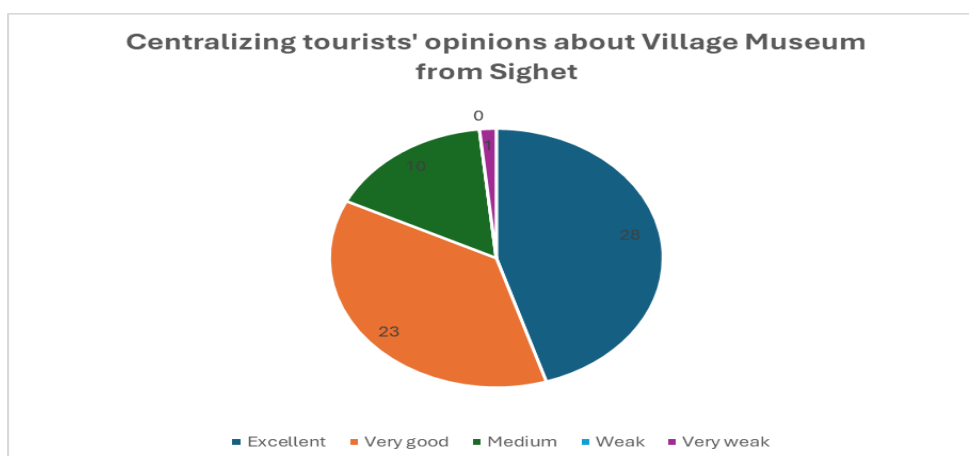


Figura 4. Centralizing tourists' opinions about Village Museum from Sighet

- *Merry Cemetery - the emblematic element of Maramures.* From all the regions from Romania, Maramures is considered to be the region most closely related to the traditional "peasant" lifestyle. The Merry Cemetery from Sapanta is the emblematic tourist objective of Maramures, and also the one that gathered the most appreciations on the site considered in this research. The creator of the cemetery managed to somehow integrate the traditional into the modern and take the area out of anonymity and bring it into the eyes of tourists, especially foreigners, who declare themselves fascinated by this perspective of a cemetery.

On Tripadvisor, Merry Cemetery has collected a number of 562 reviews, 63.87% in the excellent category. A percentage of 2.49% of the reviews are in the weak and very weak category, the justification mentioned by tourists being related to: the fact that an old Romanian language is written on the crosses that is difficult to translate, or the road is quite difficult, or the lack of other leisure services (these comments coming from foreign tourists). In fact, these shortcomings derive from the "youth" in the tourist activity, but the essential advantage is that the area has managed to dedicate itself among the unique objectives at the international level. (figure 5)

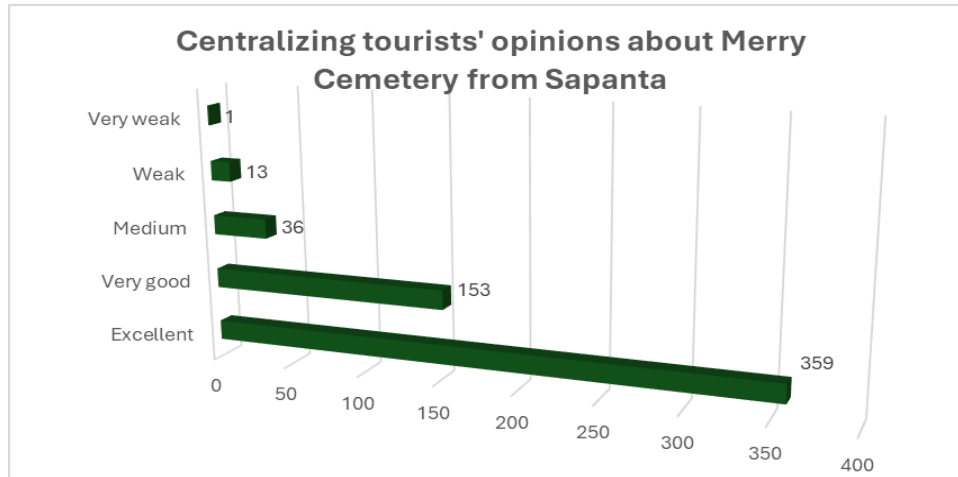


Figure 5. Centralizing tourists' opinions about Merry Cemetery from Sapanta

- *Mocanita route through the Vaser Valley - a way to knowing the area.* In Romania, this is one of the first "must dos". Mocanita is a narrow gauge train with a steam locomotive. The locomotive is powered by steam and the fuel burned is wood. This is truly the last remaining operational wood burning railway from Europe. The road involves a 21 km trip through forests, villages and mountains, in a word a place frozen in time, which allow a "return in time to simplicity", an asset sought by those settled in large urban agglomerations.

