Elements of Autochthonous Cultural Heritage versus Global Consumer Products. The Case of Romanian Traditional Farm Products.

Radu Săgeată, Claudia Bucura, Virginia Gherasim, Maria Bud, Teodor Toderaș

"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Faculty of Tourism Geography, Sibiu, Romania.

Abstract - The paper suggests an analysis basis on the devices of insertion of the products of the global consumer culture on a local level, to the prejudice of traditional elements that they tend to replace. If to the old members of the European Union this process is well regulated through a coherent legislative framework, Romania, on the background of generalized poverty emphasized by the present global economic conjuncture, registers a strong decline of the local traditional occupations and entrepreneurial initiatives, which not being supported by an appropriate policy, become unprofitable and are doomed to disappearance [39, 51].

Thus, it is reduced the degree of occupational diversification regarding small traditional rural communities, having direct consequences on life quality and migration flows [1, 4]. In this context, there are proposed a series of measures which might contribute to the reduction of these phenomena.

Key words - globalising flows, global consumerism goods, commercial services, hypermarkets, malls, Romania.

I. INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of trade and investment constituted one of the main causes of the intensification of the contemporary process of globalization. In the age of informational globalization, the financial transactions and the cooperation agreements are achieved extremely fast from a continent to another, from a meridian to another [2, 16]. Locally, as a result of international exchanges, there

penetrate, more and more frequently, products and ideas that are unknown to the respective community, which are usually assimilated and integrated, becoming regular [7].

"The informational revolution", the generalization of radio and television networks, subsequently of the Internet and of the satellite communications, but also the individualization of some new nuclei of polarization and redistribution of the globalizing flows, represented by the expanding economies from South – Eastern Asia or Latin America, have created the pre-requisites of the irreversibility of the connections and of the interdependences among all the states of the world and the appearance of a key phenomenon of postmodernity: *the global culture*" [5, 17, 21].

People tend to dress similarly, to eat similarly, to listen to the same kind of music, to have the same customs, to believe in the same moral values and rules. Therefore, the products of the global consumer culture may be defined as those products which transcend cultural spaces [40, 52].

II. DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN ECONOMY AND CULTURE

Development is an economic process, but also a cultural one [3]. The correlation between development and culture expresses, in fact, the global character of the social determinism. On the other hand, local cultural traditions, the specific past of each nation or of each community have their say and, the strongest local values are, the more powerful the awareness of belonging to these ones is, favoring the exacerbation of certain anti-globalizing tendencies that may lead to fundamentalism and even

terrorism [22]. From this point of view, S. Huntington [24] asserted that we are attending a rebirth of the concern for the cultural and civilizational identities, and this fact will lead to a geopolitical reconfiguration of the world.

Globalization may be regarded differently, in terms of the present civilizations, the same as the concept of "universal civilization" may have various meanings. Huntington says that this concept is a typically Western product, elaborated to serve as an ideological instrument of the West in its confrontations with the non-Western cultures [24, 32]. In this complex equation, the West has postulated its own type of culture as being universal, and the image conflict has reached so far that the non-Western people take as Western everything that the West considers as being universal [11]. At the same time, he makes a clear distinction between Westernization and modernization. If, until a few decades ago, the two tendencies were indistinct, the underdeveloped societies desiring to become like the Western ones, taking over their cultural model, values and institutions, lately, one can increasingly notice a decoupling of modernization from Westernization [53].

Thus, the non-Western civilizations wish to modernize, but they reject Westernization, whereas up to now, they wanted to modernize *through* Westernization, through imitation and the take over of the Western values. This leads to a process of *indigenization* of the peripheral societies as their modernization advances, and its exacerbation rallies extreme manifestations, as terrorism and fundamentalism [6, 22, 47].

Within all these processes, cities hold a vanguard position, constituting real poles of cultural globalization. Regardless of the peculiarities of the cultural identities, international experience has proved that the rural environment preserves traditions better, opposing more resistance to the globalizing flows [31]. On the contrary, cities, especially those with international functions, are the first to take over these flows retransmitting them in territory. Moreover, the great international metropolis are, almost entirely, cosmopolitan cities. In Aukland for instance, under the cover offered by the English language and by the culture of English speaking origin, there coexist Italian and German bakeries, French fashion and antiques, Belgian chocolate, food from Indonesia, Chinese bakery, numerous American and European companies [8].

