

THE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES FROM MARAMURES MOUNTAIN AREAS

DOBRA CĂLIN*¹

¹"Aurel Vlaicu" University, Arad, Romania

*Corresponding author's e-mail: calindobra06@yahoo.com

Abstract: The Maramures area, chosen for research, is one of the most well-known and why not the most representative areas in terms of highly original resources from the rural community. The region benefits from an advantageous geographical position for transregional flows likely to stimulate the cultural market and intercommunity dialogue, as well as extensive transport and communication networks, which favor the circulation of creators and cultural goods and services. The purpose of the research undertaken is to provide an overview of the current level of local development, but also to carry out a SWOT analysis for the rural communities in the analyzed area.

Key words: rural community, Maramures, rural area

INTRODUCTION

Almost 50% of the region is mountainous, here is the highest mountain peak in the Eastern Carpathians: Pietrosu (2303m). Maramures County is located in the northern part of the country, being delimited by the counties of Satu-Mare, Salaj, Cluj, Bistrita-Nasaud and Suceava, respectively to the north being delimited by the border with Ukraine, having an area of 6,215 km² (2.6% from the surface of the country) and a relief varied in morphology and complex from a geological point of view.

Maramures is formed as a distinctive administrative entity in the post-war period, by uniting four famous areas: historical Maramures (southern part), Chioar, Codru and Lapuș. All four areas united under the Maramures title have specific particularities, differentiated development degrees and aspects of local popular culture, of great value, specific to each community, some of these resources [12, 14, 15] being also known at the international level. As an administrative-territorial entity, the Maramures area includes 2 municipalities, a number of 11 cities and a number of 63 rural communities of the commune type [13, 11].

In administrative terms, Maramures means 76 UATs, 2 municipalities, 11 cities, 2.6% from the total area of our country, means the home of over 450,000 people, almost half of which are located in the countryside in the 63 communes. And if we talk about the mountainous area of Maramures, this has a well-deserved importance, starting from the high share of the mountainous area at the county level, especially if we are discussing the rural environment. Thus, from the 63 communes from the county, 43 are located in this mountainous area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Obviously, in the process of analyzing the development degree of an area must also be presented an analysis of the social component of the area, reflected by the population, and the degree of territorial equipment. The mountainous area of Maramures is characterized by small and medium-sized settlements, some marked by a representative degree of poverty, but with socio-economic recovery tendencies, the existing resources, either natural or human, and the territorial equipment being able to support and drive various directions of their return. The purpose of this subsection is to identify the state of human resources and social equipment degree, which can support a future return of the analyzed mountain area to its true value.

To achieve the proposed objectives, various sources of information were used, including books (either in printed or electronic format), maps, information taken from various statistical sources, various current research in the field, but also specialized articles.

As a research methodology, the case study method was used, and in terms of the stages followed, they followed the natural route of specialized research, involving documentation, information gathering, information processing, and then the interpretation and preparation of the relevant conclusions to be included in the actual thesis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Maramures means a specific community, a certain way of life, but also a certain way of living. Perhaps the easiest to underline economic development degree [1,9] with the help of indicators related to existing housing, analyzed from a quantitative point of view and by ownership forms and habitable area.

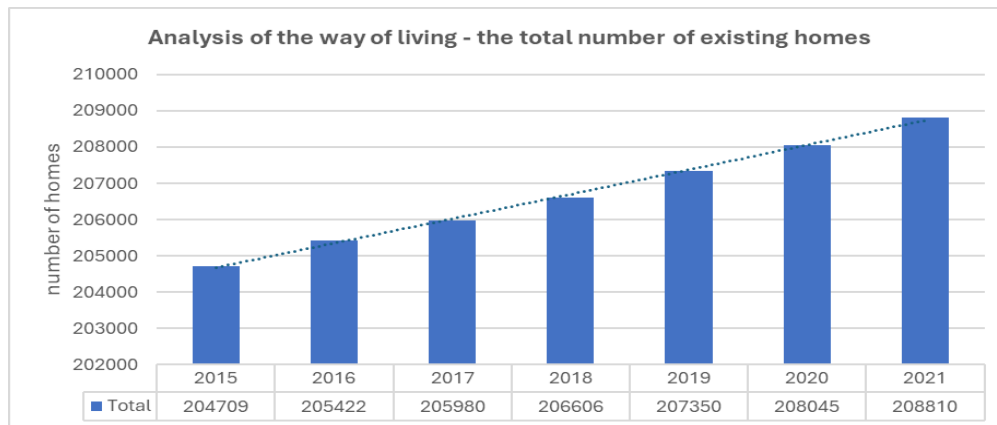


Figure 1. The situation of existing housing, analyzed from a quantitative point of view
 Source: processing based on data provided by the NIS, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted in 12.10.2024

