

Local nature, resources, cohabitation and ethnicity as firm marks of ecotourist occupations. Analysis of some gipsy communities in Romania

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Abstract—The present study represents the attempt to present the authentic values of the gipsy culture from the Romanian space, a nation which seems to be controversial enough in terms of lifestyle or occupations. Nevertheless, what is known is that each gipsy nation has its own culture worth analysing and why not, valorized or at least emphasized by means of agrotouristic activity. Proceeding from this idea, the study touches the cultural particularities related to residential architecture, occupations, garments, alimentation and family customs of certain gipsy communities located in various geographic areas on the territory of Romania. The gipsies' lifestyle, irrespective of the area where they live, is quite particular, which is easy to observe, but this doesn't mean they are known. Their culture is quite little known, due to the weak cultural collaboration and exteriorization. Lately, tourism could represent a possibility of communication, exteriorization and presentation of the authentic cultural values and why not, of raising the educational and professional level, which could in the end lead to material gains able to influence the quality of life of gipsy populations.

Keywords— ecotourism, gipsies, nature, occupations

I. SPECIALITY ISSUES APPROACHED IN THE REFERENCE LITERATURE

Rarely do the gipsies in Romania or from anywhere become subjects of scientific approach. Information about them, bearing the endorsement of society's interest, appear in mass-media as feature reports or documentaries on touristic promotion. Still, even then, the level of information about gipsies is comprised in the chapter about behavioural differences from the majority and assumed rejection by the gipsies of civic rules.

The special character of these *gipsy collectivities* is revealed by some studies which treat family planning issues of Bulgarian gipsies, planning which bears a particular orientation on account of a sexual culture of ethnics [26]. The same interest appears inserted in studies about certain health problems emerged within the poor Romanian gipsy community, as consequence of feeding habits based on certain perishable pork products [21]. The sociology of gipsy communities or the reactions towards other groups on the margin of the gipsy issue are also studied. This way, there is highlighted the dominant anti-gipsy attitude of the Basque population, but also the behavioral and social norms developed by the majority towards the former [37]. Gipsies are important through their culture, even raw as it is, but not

primitive, rather frank, brisk by display and detail expression. The gipsy culture is approached in researches as proceeding from a social construction similar to the gipsy community, leaving behind a story about the memory of the gipsy universe [24]. Romanian studies on Romanian gipsies refer to the community's cultural potential, in papers of an historiographic character [2], to their family lives [22] or to the draft of their touristic valorization possibilities as individuals and group [29].

Other studies are related to reknown approaches under the title of *ethnic tourism* and *native-related tourism*. Theoretic and practically, it is proceeded either from the image of the native community and their officially regulated right to intellectual property [28], either from the planning of a rigorous and durable ethnic tourism involving not only the minorities and the tourists, but also statal authorities and the promoters of this type of tourism [34]. It does matter to make public the touristic impact controlled by the maori community in New Zealand, their culture related to the rhythm of their own life based on cosmology elements and symbols reflected in their handicrafts [25]. Again in this part of the world there are highlighted the researches on the type of tourism based on a certain interest for exotism, especially in Australia [15], but also the seeking by tourists of the domestic-rural behaviour of Australian natives, especially the pastoral living, raising of cattle [20]. At the same time, the Chinese space is reflected in studies which prove the interest for authenticity revealed in reference analyses, in which the tourists' answers are related to the authenticity of products and attractions developed by certain minorities [35], but also the ethnics' rights and their relationship with Chinese agencies who promote such a tourism [33]. There even are precise results by means of different satisfaction levels of tourists who visit culturally solid native Taiwanese villages [9]. Cultural representations about the native Taiwanese populations [6] are completed by the promotion of the tourism of Taiwanese ethnic groups by popularizing the communities through festivals [8]. The North-American space is represented by researches which make possible the durable development as business with social-cultural bases of the Canadian ethnic component from a parc of the town of Saskatoon [13]. It is only in this manner that the discovery of the native population through musical culture and different ways of interaction between tourist-Canadian local through music [18] determines

the highlight and support of this type of tourism as motor of the economic consolidation of Canadian native groups [39]. What matters in certain studies is the modality of formation of

conceptions and how preconceptions fade away through the contact between the tourist and the American native [12].