The penetration of the allogeneous cultural elements is, on the one hand, varying with the degree of attachment of the local populations towards the autochthonous cultures, and on the other hand, with the national policies in the cultural domain, policies that tend to acquire increasing importance. Thus, before being a world city, Tokyo is a Japanese city, the autochthonous cultural elements being dominant, the same as in Beijing or Shanghai, while Montreal or Amsterdam, although being cosmopolitan

cities (with Lebanese, Chinese restaurants, companies from all over the world etc.), have not reached the stage of global cities [25, 41, 48]. (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Products which transced cultural spaces (from left to right): Chinese influences in European Architecture ("Dragonul Roşu Shopping Center", Bucharest); Modern influences in Woman Clothes in China; American influences in Islamic Space (Tunisia); Modern architecture in Islamic World (Dubai, United Arab Emirates)

On the other hand, the limit between cultural heterogeneousness and cultural homogenization constitutes the most controversial problem within the interpretation of the rise of the cultural interactions on the globe level. Cultural homo-genization lies at the basis of the formation of the global consumer culture, that the capitalist society is being built upon. Others identify cultural homogenization with a "cultural imperialism" [1]. In this sense, one should emphasize the role of the transnational companies in the extension of the American culture in the world [15, 49].

Romania could not remain outside these evolutions. The collapse of the communist system in central and eastern Europe and the cancellation of the ideological barriers have opened the way to the intensification of the globalizing connections on the level of the urban systems of central and east-European states, too [23].

Within this context, Romanian cities and especially those situated in the upper part of the urban hierarchy tend to take over insignia of the cosmopolitan cities, process favoured by the increase of human interactions, of ethnical variety and by the development of services [19]. The settling down on the territory of Romania of citizens of Arabian, Turkish or Chinese nationality who do trade or small industry business or of certain citizens who have come to study, to whom there should be added the staff of diplomatic missions, multinational companies or NGOs has been reflected in the service domain, too, through the appearance of some specialized units (Chinese, Lebanese, Italian or Greek restaurants; French or German bakeries; African, Indian or Latin-American craftsmanship shops etc.) [37]. From the other viewpoint, the rural continues to identify itself in the emotional mental as a standard of the local, an environment that preserves the autochthonous traditions (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Antithesis local/autochthonous/rural versus global/allochthonous/urban in various domains.

The boundary between the traditional cultural patrimony and the elements of the global consumer culture tends to become more and more permeable and to implacably move to the advantage of the latter, affecting even the most traditional local communities [36]. The departures to town of young-sters, which have started to affect the Romanian rural space ever since the years '50 of the previous century as a result of industrialization and urbanization of the communist period and those abroad with working purposes, after 1989, have decisively contributed to this phenomenon.

We believe that the causes are, first and foremost, of economic type, arising from the income of the population (the lack of competitiveness of the products achieved through traditional methods, that require a great volume of work and implicitely a high production cost, under the circumstances of orienting the demand towards cheap, low quality products) but also legislative, through the lack of certain legislative measures of viable stimulation of the local small entrepreneurs [26].

To these ones, one may add the lack of information and the extremely low revenues which still characterize the majority of the rural population and which hinder the development of a viable managerial behaviour in the rural environment [27].

III. ROMANIAN VILLAGE AFTER EU ACCESSION GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this context, the Romanian village is in a crossroads moment of its evolution. The integration into the European Union, component of the globalization, imposes on the Romanian rural complicated standards, new rules, new institutions, which come to affect its traditions rooted for generations [38].

The cleavage between tradition and modernity tends to become more up-to-date than ever. Will these changes, imposed by the standards of the European institutions, succeed in preserving the charm and identity of the Romanian village? The Western experiences tend to confirm this thing. An efficient and coherent rural development policy would be the only one entitled to decouple the traditional from the autarchy, to preserve its traditional values under the conditions of an inherent accentuation of the globalizing flows. This aims at three basic components [57]:

- The increase of the competitiveness of farms and forestry, through measures of infrastructure improvement and development; supporting the farmers who attend the programmes of ensuring the quality of food products, establishment aid for young farmers, supporting semisustenant farms,
- The management of the environment and of the land, through measures of supporting the farmers of the mountain areas, "Nature 2000" programme, the improvement of the agricultural environment, payments for animal welfare,
- The improvement of life quality and the diversification of activities through supporting the non-agricultural activities, aids for setting up small entreprises, encouraging tourism and renovating villages.

An extremely important aspect with direct reference to the second component of the rural development policy, but insufficiently negotiated with the EU authorities, intended to ensure the protection of traditional agricultural products [28], is represented by the acknowledgement and promotion of *the names of origin* for the Romanian food and agricultural products.