The way of living can be analyzed primarily by the total number of existing homes. In the case of the Maramures area, during the last seven years the housing trend is an increasing one. Thus, if in the first year considered, 2015, the total number of homes was 204,709, in the last year, 2021, the total number of homes reached 208,810.

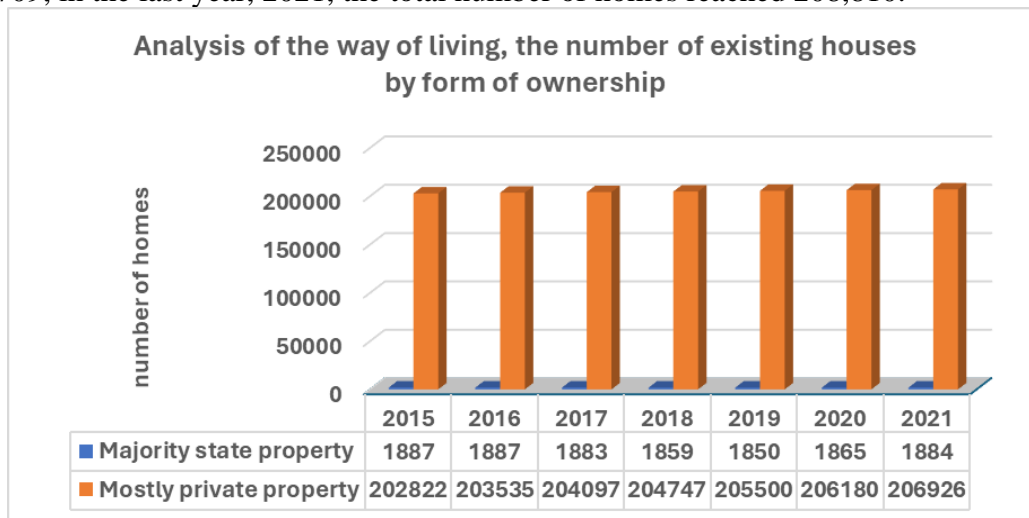


Figure 2. The situation of existing housing, analyzed by form of ownership
 Source: processing based on data provided by the NIS, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted in 12.10.2024

Using the indicator related to the habitable area, and referring strictly to the mountain area, in the last seven years the trend of the habitable area has registered an increasing trend, from the value of 2711993 sq.m. per developed area recorded in 2015, to 2790943 sq.m. per developed area registered in 2021.

It is gratifying that from the total number of existing homes in the analyzed area, the majority is held by privately owned homes, their trend also being an increasing one.