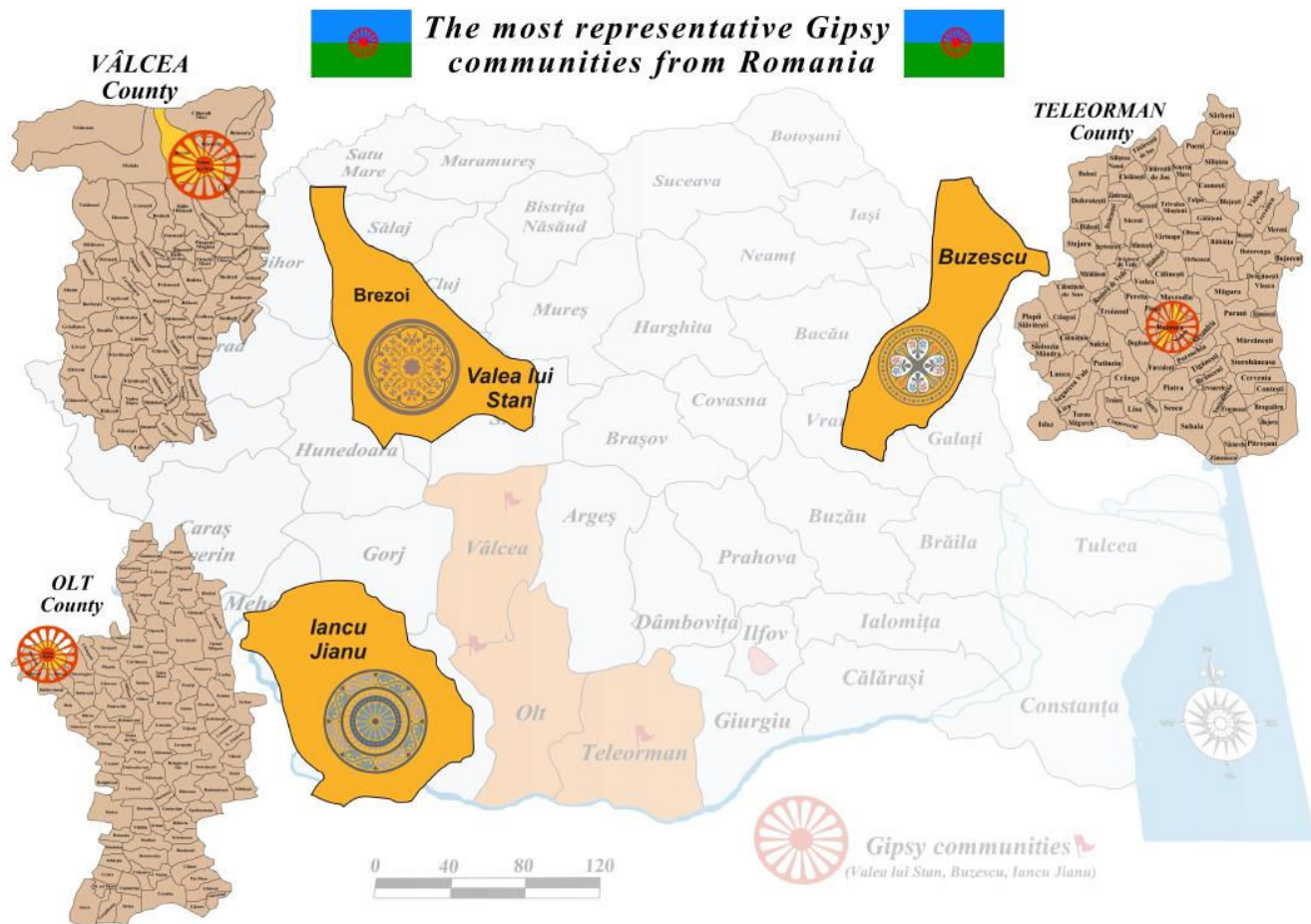


Fig. 1 Geographic position of the three towns with gipsy communities at the level of Romania and its counties

Nevertheless, the interest for the culture of certain ethnic groups is quite high, a fact discovered for the ethnic group Mi'kmaq, from foreign tourists especially [14]. Anyway, ethnic attractions are the core of monitory culture [36] and the native culture generates touristic industry and influences the tastes of tourists from everywhere [40].

There are varied results of the researches which mainly treat *ecotourism* or as subject associated to the nature in which ethnics willing to practice it can live. We remind of the theoretical considerations which help to practically reach a balance between nature, locals and tourism [23], but also of the existence of a specialized contingent interested in ecotouristic experiences, in the sensitivity of the ecotouristic environment [38], against the worry that ecotouristic activities cannot cope with protecting locals and places [16]. There can be noted the attitude of residents from the Balearic Islands towards environmental aspects, an environment which must cope with touristic activities [4], but also the use of natural resources of an environment which complies with the healthy ecotourism principles [7]. The empirical studies investigate the situations when mass tourism and ecotourism superpose, but also interact in Southern Thailand [17], and how the

economic force of ecotourism in rural communities from Costa Rica contributes to the creation of an expectance attitude from the rural inhabitants with respect to offering their households for ecotouristic activities [5]. There are also noted analyses of the relations between resources, community and the durable character within ecotourism, as well as the preoccupations of the locals of a Taiwanese site towards economic, social and environmental aspects [32].

The link to *nature*, keeper of an ethnically-based touristic environment, is well-enough explored scientifically. There emerges the approach of nature making itself available to the community in the touristic process [31], as well as the importance given to campings in areas dominated by nature-focused tourism [10]. There is revealed the importance of tourism focused on the nature of poor countries, on environmental problems and landscape administration, on the development of local communities and the social issues derived from development [3]. Other results reflect the need to deepen the ecologic education and to promote green products in an ecologic sense [30]. There also matter the analyses which highlight the destination chosen depending on the area,

village, natural attraction or cultural objective, facilities and services [19].

