URBAN IDENTITIES IN PERIPHERAL SPACES: THE CARPATHIAN SMALL TOWNS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: The Romanian Carpathians are considered one of the least populated and poorly urbanized regions of the country and a geographical area that is about to become more and more isolated. The majority of the mountain towns, those having less than 20 000 inhabitants, could have a substantial more significant importance within the network of mountainous settlements if their territorial role and their functional profile would be recognized and supported by adequate development policies. The purpose of our paper is to identify the socio-spatial and environmental features generated by recent urban dynamics of mountainous small towns in Romania, to explain the relation between these features and the peripheral position in the urban system and to assess different sides of the Carpathian small town’s identity. We accomplished these objectives by analysing both statistical data and other comprehensive information regarding perceptions, intentions and decisions of the authorities administrating those (more or less) urban entities.

Key words: small towns, Carpathians, urban evolution, peripheralisation, spatial identity

INTRODUCTION

Spatial identity is defined by specific features of the human communities, but, moreover, in relation to the others, by delimitation and contact. Usually, the source of differentiation is distance while physical proximity is the source and matrix of social proximity (Groza, 2003).

In Romania, traditional geographic identities are best configured at high and medium altitudes - mainly in Carpathian and Subcarpathian regions (Popa, 2000). Before 1989, the mountains were, on the one hand, more or less, away from collectivization, lacking large cultivated areas, but, on the other hand, they were victims of communist industrialization that exploited local resources beyond their carrying capacity. The Carpathian small towns were highly disadvantaged by a regime that promoted a highly hierarchical settlement system where decisions and financial resources came from the top down (Borsa et al., 2009).

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The peripheral position made them lose their main territorial role: market places and services providers for the rural area. The only sign of development and centrality, the industrial investments most frequently created “one factory towns” highly vulnerable to environmental degradation and to the later political and social-economical turmoil. If we analyse Carpathian small towns’ identities by the filter of chore-periphery model we can state that, generally, isolated towns generally have lower (economic, infrastructural) performances than those surrounded by other urban localities which benefit from the employment opportunities of the delocalized activities distinctive for the bigger city. On the other hand, some authors (Zamfir, 2009) see isolation in relation to bigger cities as an advantage favouring the manifestation of the relay function between rural and urban settlements, but also the conservation of the local identities and natural heritage. On the contrary, the towns located near large urban poles absorbed, therefore losing their identity. They actually become “vast dormitories” entirely depending on the big city. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the towns situated within mountainous rural areas have better chances to develop due to geographical position, economic level and facilities if local communities and authorities have the capacity to wisely manage and develop the local resources for a sustainable future.

**METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

In this study, there were taken into account 59 small towns situated in the Romanian Carpathian area and having a population of less than 20,000 inhabitants. The main working hypothesis was the existence of a direct relation between the peripheral position of small towns and the current identity crisis they face. We also wondered whether peripheral position can be an advantage for small towns - when it provides conditions for becoming local development poles and for keeping their own identity.

The first stage in our approach was an extensive literature review and data collecting: from the National Institute of Statistics in Romania; the sites of the Town Halls and County Councils, a study regarding the authorities’ access to European funds financed by Soros Foundation (AALFE, 2009), but also Corine Land Cover, 2006. It was followed by the establishing a set of indicators in order to highlight the demographic, social, economic and environmental evolution of Romanian small Carpathian towns considering the period 1990 - 2009 (in some cases 1990 - 2006). The cartographic representation of these indicators was made using the multi-criteria analysis for drawing urban typologies in population growth and social-economic identities. In order to assess peripheralisation, we made a distinction between isolation from all the other towns and remoteness from higher rank towns (Portnov, 2004). Urban location is a function of remoteness from the major population centres, but the vicinity to other urban localities is also important. The second provides the index of isolation, which, in our case, takes into consideration the urban population 30 km around the small towns. The report between the isolation index and the remoteness index (i.e. the road distance to the closest town having at least 50000 inhabitants) was named the Index of clustering. The relation between the peripheralisation indexes and the values of important urban development indicators was assessed using the statistical correlation and standard deviation.

The last part of our paper analyses the possibility for the Carpathian towns to preserve their own identity and to increase their local importance by inter-communal cooperation, environmental protection management and decentralization, but also the threats of current approaches. As identity is, first, an inner, spiritual and subjective reality of people we assessed authorities' perception on Carpathian small town and their action to promote urban identity. We also imagined a composed sample picture by visualizing the official sites of the town halls.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Sides of local identity - demographic, functional and socio-economic evolution of the Carpathian small towns**

The population is an effective barometer of all local transformations a community experiences. The small Carpathian town witnessed important demographic changes mainly due to the major decrease
in the industrial sector, the difficulties induced by the economic crisis generating a lack of local opportunities of competitiveness and integration in the general economic network.