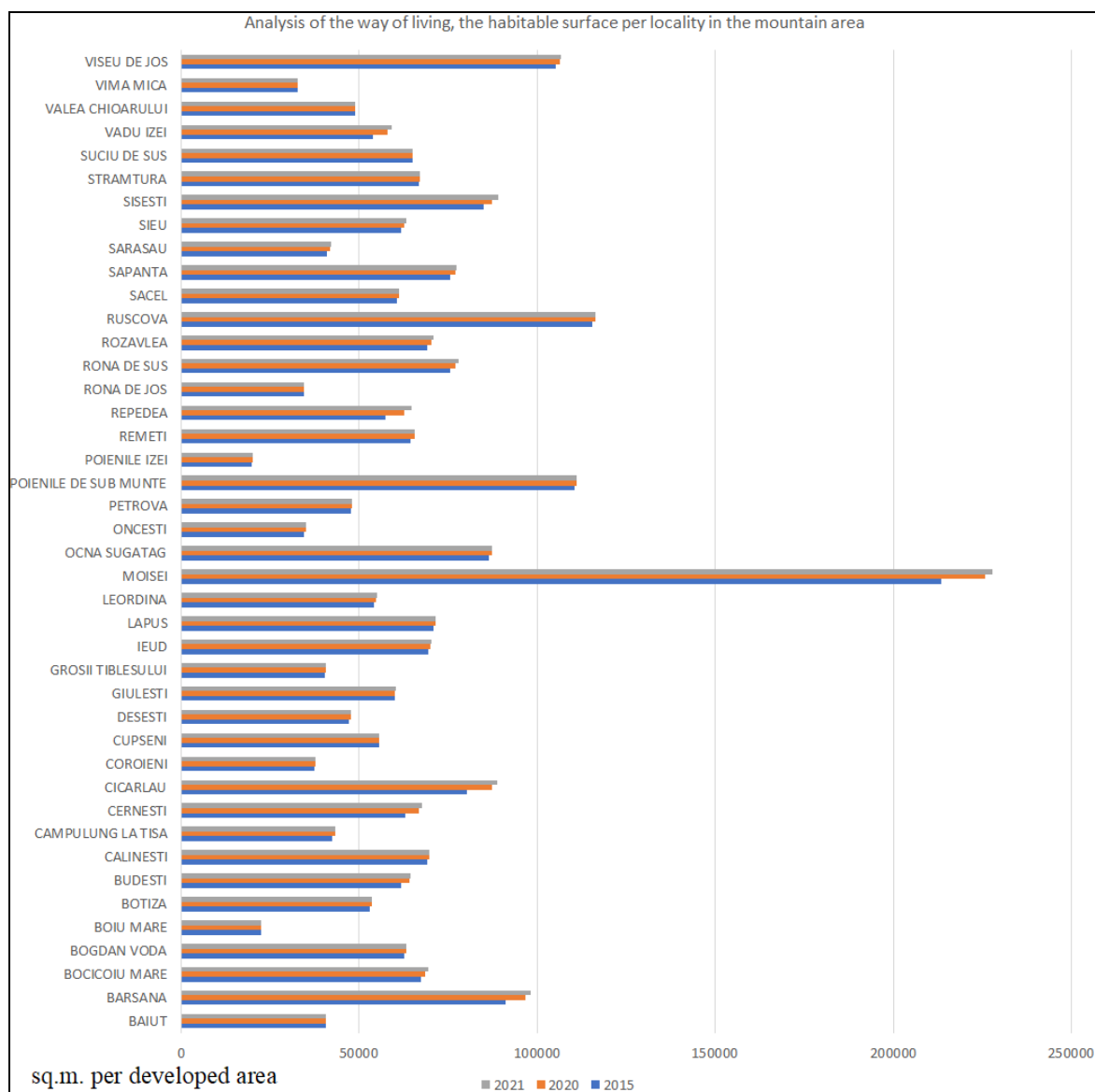


Figure 3. The habitable area, referring strictly to the mountain area

Source: processing based on data provided by the NIS, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted in 12.10.2024

In order to highlight the dynamics of the population in the area under analysis, several indicators were considered: the total population, the population employed by activities of the national economy, the number of unemployed, but also the average number of employees in its counties and localities. In the case of the first analyzed indicator, the total population, the same trend as the one existing at the national level, of population decrease, is observed, the largest reduction being recorded in the male population.

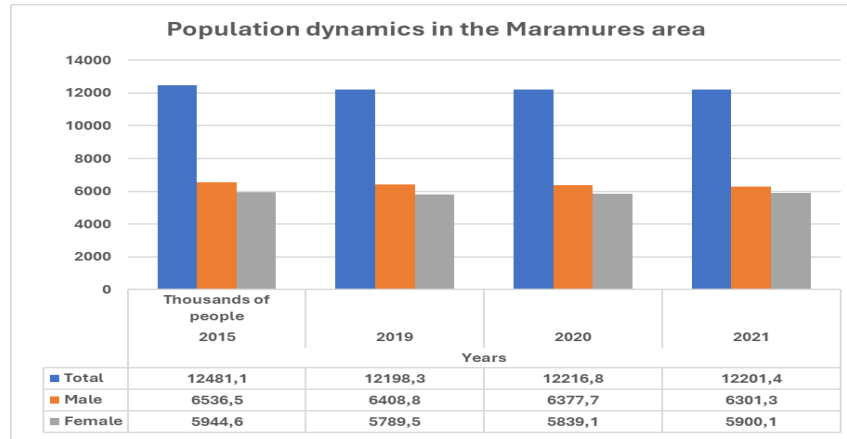


Figure 4. The population from the area under analysis

Source: processing based on data provided by the NIS, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted in 12.10.2024

For the second indicator, the population employed by activities of the national economy, the main economic activities are analyzed. The conclusions drawn reveal, for the presented period, the fact that the majority is held by those employed in agricultural activities, the manufacturing industry, construction, education, transport, health and social assistance.