II. DATA ON THE GEOGRAPHIC SPACE OF THE COMMUNITIES OBJECT OF THIS STUDY

The studied gipsy communities are found in the rural areas in the south and south-central part of Romania (Fig. 1). One group lives in the Valley of Stan in the north of Vâlcea County, on a quite narrow valley from Loviștei Depression, a mountaneous depression between Căpățânei and Lotrului Mountains. Another community lives in the town of Iancu Jianu, located in the NW of Olt County, in plain field and low plateau in the SE of Oltenia region. The town of Buzescu lays in a water meadow plain area in the central-southern side of Teleorman County from the SW of Muntenia region and hosts another ethnic gipsy group.

III. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The study intends to draw the manner in which the 3 groups of the same nationality, respectively Romanian gipsies, can practice ecotouristic activities, proceeding from the very good knowledge of their local nature and the natural and material resources available to them, all these being subject to

the idea of respect for their environments. There is expected an economic growth of the communities, but especially a cultural one, the individuals having to display flexibility, receptivity and a participative character. The results of the study are linked to certain stages: a field exam for the examination of the environment natural and anthropic components, inventory of households, practices and customs of the group, capability for ecotouristic practices from their side, on account of the neighbouring nature and the draw-up of an economic analysis.

IV. LANDSCAPES AND NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE THE ROMANIAN GIPSIES LIVE – THE BASIS OF ECOTOURISM

Each of the 3 gipsy communities have different access to resources and the nature appears different for each village and community. The individuals here express themselves through ecotourism and through their nature within a symbiotic assembly of energy, physicality and volume. Many of the ecotouristic activities recommended as adequate can be reunited in real microcircuits on thematic itineraries, not very complicated and accessible to any tourist.

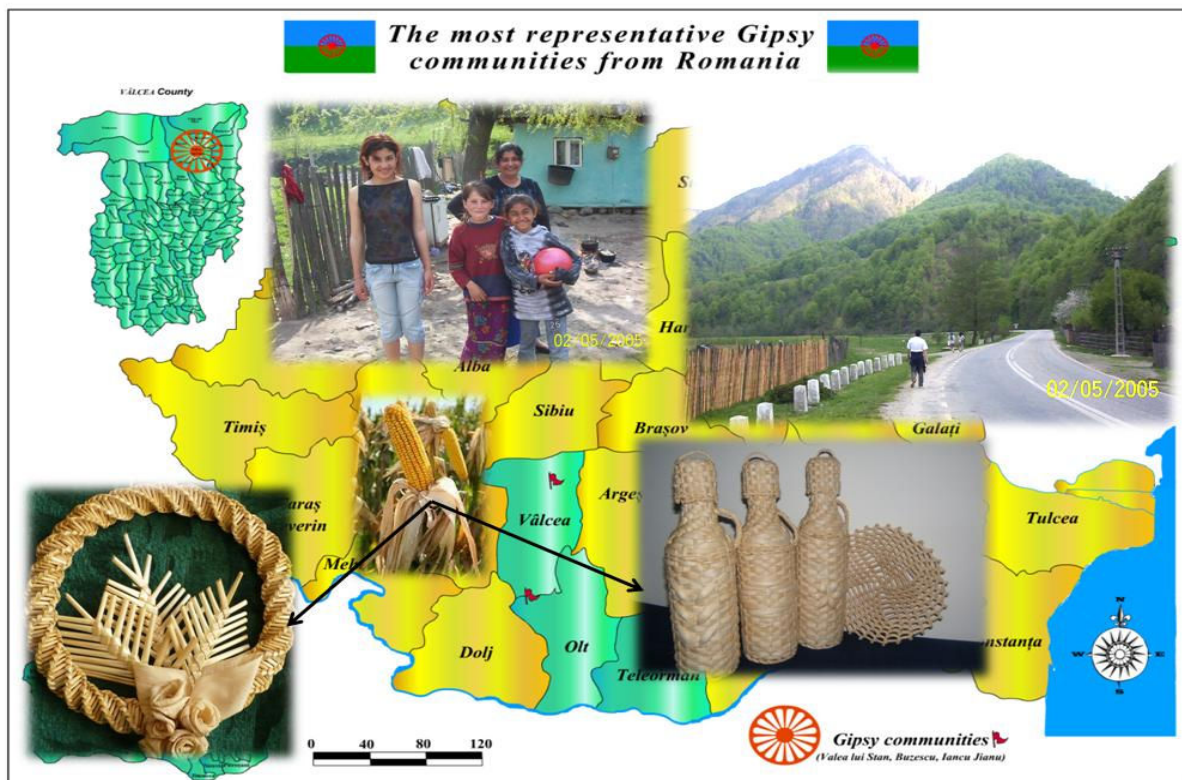


Fig. 2 Nature, gipsy ethnics and occupations in the Valley of Stan

In the **Valley of Stan** the gipsy ethnics can propose the option within which the actions, natural resources and environment specific are subject to the typical physical mountain frame (Fig. 2): a *short ecotouristic route* towards the East or West where the landscapes are predominantly subnatural and humanized, with a relief arising on the hard