According to Tripadvisor's centralization, this objective has gathered a number of 282 reviews. From these, 157 are in the excellent category, 73 in the very good category, 28 in the average category. There are also negative assessments, 19 being in the poor category and 5 in the very poor category. The negative assessments derive from several aspects mentioned by tourists: the rather long route, poor conditions, the long waiting time for purchasing tickets, etc. (figures 6)

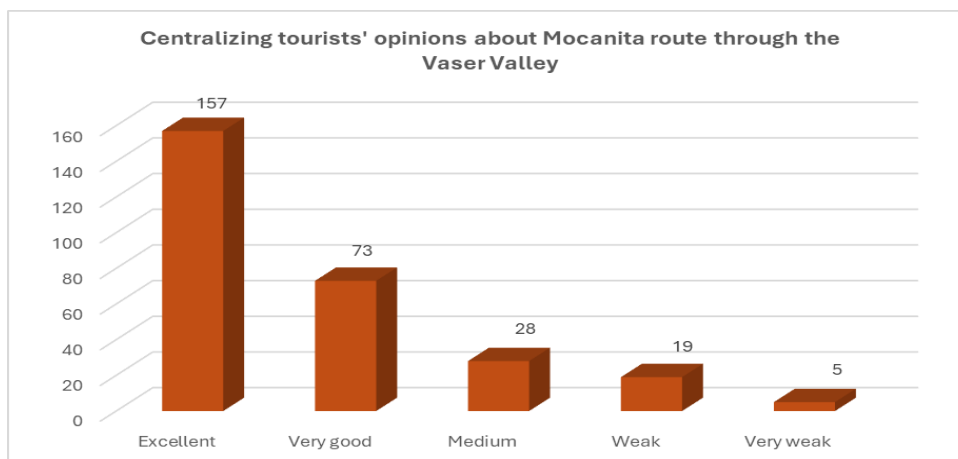


Figure 6. Centralizing tourists' opinions about Mocanita route through the Vaser Valley

Proposals for increasing the visibility of Maramures and its specific resources. Although Maramures is visible, both in the eyes of the Romanian tourist and in the eyes of the foreign tourist, the lack of appropriate management of the activity is noticed by the tourist, in the case of almost all the analyzed objectives. Perhaps, first of all, there is a need to establish some general measures, applicable to the entire area, and their summation to constitute a plan to follow.(figure 7)

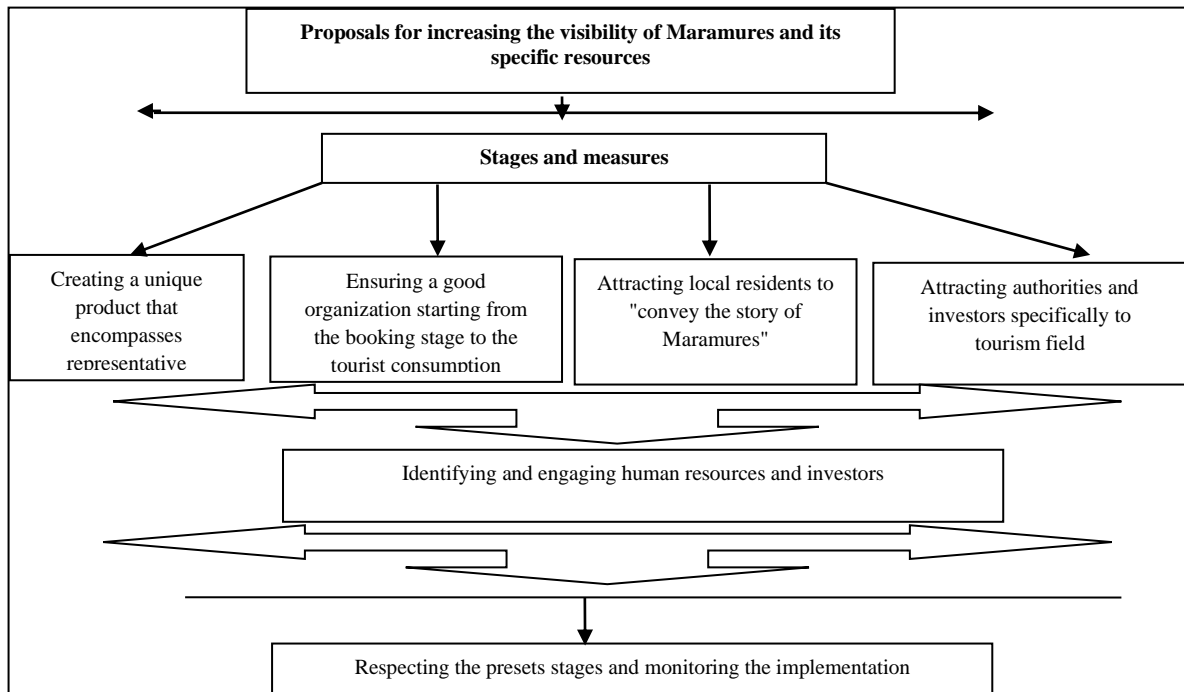


Figure 7. Proposals for increasing the visibility of Maramures and its specific resources