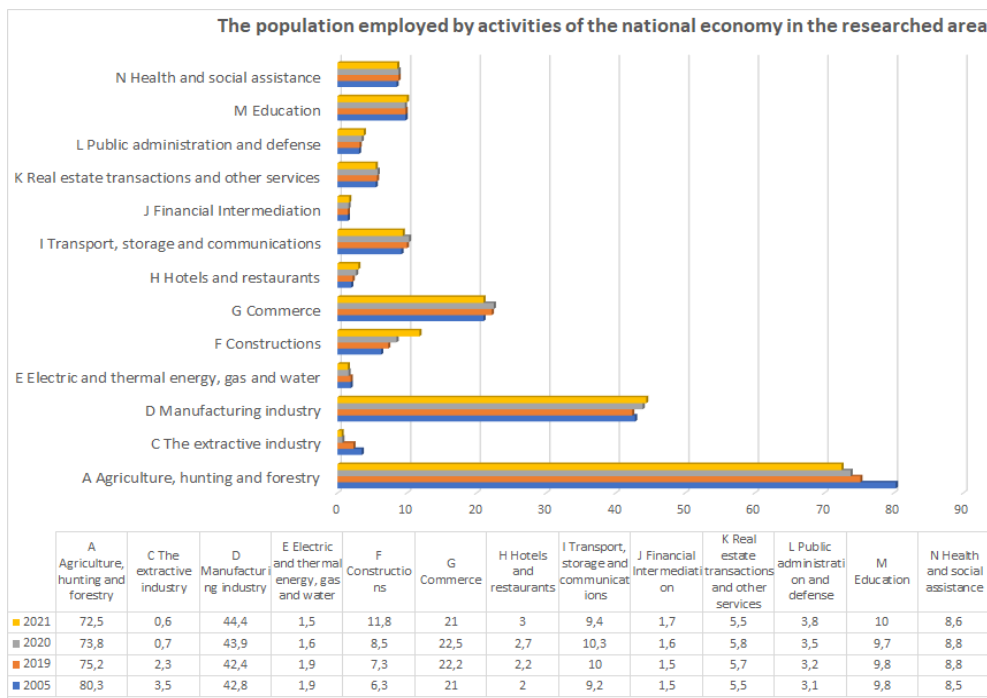


Figure 5. The population employed by activities from the analyzed area

Source: processing based on data provided by the NIS, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted in 12.10.2024

Regarding the number of unemployed people from Maramures it is presented in figure below and can be fortunately observed a downward curve.

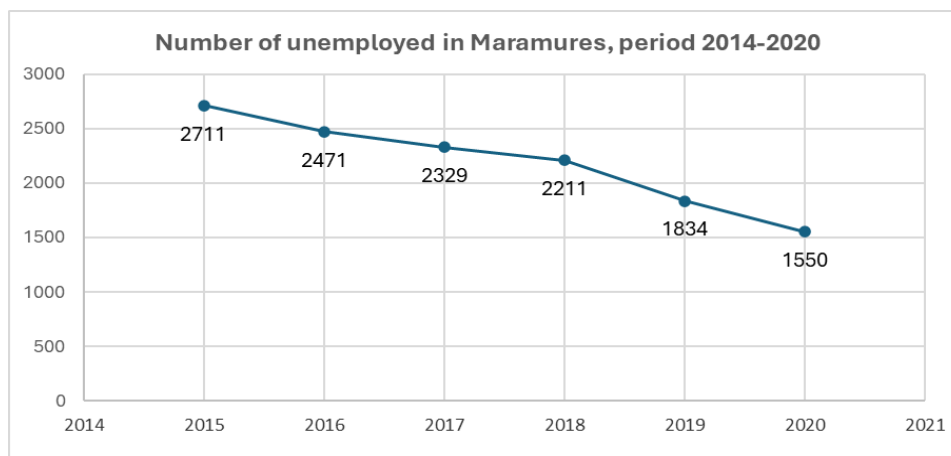


Figure 6. The number of unemployed people from Maramures

Source: processing based on data provided by the NIS, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted in 12.10.2024