rock deposits from the secondary mountain spaces between rivers (beech woods and nut groves on the right and left of the spring which waters the setting, the hard rock crags, grasslands and goat flocks), trout farm, belvedere points which open to very generous and deep angles; a *full ecotouristic route* with dominant landscapes (4-5 hour campings towards

the North-South parallel to the valley course, towards the springs from the village valley, springing from Căpățâni Mountains – 6 km: visiting some households from the collectivity but also those of old Romanians, mature beechwoods, the decommissioned gold mine, waterfalls and quick swirls, trouts in springs, raspberry canes, blackberry

canes, bilberry canes and their free harvesting, wild flowers in glades, mushrooms, hay in horsecarts, horses, grazing sheep and cattle, drinking fresh water from the many versant springs, observing the woodcrafters with slightly archaic tools, watching the demonstration of how to cut a tree with the ax).

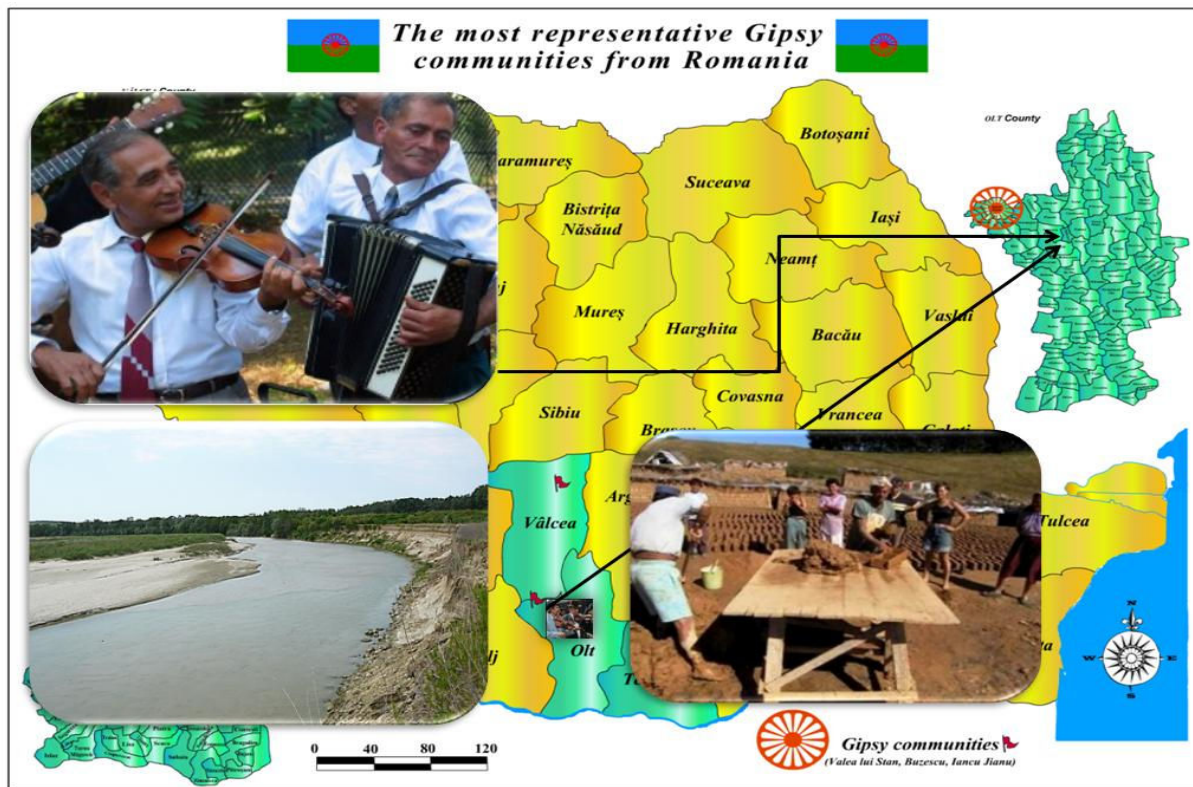


Fig. 3 Nature, gipsy ethnics and occupations in Iancu Jianu

For **Iancu Jianu** there is no actual ecotouristic route proposed, but rather activities/actions which can emphasize the subnatural character of the landscapes whose resources and functioning reveal the specific of the plane, plateau and of a valley crossing the town (Fig. 3): crooks and steep banks towards Oltețului valley, possibility to bathe in the river and in the sun on the low bank fringed with true beaches with white and fine sand, wild parks, willows, woods and grasslands on the western terraces of Olteț, high terraces with splendid view of the village and very long sight-axes, walks on the village's alleys and discovery of vegetable and market gardens and the domestic animals people keep, emotional participation to the historical destiny of the place by visiting the Tracian tomb and Tracian objects on the Hill of Bucică (Dobriceni village, 2 km away), knowing the geologic evolution of the places by visiting the collection of mammoth bones, seashells in specific petrographic deposits, coins and Roman objects in the Museum of Dobriceni (2 km away).