IV. EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES.

The French experience may constitute a good example in this respect. The traditional products are carefully monitored and amply promoted on a national and European scale through the hypermarket chains. People even talk about "viticultural tourism" or "food tourism", components of cultural tourism which capitalizes the cultural patrimony related to the traditional recipes of certain food products [50].

In the field of cheese products for instance, entire lists of traditional products are being associated to historical regions, each product being achieved according to traditional original recipes acknowledged on a European scale through their names of origin [33, 34] (Figure 3).

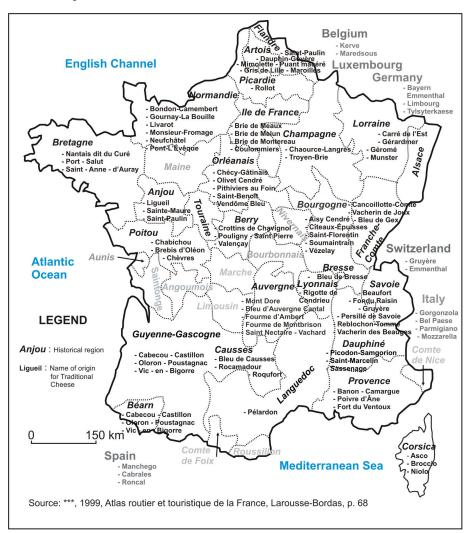


Figure 3: Name of origin for the French cheese products [55].

Viticulture and vinification represent another agricultural sector where the traditional component stands out through its importance. In the viticultural region of Bordeaux for example, one of the most famous in the world, to a 120 000 hectare viticultural area there are 57 names of controlled origin and 353 addresses of homologated viticultural properties [44]. They constitute

integral part of the regional and national cultural patrimony and lie at the basis of a viti-wine tourism which combines the traditional elements of viticulture and vinification, of agriculture in general, with the natural charm and the century-old history of the places (Figure 4).









Figure 4: Touristic capitalization of a viticultural region with historical and cultural potential: Bordeaux (France).

Similarly, in Great Britain there are homologated, on a European level, the cheese products of *caerphilly*, *cheddar cheese*, *chester* and *double gloucester* type; for Belgium those of *kerve* and *maredsous* type; for the Netherlands those of *édam* and *gouda* type; for Germany the *Bavarian emmenthal* and the cheese of *limburg* and *tysyterkaese*; for Italy those of *gorgonzola*, *bel paese*, *parmigiano and mozzarella*; for Spain those of *manchego*, *cabrales* and *roncal* etc [55].

V. ROMANIAN AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS BETWEEN THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Although Romania ranges among the states with a rich tradition regarding agriculture, Romanian agri-food products having been famous and appreciated abroad for a long time, our country lacked a coherent and pragmatic legislation of putting in value the elements of the popular, traditional culture, that are found in these products. It was only in 2004, under the pressure of the negotiations regarding the EU accession, that there were transmitted to the European Commission two lists containing possible geographical names of traditional agricultural products which, after the accession, to the request of the groups of producers, could be protected and registered on community level [42].

One of these contains the geographical indications and the names of origin protected and acknowledged in Romania for food products, differentiating four categories of products (made of milk, meat, bakery and processed fruits) (Figure 5), and the other one contains the geographical names protected and acknowledged in Romania for spirits (tuică, pălincă and vinars (Figure 6).

In order for the registration of these names on community level to be requested, the creation, on a national level, of a recording system and of a submitted application evaluation system is necessary.

The creation of a monitorized system through the granting of the names of origin for the Romanian traditional agricultural products constitutes a fundamental element in the orientation towards the *ecological agriculture* (the organic agriculture, the biological agriculture) that has as an objective the production of food which is purer and more adequate for the human metabolism through the conservation of the environment resources [57].

The ecological agriculture does not use synthesis fertilizers and pesticides, growth promoters and regulators, emulsifiers, antibiotics and intensive animal breeding systems as well as genetically modified organisms. The practise of the ecological agriculture assumes the use of those methods and technologies which are very close to the laws of the nature, which are regulated through strict production rules and principles, included in the national and community legislation. The agricultural products which observe these norms and principles, from soil quality to the one of the final product, certified as such by inspection bodies, receive the ecological product certificate [26, 47].