Taking an inventory of the employees' dynamics from this mountain area, a gratifying evolution was noted, in the sense of increasing the number of employees, per total area, from 10,040 in 2018 to 10,568 in 2021.

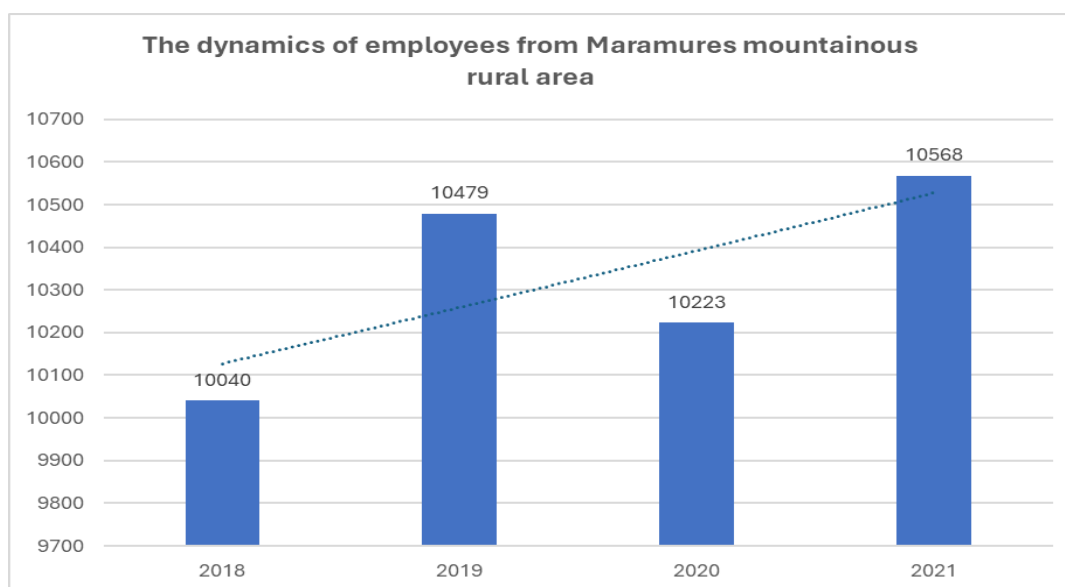


Figure 7. The employees' dynamics from Maramures mountain area

Source: processing based on data provided by the NIS, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted in 12.10.2024

Social identity of the area under study is also configured by the specific occupations, and in the case of Maramures they converge towards the agricultural field, with a greater share of the animal husbandry branch, then towards the craft field, and wood processing, and more recently towards tourism. [2,3,4,5,6,10]

The animal husbandry branch is much more developed, and the essential element of this field, the Maramures sheepfold, is in fact an emblematic, rudimentary aspect, but which mirrors many specific aspects of life from Maramures countryside. The specific customs related to the barn such as: "living fire", "milking the measure", specific aspects derived from the "Miorița ballad" reflect not only "life in the sheepfold" but also the specifics of life in rural mountain community from here.

From the category of *peasant crafts*, the activities from the category of weaving, sewing, especially in the direction of interior textiles (the most famous being traditional

style rugs and carpets) or clothing (here we are mainly talking about pieces specific to the folk costume) are those which perhaps brought the fame to this area, and why not the desire of people from advanced countries to return to the past.

The specific *occupations of wood processing* derive from the specific geographical features of the analyzed area. Maramures identifies itself with a "real civilization of wood", and this craft, which in the past was used for all the components of the house (from the house itself to household inventory items, to the specific Maramures gate, or the means of transport) is another strong point of Maramures that, to a large extent, brought the area out of anonymity. The area of Sapanta is individualized, which uses this craft of woodworking for grave crosses, managing to cast a joyful note on death, by placing some humorous verses characterizing the life of the deceased. Thus, through the talent of a local craftsman, it was not only possible to pass on the craft, but also to bring the area out of anonymity and place it on the international tourist map. The processing of wood and its transformation into furniture products is again a widespread occupation, the furniture manufactured in Sighet being internationally renowned.