What **Buzescu** is recommended by ecotouristically speaking are the particularities of the rural-agricultural landscape and the valorization of the crafts and ethnics' talents (Fig. 4), the ecotouristic activities being suitable for execution in groups: 2-3 activities or one by one thanks to the short distances between objectives located in the immediate

proximity of the gipsy community: discovery of the perfectly rectangular structure of the settlement's cut-off trench and the morphological detail generated by the planeity of the relief, visit of the Neolithic settlement from Nanovului Bridge (7 km), fishing at Izvorul Rece (7 km), boating on Vedeia and surprising the topography of the concave and convex banks and the water's hydrodynamics, visiting the gravel plant and observing how the natural construction materials deposits from Nanov situated at 3,5 km were formed (sands, gravel, spindle), bathing spots on long sand beaches on the banks of Vedeia River, attending the animal fair from Mavrodin (3 km), discovering the evercinee and alder woods from Nenciuleşti (3 km), assisting to the watering by aspersion on the agricultural lands around, visiting the Western exit of the village (0,3 km), learning the complex ecosystem with water meadow and park biotops of Vedeia River.

V. ETHNIC CHARACTER AND CULTURAL REVERBERATIONS REFLECTED IN THE CONFIGURATION OF THE ECOTOURISM TYPE

Gipsies represent an ethnic group on the territory of Romania but having a special culture, with their way of life representing a continuous source of analysis not only for

demographics but also for those interested in promoting tourism or other economic activities. Their particular life and customs shape the ethnic note of the cultural side of ecotourism tourists are interested in. The family life of the Romanian gypsies and their style of cohabitation represent pure culture, with very poor interferences from the majority. Ecotouristically speaking, ethnicity is expressed through the culture of language, customs and association mode. The individual or the group express themselves through ecotourism.

The analysis of the cultural values is based on the vintage in the territories where the ethnics settled. The authentic cultural values are represented by their family life and the crafts they practice and last but not least by the modifications brought to the inhabitation spaces, which today can represent true inspirational sources for social-economic and geographic studies.

Gypsies divide in various "bloodlines". In traditional culture, „bloodline” does not refer to the blood link, but to the gypsies' grouping according to mutual elements such as traditional

profession, social organization structures, family customs and calendar holidays.

The present study attempts to also present the authentic values of the gypsy culture within the Romanian space as part of the ecotouristic knowledge process, the gypsies seeming to be a quite controversial nation in terms of lifestyle or occupations.

V.I. THE CULTURE OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE VALLEY OF STAN

The presence of gypsies in the geographic area of Meridional Carpathians, especially in the Valley of Stan, is directly connected to the convent domain of Cozia. They stand apart by their preoccupations over time, which can today be valorized through exhibitions, allowing them to express their own culture in a civilized manner. The vintage of this community can be traced back to the XV century, where it is mentioned as a community of slaves. The place where they live today, quite isolated, represents a particularity of this nationality. Most of them present themselves as descendents of „woodcrafters”.



Fig. 4 Nature, gipsy ethnics and occupations in Buzescu

By analysing the habits and occupations of the gipsy population (called rudari) from this community, ecotourism can become an income source from the economic occupations of the former. They are excellent with deciduous wood, they process the local vegetal materials making pottery and decorative objects, they braid baskets from nut canes, make objects from tree bark, and practice the cold and hot metal processing (as quite gifted jewelers). All these occupations can be introduced in touristic activities, either as subject of

observation-discovery, but also through the direct involvement of tourists in the making of objects (Fig. 2).

What is important resides in the fact that this community can express the elements of their culture without impacting the environment. On the contrary, they valorize the existing natural resources through simple processes, but which can have important social-economic effects.

V.II. THE CULTURE OF THE COMMUNITY IN IANCU JIANU

The gipsy community from Iancu Jianu displays an incomparable cultural specific. What makes them special is their capacity to express their culture's elements through music. The gipsy community from Iancu Jianu is interesting by what it has to offer cultural-touristically speaking, by the elements specific to their family lives and especially by their musical life or talent. They are known as musicians, with no higher-education studies. For them it is a way of life, a way perfectly harmonized with the major Romanian population. They are the fiddlers present to each party or important event which involves music for any ethnic group [1]. Fiddler music has crossed far out from Romanian borders, these gipsies becoming famous for their talent and power of interpretation.