Therefore, the ecological agriculture means the return to traditional agriculture, but observing some strict sanitary-veterinary norms and it may decisively contribute to the increase of the agricultural activities with an important added value and with a great intensity of labour occupancy of the rural environment [18].

In the domain of milk quality, for instance, ever since 2002, through the Order of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food no. 389 of August, 29th there have been stipulated strict sanitary-veterinary norms regarding health conditions for the production and commercialization of unboiled milk, of heat-treated milk and of milk-based products [56].

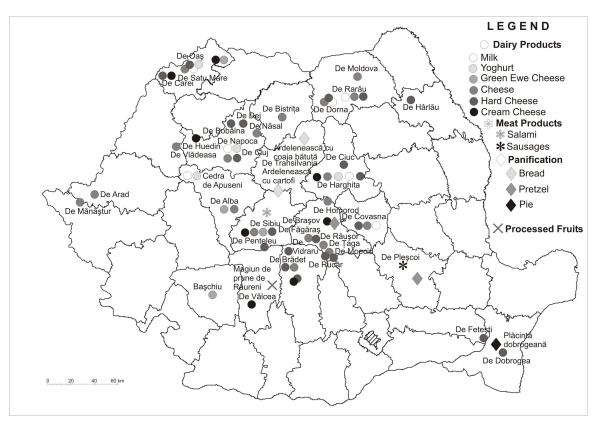


Figure 5: The geographical indications and the names of origin protected and acknowledged in Romania for food products (in compliance with the Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Rural Development no. 212/2004) [56].

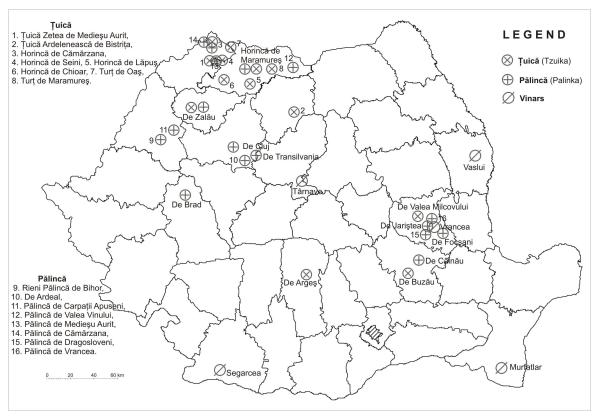


Figure 6: The geographical indications and the names of origin protected and acknowledged in Romania for spirits (in compliance with the Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Rural Development no. 212/2004) [56].

But some traditional technologies conflict with these provisions, fact which imposed the necessity of granting some derogations for a number of traditional products, with the aim of supporting their production and commercialization. These ones preserve traditional, local cultural patrimony elements and we consider that their inclusion into the category of products with names of origin would be beneficial [43, 46].

VI. THE TOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS

We may assert that traditional rural agri-food products represent an important component of the cultural patrimony of a nation which should not be affected by the generalization of the intensive agriculture imposed by the European norms, themselves a globalization product.

The European legislation stipulates strict norms in this sense, the agri-food products that include traditional elements having a product of origin statute and constituting an element that defines the local level [9, 12]. They complete the local touristic patrimony, generating tourism specific forms, such as viticultural tourism, insufficiently developed in Romania, in spite of the rich viticultural traditions that have dated ever since the Antiquity. The vintage moment has attracted visitors, being registered tourist rides to the vineyard regions, especially in week-ends. Nevertheless, the equipment has remained reduced, being more developed only in the vineyard along the Valley of Carasu, Murfatlar region, which may be included in complex touristic programmes (that target the seaside, the Danube Delta, the ancient vestiges of Dobrogea, the museum patrimony of Constanta etc.), in the vineyards of Vrancea, in those of the counties of Timis and Arad (Recas, Ghioroc), in those of the centre of Transylvania (Jidvei) or of Cotnari (Iași) [50] (Figure 7).





Figure 7: Recaş vineyards (Banat, Romania).

Similarly, there may be set the basis of an agri-pastoral tourism in Sibiu Surroundings (Mărginimea Sibiului), Maramureş, Bucovina, Lacu Roşu or the Rucăr-Bran Passage, as a premise of the revitalization of the traditional occupations of these areas, the natural beauty

of the places and the testimonies of the historical past completing their touristic dowry [13, 14, 20, 30].