In terms of population growth rate they were more stable compared to the other Romanian urban settlements, or even compared to the other Romanian small towns. Some even had a positive evolution of the natural growth rate. They are rural towns that kept their high natality rate values (Dărmănești, Frasin) or urban settlements that became attractive due to recent investments in efficient economic activities (Horezu, Băile Herculane, Aninoasa) (figure 1).

![Figure 1. Carpathian Small Towns natural and migratory growth rate (1990 - 2006)](Data source: National Institute for Statistics)

At the other pole there are small towns greatly affected by “de-economisation” due to the fact that they had negative values both of natural and migratory growth rate (Bălan, Oțelu Roșu, Abrud) or they were old tourist centres knowing accentuated demographic ageing most of the towns that we study have moderate negative values. They are situated in traditional emigration areas (Maramureș) or consist in former monoindustrial towns affected by current crisis but trying to rehabilitate and to renew their urban identity. The small Carpathian towns fit the general picture of Romanian small towns with rather high percentage of rural population occupied in agriculture, but less endowed with urban services than the big cities. Towns with an agricultural profile are few because of the specific of mountainous areas - mainly the zootechnical activities maintaining important rates of local labour force employment (between 45 - 78 % in Săliștea de Sus, Dragomirești, Sângeorz Băi, Novaci and Tismana). By the other hand, industrial towns are the most numerous (30), as industrialization was one of the priorities of the former communist regime and was considered the fastest way towards social and economic modernization.
Nevertheless the industrial implants as well as the large collective dwellings proved, in most of the cases, unreasonable and unfeasible in the long term. After the transition to a competitive market economy some have become true mono-industrial ghettos (Ioniţă, 1997). The mono-industrial societies have an economic life gravitating around a sole economic branch which is „the main axis of organization of social life” (Ciechocinska, 1993, p. 32). With a low representation of services, these towns are the exponents of a less-diversified social lifestyle, which intensifies economic risks.

Especially those based on the mining industry remained stacked in this situation (Anina, Aninoasa, Bălan, Moldova Nouă), while the monoindustrial towns depending on more dynamic branches such as food and drinks industry (Borsec, Ștei) or mechanical engineering (Bumbești Jiu) recent restructured and modernized had effective results. There are also monoindustrial towns that succeeded in overcoming this status by completing their functional profile with profitable tertiary activities (Rășnov, Nucet, Vălăhița or Baia Sprie) (Dumitrescu, 2007).

Tertiary towns are following the main Trans-Carpathian communication routes (Depresiunea Dornelor, Valea Prahovei) as they are either isolated tourist resorts which valorise a certain local natural potential (Băile Herculane, Tușnad, Covasna) or polarizing centres for neighbour rural area (Gheoghieni, Vișeu de Sus, Țintșuura Buzăului, Brezoi).

Tourism is seen as an important opportunity for most of the small towns situated in the Carpathians. Many of the small Carpathian towns are officially stated as tourist resorts of national (14) or local (3) interest. Even though it is not a panacea (Matei & Caraba, 2010) for all small towns, tourism is a viable alternative to industrial development if the potential impact on the local environment is taken into account, considering that 4/5 of the Romanian protected areas lie in the Carpathians where inappropriate tourist activities could have irreversible negative consequences (Erdeli & Dinca, 2011).
The location of certain small towns with tourist profile in Romanian Carpathians is related to the presence of the main transportation routes, functioning as national or international tourist axes. Thus, they are more easily connected to populated areas with important economic potential. Over the last 20 years, the evolution of lodging capacity reflected extremely contrasting situations: small towns in the traditional tourist areas like Bușteni, Sinaia, Predeal have preserved their lodging capacity, while others have increased it due to investments in new facilities (Râșnov, Gura Humorului) or in modernizing the units that existed before 1989 (Azuga). Certain towns have experienced a decrease in their capacities, either because they have important share of decrepit tourist structures that were not modernized (Slănic Moldova, Bâile Tușnad, Bâile Herculane) or because they were placed outside the main tourist axes (Gheorghieni, Vlăhița, Dârmănești) (Bănică & Camară, 2011).

In close relation to their function, the state of the local environment influences local identities. Towns situated in those Carpathian areas where mining activities prevail, sometimes overlapping areas harmed by pollution, are confronted the most important social and economic issues (Zlatna, Bălan, Anina or Moldova Nouă). Some witnessed an important migratory deficit, thus adding to depopulation a major drawback of investments in housing and urban infrastructure (figure 3).