A long-standing occupation is *beekeeping*, generally being practiced for the family's own needs, the technique being a traditional one, and the quality of the products is a special one given the quality and variety of the vegetation. Moreover, there are special places that reflect their potential for this occupation: Valea Stuparului or La Prisacă.

Since the forest areas are relatively large, another occupation practiced since ancient times is the *picking of fruits from nature*. Medicinal plants are collected, the inhabitants of Breb know more than 400 species of plants useful for various diseases. Then the forest fruits are picked: raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, rose hips, which are either consumed as such or transformed into jams, wines, juices, or gourmet products. Also picking mushrooms is an ancient occupation, the products being in great demand on the international market.

The products resulting from the animal husbandry branch, the skins, are capitalized by making shells, or belts in the traditional way, generally used as clothing pieces for the traditional folk costume.

Another specific occupation is represented by pottery, this craft being present in the area of Maramures since ancient times, famous centers being in the areas of Lapușul Romanesc, Targul Lapuș, Baita de sub Codru, Baia Sprie and the famous center from Sacel (incidentally the latter is the one that still works today and has its own specificity).

The analyzed region/area is characterized by a local specific that gives it a cultural identity of great value, this being conferred by: geographical position, good infrastructure, especially in terms of roads, a multi-ethnic structure, a representative lifestyle. All these aspects give the area a "unique" character, and the research undertaken reveals both strengths and weaknesses.

The elements that give specificity to these communities are first of all the natural resources, represented by the 39 distinct protected areas: 2 parks, one natural and one national, 18 types of natural resources classified as natural monuments, 13 nature reserves, 3 scientific reserves and 3 areas of local interest. Summing up the area owned by the protected areas, 164,290 hectares emerge, and a representative number of localities, and considering this area, Maramures can be placed in second place at the national level. To these resources are added a multitude of ethno-folkloric elements, which also give authenticity to the area: carved wooden gates, houses that reflect the traditional local identity, wooden churches with unique character in the world, specific rural customs, ceramics, etc. There are numerous examples of traditional villages, located in the Izei, Marei, Vișeuului Valleys, where the multitude of preserved original elements can guarantee the status of a museum village.

Table 1.

Diagnostic analysis of the analyzed area

<p>Geographically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - positional advantage from the location close to the border - high natural potential, derived from existing resources, the mountain area being located within the Maramureș Mountains Natural Park <p>Demographically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - homogenous multiethnic character of the population in the analyzed area - positive demographic growth and the existence of the young population - high interest from the young population to return to the countryside <p>Economically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high potential derived from multiple resource categories - high potential for diversification of economic fields - the existence of highly sustainable crafts that can capitalize on a wide range of resources <p>In terms of services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interest in public-private partnerships and the large number of existing LAGs - suitable infrastructure for supporting various socio-economic activities 	<p>Geographically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - long distance between big cities and communities in the mountain area <p>Demographically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the phenomenon of external migration quite intensified in some rural communities - demographic concentration in certain areas - aging of the rural population - the lack of direction and specific measures to maintain young people in the rural environment <p>Economically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the category of services with a not too high degree of diversification - the lack of a market for handicraft products with a unique character/high originality - reducing interest in agricultural or specifically rural occupations, although they could revitalize certain communities [7,8] <p>In terms of services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insufficiently diversified services - non-utilization of the area's resources through tourist services
---	--

Source: own interpretations

CONCLUSIONS

The beneficial aspects of the analyzed area are:

- Favorable location and high natural potential;
- Original traditions, internationally known, but also the ability to preserve them by passing them on to future generations;
- Representative cultural heritage and included in the UNESCO heritage (8 wooden churches and the Vesel Cemetery);
- Revitalization of crafts with the help of European funding;
- Cultural institutions that capitalize on the values and events in the area (Art Museum in Baia Mare, Maramureș Museum in Sighetu Marmăției);
- The emergence of partnerships for the capitalization of cultural heritage and popular traditions.