The documents kept at Slatina Episcopacy and Craiova Mitropolity reveal the early presence in this space ever since the XVI century of „*slave gipsies*” on the domains of boyars and on those of Căluși Monastery, as well as the presence of „*old wive's tale fiddlers*”. The only gipsies referred to as nomads are the moulder gipsies who appear in this space, remarking themselves by their talents of making burnt ceramics from clay through archaic processes, ceramics needed in the construction of houses and manors. There are 14 families which still mould clay nowadays and burn bricks in manually-built ovens (Fig. 3). But the fiddlers are still, the gipsies who best valorized their talent and managed to express their own culture.

V.III. THE CULTURE OF THE COMMUNITY IN BUZESCU

Their presence in this geographic space is relatively new, historical documents referring to the gipsy families living at the edge of Alexandria town or in villages in Teleorman County (Southern Romania). Most of them are mentioned as agriculturists, blacksmiths and copperers (making coppers and cauldrons for tuica from copper). This community is particular through the occupations of its members, but most of all through the architecture of the houses (Fig. 4). Each construction bears the sign of the inhabitant, observing the imposing volumetry with notes of veritable kitsch. Certain colors are used in combination with games of lines or elements from the oriental architecture. The impressive dimensions are given by the position of the owner within the community.

The present main occupation of the gipsies in Buzescu is represented by the processing of metals, they being copperers. The authentic gipsy garments are represented here maybe better than in the other two communities we have analysed. Each costume bears a certain signification. The colors of the costume worn by women and girls, the number of skirts, the color and adornments of shirts, all bear certain significations. Tourists have the possibility to understand these significations of each color, those of the age of he who wears a certain garment and the moment in life when he can wear that garment, to which there adds the knowledge about the family life and gipsies' customs [11]. Jewellery accompany the

traditional costume, as integral part of their lives. Gipsies display great attraction and respect towards jewellery, especially those made of gold. Similar to the costume or garments, jewellery are particular for every person who wear them.

VI. ECOTOURISM AND ECONOMIC FRAME GENERATED BY THE PROPOSED STUDY

VI.I. SOCIAL-ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES AS CONSEQUENCE OF DEVELOPING ECOTOURISTIC ACTIVITIES IN THE MIDDLE OF GIPSY COMMUNITIES

The study about valorizing the gipsies' culture through ecotourism should be implemented, finding supporters within the analysed communities. A first stage of analysis is the evaluation of various factors which compose the basis: the gipsy community and the resources suitable to be valorized.

In what concerns the gipsy community, we recommend the detailed analysis of the human potential depending on the specific cultural-traditional features, the education level, structure on age groups and genders, analysis of incomes per family within the community.

Each of the analysed communities disposes of a certain cultural specific expressed through traditions and occupational customs and by the income obtained by a family, as a result of the type of activity rendered.

The development of an economic activity within a gipsy community targets the involvement of non-active persons in a productive sector. This seems to be one of the greatest achievements following the implementation of the study. The gipsy population is mostly confronted with the lack of workplaces. This activity would provide the opportunity to engage them in a productive lifestyle, precisely in their native environment to which they are accustomed. Long-term observations in gipsy communities, made for the application of this study, lead to a broader knowledge and understanding of what they can achieve with good results. Therefore, it is considered that the creation of workplaces within the community is welcomed, and they can feel at home in the environment they grew up in [27].

The study of the community and the analysis of its potential are just a first stage from an economic and social perspective, but a cost/benefit analysis is mandatory (Fig. 5). The value of the primary investment estimated along 5 years for the valorization of the gipsies' cultural elements from within a community includes: expenses for space arrangements; expenses for personnel's training; costs with raw materials and necessary ones; expenses with advertising; maintenance costs.

Equally must there be estimated the material and non-material benefits on certain time periods. The collections estimated for 5 years are mostly related to direct collections, by selling entrance tickets, from sold products, and after a 3-year period (equal to the personnel's training) also the salaries of the employed persons from the community.