Unfortunately, many of the traditional elements which could have been touristically capitalized through integrated touristic programmes, contributing to the occupational diversification of the inhabitants and to the development on the whole of certain peripherical or disadvantaged areas, have been destroyed or left to dereliction falling prey to indifference or to certain local interests on the background of the repeated periods of economic decline which have affected Romania almost continuously in the latest decades and which have borne various names: dictatorship, transition, crisis. We have in view, first of all, the narrow railways (cog railways), which have been disposed in their greatest number, the one in Hunedoara having the possibility of being integrated into a programme of cultural and industrial tourism beside The Castle of Huniades and the old industrial equipment of the Steel Mill, dating from the XVIIIth century, the fortress on the Hill of Mihai from Cisnădioara (Sibiu County) [10], but also many other historical and archaeological vestiges which are insufficiently touristically capitalized or even left to dereliction and destroyed (Asam's Mill from Bucharest representing such an example).

VII. ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS. SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis of the competitiveness on the internal and international markets of the Romanian products achieved through traditional methods, may have in view the following aspects:

A. Within the analysis of the internal environment (of the internal market):

- 1. Strong points:
- The originality of these products. Despite the penetration of the globalizing flows into the smallest local levels, fact that tends to affect the traditional production processes, these products continue to preserve their original character, through original preparation recipes transmitted from generation to generation, that keep a still powerful local stamp;
- They are *ecological products*, achieved in regions weakly affected by the chemical and biological pollution of the components of the natural environment;
- The original character continues to be associated with the local character of these products, fact confirmed by their names themselves, perpetuated along the time: wine of Murfatlar, sausages of Pleşcoi, milk of Dorna, cheese of Rucăr, cottage-cheese of Harghita, brandy of Bihor, salame of Sibiu etc.

2. Weak points:

- The lack of competitiveness on the internal market. Being products achieved through traditional and ecological methods, they blend a great volume of labour, time and specific expenses, which attracts higher costs than in the case of large series products, costs that are reflected in the price of these products;
- The low degree of productivity in the achievement of these products through traditional processes, fact reflected by higher production costs and implicitely by price;
- The low degree of absorption on the internal market, whose consumers generally prefer cheap, large series products, due to their low income;
- The high level of poverty which characterizes most of the traditional rural communities of Romania and implicitely the local producers, having direct negative consequences over the quality of the raw materials used and the manufacturing processes;
- *The lack of* clear and properly applied *legislative measures* of efficient support of the local producers;
- The high degree of corruption of the local authorities, those who should implement these measures, in terms of the precarious economic situation in general.
- B. Within the analysis of the external environment (of the European and international markets):

C. Opportunities:

- The great demand of ecological products, achieved through traditional methods (the return to the "ecological agriculture"), result of the awareness gained by the western societies and political actors over the potential danger represented by the consumption of Food Additives (E-s) and by genetically modified products;
- The existence of *clear and coherent European legislative* norms in this sense, which Romania has recently joined through the harmonization of the internal legislation with the European one: The Order 212/2004 of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Rural Development regarding the endorsement of the List containing the geographical indications and the names of origin protected and acknowledged in Romania for food products and the Order 906/2007 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development regarding the endorsement of the Procedure of registration and verification of the documentation for the acquisition of the protection of a geographical indication or names of origin for an agricultural or food product, of the Procedure of the declaration of opposition on a national level, and of the Procedure of transmission to the European Commission of the registration application for the geographical indications or for the names of origin of the agricultural or food products, with a view to gaining protection at the European Union level as well as of the specific Rules regarding the model and use of the national logo [56, 58].

D. Restrictions:

- The low degree of competitiveness of the Romanian traditional products with similar products from states with greater experience in this sense (France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Great Britain etc.);
- The insufficient international promotion of this category of products and of the local producers of Romania.

CONCLUSIONS

The integration of Romania into the European Union has created the pre-requisites of the intensification of the globalizing connections, which determines a penetration on an increasingly large scale of the global consumer culture products on a local level. They tend affect more and more the traditional rural communities through the alteration of autochthonous cultural patrimony as a result of a massive import of western cultural values, process that has been materialized both mentifactually (artistic creations: literary, musical, choreographic etc.) and artifactually (architecture, clothing, traditional crafts).

This category also includes the agricultural products achieved through traditional technologies, that tend to become uncompetitive in relation to serial products, which are cheaper but of inferior quality. In this respect, there are required a series of interventions of a regulating nature accepted and provided by the European legislation, by granting names of origin to Romanian traditional products, which are thus included in the autochthonous cultural patrimony and protected as such

They may thus be added, through an efficient management, to the long list of tourist attractions that are offered by Romania.

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