![Figure 3. Carpathian Small Towns’ Socio-Economic Identity and Environmental Issues](image)

(Data source: National Institute for Statistics; Benedek, 2004)

There are towns that did not succeed in confirming their recently gained urban status, although they seem to be stable in respect of their demographic profile. In reality, they are facing an obvious scarcity of economic non-agricultural activities (Dragomirești, Săliștea de Sus, Dârmănești, Tismana). Grounded on tourist or industrial traditions, the most advantaged are the small towns that, benefit from important investments and becoming competitive within the Romanian urban system (Ghimbav, Sinaia, Târgu Secuiesc, Ștei).
Peripheralization and urban crises. Are they connected?

The development of small towns is not always determined by internal factors and local networks but more often the small towns are subject to external forces acting at regional, national and even global scale (Burdack & Knappe, 2007).

Although situated in the centre of Romania, the Carpathians remain the most peripheral area of the country as the accessibility and the connectivity to the rest of the settlement system is the weakest. The most spatially peripheral small towns lie in the mountainous area of the Eastern and Western Carpathians (Borsec, Sovata, Broșteni, Vaslui, Nucet), sometimes at the (non-EU) border (Moldova Nouă, Anina). Meanwhile the position in a „less-advantaged” area is a mark of town’s peripheralisation (figure 4).

On the contrary the most central seem to be the towns near Brașov (Ghimbav, Râșnov), Baia Mare (Baia Sprie) or Râmnicu Vâlcea (Olănești, Călimănești). However because of this position, they are sometimes absorbed and transformed into labour force large-dormitories with no actual identity, which is also a form of peripheralisation. In this case the territorial competition for attracting population and economic activities is not favourable to small towns. There are also localities integrated in urban networks with different functional profiles such as tourist (Prahova Valley) or mining (Petrosani Depression). The mono-industrial character of the latter and the decline of the mining industry joined to the incapacity of central and local authorities led to a lack of a sustainable solution, and to the profound loss of urban features. It is a radical form of „cluster peripheralisation”.

Correlating peripheralisation and the socio-economic indicators analysed before, it is obvious that small Carpathian towns that are close to other urban poles are advantaged as their population has access to jobs and benefit from periurbanization - by receiving firms that relocate their headquarters or population moving from neighbour cities (table 1).

Being close to a big city (1-10 km) without having a good quality of urban endowments does not ensure a high level of social welfare. They are often peripheries from the viewpoint of
technical infrastructure and they do not have the capacity of competing against big centres considering tourist structures’ attractiveness (Ghimbav, Baia Sprie etc.).

### Table 1. Correlation between peripheral position and social-economic indicators
(Data source: National Institute for Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance to the closest town bigger than 50000 inhab.</th>
<th>No. of towns</th>
<th>Mean population</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>ISCD 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>ISCD 2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>ISCD 3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>ISCD 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 10 km</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10997</td>
<td>31,00</td>
<td>12,76</td>
<td>38,10</td>
<td>15,17</td>
<td>58686,65</td>
<td>58786,65</td>
<td>39,29</td>
<td>10,71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 20 km</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9486</td>
<td>24,40</td>
<td>5,21</td>
<td>22,31</td>
<td>7,41</td>
<td>11834,26</td>
<td>7223,61</td>
<td>55,52</td>
<td>25,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 30 km</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>76423</td>
<td>21,40</td>
<td>10,56</td>
<td>20,97</td>
<td>6,82</td>
<td>10796,57</td>
<td>10350,78</td>
<td>59,84</td>
<td>24,33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40 km</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10016</td>
<td>23,03</td>
<td>9,82</td>
<td>24,56</td>
<td>11,50</td>
<td>13879,24</td>
<td>13879,24</td>
<td>50,39</td>
<td>17,18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 60 km</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10187</td>
<td>25,83</td>
<td>10,94</td>
<td>22,31</td>
<td>7,41</td>
<td>11834,26</td>
<td>7223,61</td>
<td>55,52</td>
<td>25,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 – 80 km</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8443</td>
<td>20,00</td>
<td>6,95</td>
<td>25,03</td>
<td>11,57</td>
<td>10657,93</td>
<td>10657,93</td>
<td>42,01</td>
<td>21,95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 – 116 km</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9778</td>
<td>22,17</td>
<td>6,71</td>
<td>27,43</td>
<td>14,50</td>
<td>11083,97</td>
<td>11083,97</td>
<td>58,49</td>
<td>27,70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance to the closest town bigger than 50000 inhab.</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>ISCD 5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>ISCD 6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>ISCD 7</th>
<th>UP30KM</th>
<th>IC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 10 km</td>
<td>16,14</td>
<td>5,98</td>
<td>-7,02</td>
<td>0,67</td>
<td>0,97</td>
<td>0,05</td>
<td>287200,00</td>
<td>28720,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 20 km</td>
<td>19,67</td>
<td>8,70</td>
<td>-9,27</td>
<td>13,17</td>
<td>18,47</td>
<td>22,16</td>
<td>183301,60</td>
<td>9403,52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 30 km</td>
<td>34,82</td>
<td>38,10</td>
<td>-13,52</td>
<td>9,04</td>
<td>13,99</td>
<td>21,70</td>
<td>112284,56</td>
<td>4371,27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40 km</td>
<td>22,43</td>
<td>8,35</td>
<td>-8,18</td>
<td>8,95</td>
<td>7,73</td>
<td>20,91</td>
<td>28083,42</td>
<td>826,16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 60 km</td>
<td>32,85</td>
<td>28,76</td>
<td>-12,72</td>
<td>15,25</td>
<td>14,01</td>
<td>20,33</td>
<td>16709,77</td>
<td>326,75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 – 80 km</td>
<td>22,03</td>
<td>7,84</td>
<td>-12,13</td>
<td>4,27</td>
<td>0,77</td>
<td>1,01</td>
<td>20018,60</td>
<td>274,98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 – 116 km</td>
<td>14,52</td>
<td>5,68</td>
<td>-13,43</td>
<td>13,94</td>
<td>5,53</td>
<td>6,92</td>
<td>11225,25</td>
<td>121,33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 – number of firms/1000 inhab.; 2 – percent of working people from total population; 3 - average turnover/inhab.; 4 – percent of modernized streets in 2006; 5 – No. of houses built 1990-2007/total population; 6 - population growth rate 1990-2007; 7 – tourist function rate 2007; ICSD – intra-class standard deviation; UP30 – urban population 30 km around the small town; IC – Clustering index).