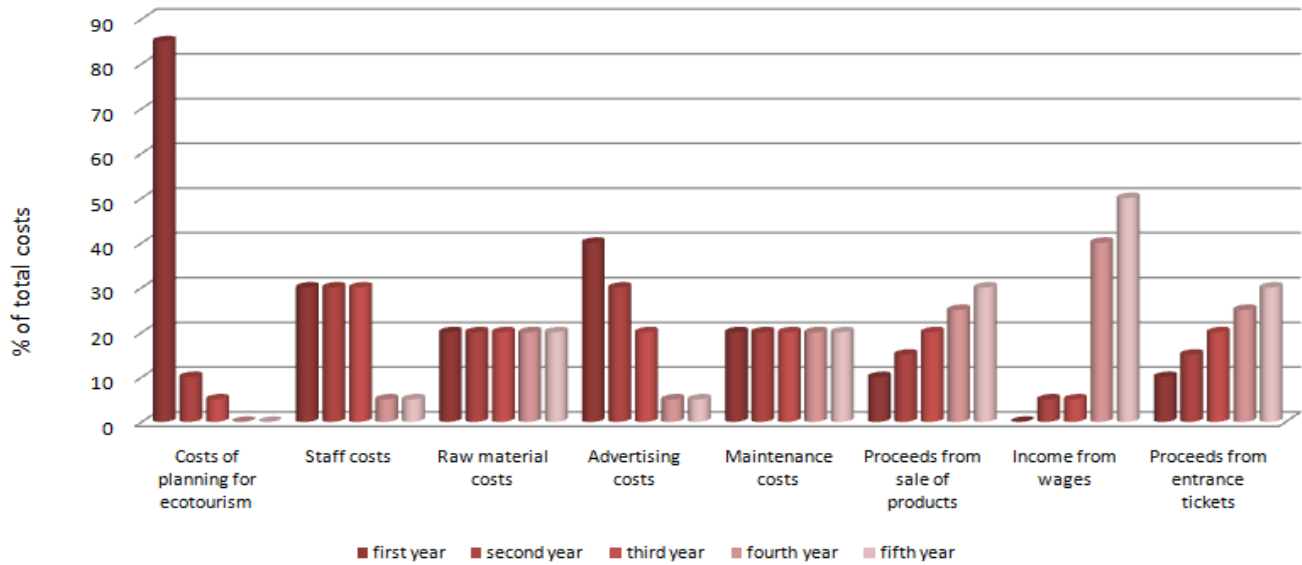


Fig. 5 Estimate costs and revenues in the first five years

An estimate analysis on each year reveals a negative cost/benefit report for the first year, with costs exceeding collections. The same situation is recorded in the following two years, differing from a community to another depending on the value of initial expenditures. Only in the fourth year would there be observable a slight increase in payments as compared to costs.

The optimistic situation is to have higher collections ever since the second year, but however high they cannot compensate for the value of the investment with arrangements in each community.

All estimations have been done based on the cost/benefit calculation methods on a scale from 1%-100% from the value of costs and incomes, taking into consideration the specific of each community. Thus, different results may be recorded from a community to another:

- a. In the case of the community from the Valley of Stan, the investment recovery time is relatively long, as a result of the cultural specific; the arrangement expenses foresee real estate and infrastructure costs (including those related to campings and information/orientation), which can record high values. To these there can also be added the costs with presentation and execution stands. All the other expenses are approximately equal for all communities.
- b. The costs with arrangements in the community from Iancu Jianu is not high, being possible here to use the community's spaces; it is quite a plus of artistic value to use the house of local fiddlers. Likewise, personnel expenses drop here, being incurred only with the personnel who can function as touristic guides, the community members, given the level of their knowledge, being able to present their own cultural values;

- c. In what concerns the community in Buzescu, we observe an intermediate situation as compared to those two above. They have infrastructure but expenses with personnel grow, because preparation is needed for explanations to tourists. Their cultural values are related to metal processing, architecture, traditional port and culinary art.

The development of an economic activity within a community in need is very important. But there must be considered the factors likely to affect the economic and social life.

Another element which supports the analysis of the effects resulted from the development of touristic activities in the gipsy communities is that of raising the level of preparation for this type of activity. From the existing statistical data it is obvious that the education level of the gipsy population is not at all high, this level being under the average values recorded at national level. This touristic development requires the education of persons, especially of the young. This preparation and the creation of workplaces have a quite important effect on migration and on raising the income of the gipsy population. This aspect is most delicate for the analysis of the general social-economic situation within gipsy communities. Their income is gained nowadays mostly from the activities presented for each community. The income in the Valley of Stan is relatively low reported to the number of persons in the community, being obtained mainly from selling wooden products or derivatives of wooden resource. They are not constant incomes, depending on the sales opportunities from a period to another. The highest incomes are obtained by the fiddlers from Iancu Jianu, following the many invitations for interpretation of gipsy music and the relatively high prices they toll. Following the statistical calculations and analyses, the incomes/inhabitant aren't very high here neither, falling under the average income at national level.

The effects of touristic activities must be analysed from various viewpoints, depending on the influence on various segments of population. On one side the *effect duration* is considered, these effects may be short or long-term. Equally, there will be needed a detailed analysis of the *results' effect on the involved*: hipsy communities and tourists.

What must not be neglected is the phenomenon of organization of the interior community space, for creating the optimum conditions to practice tourism. This requires the set up of an accomodation infrastructure, spaces of exhibitional character for individual work and griup work with tourists, meal spaces and communication spaces. This aspect must be carefully analysed so as not to damage the authentic values of that community and the gipsy cultural values on the whole. The valorization of local resources is necessary to be done without intervening negatively in the authentic gipsy culture.

VI.II. THE ADVANTAGES OF TOURISTS WHO BENEFIT FROM THE ECOTOURISTIC SERVICES PROVIDED IN THE ROMANIAN GIPSY COMMUNITIES

A stronger and stronger accent is nowadays placed on the discvery of the authenticity of values in less studied cultures.

In Romania there exists that possibility to analyse the specific and environment of certain nationalities, among which that of gipsies. They are very different, not only by their physical traits, or as dispersion in the territory, but also as means of cultural expression. The contact they had with various populations during their nomad period hall-marked their lifestyle which is very well presented nowadays, when their life became sedentary.