The main problems of the area analyzed are:

- Difficulty in attracting the attention of potential investors;
- Migration and the lack of direction and specific measures to maintain young people in the rural environment;
- Unfavorable perception of investors on the socio-economic potential of the area and on the main investment opportunities;
- Lack of a market for handicraft products with a unique character/high originality;
- Competition with other areas.

In order to capitalize on the strong points and eliminate the problems, it is necessary to target some priority action objectives:

- Increasing the interest in agricultural or specifically rural occupations, although they could revitalize certain communities;
- Maintaining young people in the rural environment;
- Diversification of economic fields;

- Identifying and accessing regional development projects, as much as possible with an emphasis on traditional, cultural resources;
- Supporting public-private partnerships in areas specific to the rural environment, depending on the particularities of the analyzed area;
- Supporting the tourist activity by creating networks with the purpose of support;
- Supporting the traditional rural industry, especially the part of traditional crafts.

During this subsection, we continued the diagnostic analysis, going deeper with an analysis of the factors specific to the analyzed area, its purpose being the identification of problems, needs, resources and opportunities in the rural environment under analysis.

REFERENCES

- [1]. **ADAMOV TABITA CORNELIA**, 2006, The policy of regional rural development – present and perspectives, Energy Efficiency and Agricultural Engineering, Association of Agricultural Engineering in Southeastern Europe, Rousse, Bulgaria, ISSN: 1311-9974
- [2]. **AGARWAL S., RAHMAN S., ERRINGTON A.**, 2009, Measuring the determinants of relative economic performance of rural areas, Journal of Rural Studies, 25, 3, 309-321
- [3]. **CIOLAC RAMONA, CSOSZ IOAN, PETROMAN CORNELIA, PETROMAN IOAN, MARIN DIANA, DINCU ANA-MARIANA, RUJESCU CIPRIAN, STANCIU SORIN**, 2013, Public-private partnerships on rural tourism field in Europe an innovation for rural development-achievements and proposals, Lucrări Științifice Zootehnie și Biotehnologii, ISSN 1221-5287, vol.46 (2), pag. 387-392
- [4]. **CIOLAC RAMONA**, 2021, Rural tourist village-a projection between tradition and profitability, Lucrări Științifice Management Agricol, vol 23
- [5]. **MATEOC-ȘIRB NICOLETA, ALBU SIMONA, RUJESCU CIPRIAN, CIOLAC RAMONA, ȚIGAN EUGENIA, BRÎNZAN OANA, MĂNESCU CAMELIA, MATEOC TEODOR, MILIN IOANA**, 2022, Sustainable Tourism Development in the Protected Areas of Maramureș, Romania: Destinations with High Authenticity, Sustainability Vol. (14) Issue 3 pag.1763.
- [6]. **MOGA T., RĂDULESCU CARMEN VALENTINA**, 2004, Dezvoltarea complexa a spatiului rural Partea I, Biblioteca digitală ASE, <http://www.biblioteca-digitala.ase.ro/biblioteca/carte2.asp?id=394&idb=>
- [7]. **SIMON G.**, 1971, Impact de l'agriculture moderne sur l'espace rural. Annales de Gembloux, nr.4
- [8]. **ZAHIU LETIȚIA**, 1992, Agricultura mondială și mecanismele pieței, București: Editura Arta Grafică
- [9]. *****Academia de Studii Economice din București**, ”Studiu privind stabilirea potențialului socio-economic de dezvoltare al zonelor rurale”, elaborat de în cadrul contractului “Asistență tehnică pentru pregătirea perioadei de programare în domeniul dezvoltării rurale 2014-2020”, www.madr.ro
- [10]. *****Comisia Prezidențială pentru Politici Publice de Dezvoltare a Agriculturii**, Cadrul național strategic pentru dezvoltarea durabilă a sectorului agroalimentar și a spațiului rural în perioada 2014-2020-2030
- [11]. *****APIA Maramures**
- [12]. *****Baza de date Tempo online, AGR103A**
- [13]. *****Direcția Județeană de Statistică Maramureș, octombrie 2022**
- [14]. *****Institutul Național de Statistică, www.insse.ro**
- [15]. *****Ministerul Finanțelor; Oficiul Național al Registrului Comerțului.**