Another proposal that would ease and at the same time will make more efficient the tourist activity from rural area would be the establishment of a specific tourist network, this comprising the entire organizational system specific to the tourist product offered. In order to be anchored in reality the tourist network must try the profitable combination of three components: the tourist entrepreneur, the product offered, and the tourist. Specifically, the establishment of the tourist network starts directly from those interested in selling the products, meaning local entrepreneurs, who have to start from the premise that together they can constitute valuable products, and can ensure their profitability more easily. The next actor necessary to be attracted is the local authorities, whose involvement should be a direct one in the establishment of the network, from the level of legal constitution and until the concrete activity. (figure 8)

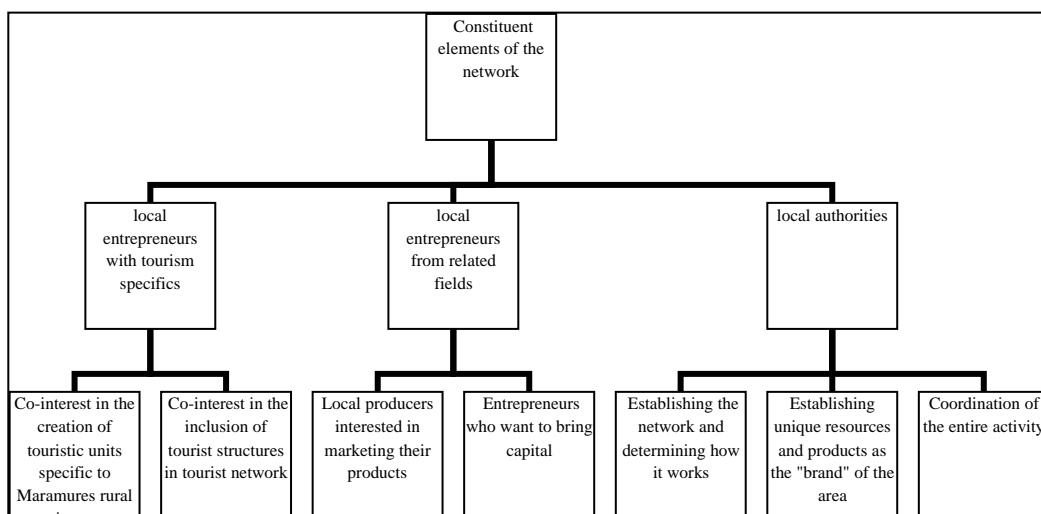


Figure 8. The creation of a rural tourist network-a way of profitable caitalization of local resources

Existing the network, should be established the representative tourist product for the studied area. Maramures is a very rich area in terms of potential for rural tourist activities but must be done some "sifting" between kisch and originality. The rural tourism product here should include:

- Customs from village life;
- The novelty of spiritual life;
- How to celebrate holidays locally;
- Initiation in local crafts;
- Local gastronomy.

The advantages of such a proposal can be multiple, from the ease of commercialization to the organized development of activities and the increase of tourist satisfaction. However, there are also certain barriers to overcome. A first difficulty of the proposal comes from the refractory attitude towards association. Another obstacle is related to who will coordinate the activity, considering some aspects such as: training, experience and impartiality.

CONCLUSIONS

Maramures is representative in terms of tourist activity, an aspect confirmed by the multitude of comments left by tourists, especially foreign ones, on the various tourism-specific websites (Booking, Tripadvisor). Due to the ancestral way of life and still completely unaltered by the specifics of modern life, Maramures allows the tourist a "return in time to simplicity", an asset sought by those settled in large urban agglomerations.

General measures can be issued, applicable to the entire area, to be followed:

- Creating a unique product that includes representative resources;
- Ensuring a good organization starting from the reservation stage to tourist consumption;
- Attracting first and foremost the locals in "transmitting the story of Maramures";
- Attracting authorities and investors specifically for tourism and related activities;
- The creation of a specific tourist network, including all the organizational system specific to the tourist product offered.

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