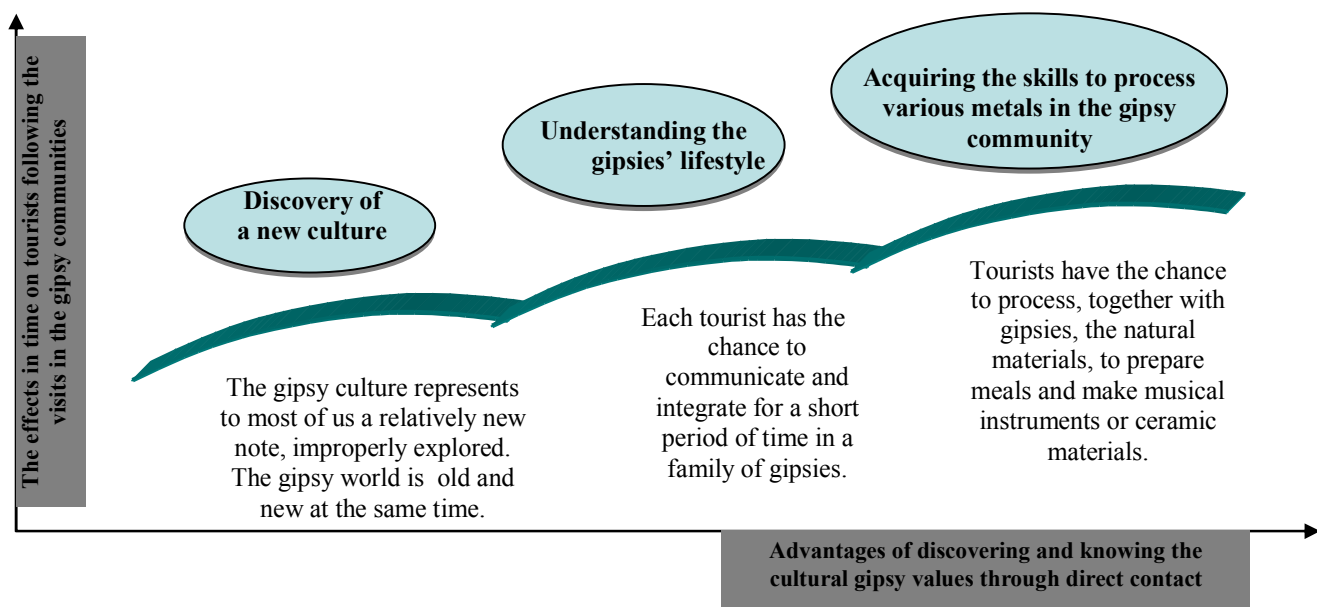


Fig. 6 Advantages of tourists discovering the cultural values of gipsies in communities

The advantages of this type of tourism don't seem to be unilateral, oriented only to the benefit of gipsy communities, but are meant to satisfy the curiosity of those who desire to complete their pallet of cultural and geographical knowledge with new elements, belonging to populations with different features (Fig. 6).

It is precisely with these particularities tourists must come in contact, irrespective of their descent. By discovering the authentic gipsy cultural values, tourists can draw the complete image of this nationality's integration in certain geographic areas of Romania, of understanding its adaptation to the environment and demographic existing conditions [2].

For instance, together with the gipsies in Iancu Jianu, tourists are given the opportunity to learn the wood processing technique for making musical instruments, but also the environment which hosts the wood as supplier of raw materials. A real novelty for most of the tourists could be the primary processing of clay and the making of ceramic

materials, making burning ovens, the burning process and the storage of the crafted materials. It is „an art” which disappeared from the activities of the Romanian population. Tourists are certainly enticed by this clay mouldering and making of ceramic items.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The valorization of gipsies' culture by means of ecotourism is an attempt to implement the theory involving the phenomenon of knowledge. The discovery of the gipsy culture elements through touristic activities can represent a real and pleasant form of knowledge – knowledge by discovery. The ecotouristic activity is one of those activities which do not require large amounts of money for starters, the touristic infrastructure being enough or being developed as activities grow. Secondly, the increase of workplaces, income and education levels represent true advantages for gipsy

communities. Among tourists the benefit is considerable, mainly due to the enrichment of their cultural register. The gypsies and their culture are too little known, we can even state we are confronted with a real informational and cultural "vacuum" relative to their existence.

This proposal to develop a sector of activity which would allow the knowledge of their culture and authentic values is a beginning in the economic integration of this nationality. Their lack of education and the low level of living prevented them from launching in a mass economic activity. This attempt to valorize what they already have to offer is maybe the beginning of a normal living with higher incomes. It can also be about filling a knowledge gap at the price of activating some individuals who desire to open themselves economically and communicationally. There naturally appears a satisfactory result shaped in the tourists' demand for new, for "exotic", within a space of certain European civilization.

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