Meanwhile, the isolated (61 - 80 km) and very isolated (80 - 116 km) small towns (Borsec, Moldova Nouă, Nucet, Câmpeni etc.) are often confronted with great economic issues (although they sometimes have high employment rates) and disadvantaged by depopulation and weak local capacity for investments in housing, but some try to compensate this by investing in transport infrastructure.

When it comes to the urban infrastructure the most dynamic are the towns situated at small-medium distances (20 - 30 km) from other urban poles, those being also the towns with the greatest number of recently built houses and the greatest percentage of modernized streets (Orșova, Predeal, Covasna, Bicaz).

Carpathian small towns situated at medium-long distances from bigger towns (40 - 60 km), sometimes important tourist resorts, with competitive firms employing an important share of the population, are dynamic when considering the number of recently built houses (Sinaia, Băile Herculane, Bușteni, Horezu).

**Challenges of isolation and solutions to promote local identities**

One of the outcomes of isolation, the lack of capital resources transforms decentralization from an opportunity to affirm one’s own identity into a heavy burden that deepens the peripheralisation of small mountainous towns by distancing even more the weakest integrated territories. The true problem is the fact that, incapable of reforming, small town halls delay public expenses and have a passive attitude towards their own financial resources.
However, if honest, the local authorities are in the position to best identify the main issues their communities are confronted with (table 2).

**Table 2. Objectives and solutions for Romanian Carpathian small towns**
(Data source: AALFE, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Priority objectives for the local administration</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No. of small towns</th>
<th>Exemples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Utilities and public services</td>
<td>- drinking water systems, central heating, public illumination, housing modernization, emergency services improvement</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Zlatna, Ștei, Moldova Nouă, Toplița, Broșteni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Waste and waste water management</td>
<td>- selective collection - integrated waste management systems - waste water plants building</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dărmănești, Brad, Brezoii, Novaci, Bâile Olănești</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Promoting tourist development</td>
<td>- winter tourism infrastructure development - historical and cultural heritage rehabilitation - reviving traditions by tourist revaluation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bușteni, Sinaia, Calimănești, Slănic Moldova, Nucet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social issues</td>
<td>- integration of gipsy communities - creating facilities for health and sports for young and elder population</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Târgu Secuiesc, Beiuș, Predeal, Bălan, Întorsura Buzăului</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Local management and intercommunity cooperation</td>
<td>- intercommunity strategies elaboration - better efficiency for the local administration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Aleșd, Sălăștea de Sus, Olănești, Vașcău, Aninoasa, Nehoiu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Local solutions for urban development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No. of small towns</th>
<th>Exemples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>- allocation of sufficient budgetary resources from county or national level - access to European and governmental funds</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bălan, Bicaz, Tâlmaciu, Gura Humorului, Brad etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Human resources improvement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dărmănești, Săliște, Predeal, Slănic Moldova, Anina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Legislation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nehoiu, Abrud, Ștei Roșu, Baraolt, Toplița</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Development strategies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vașcău, Bâile Herculane, Beiuș, Gheorghieni, Baia Sprie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Technical infrastructure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ștei, Baia Sprie, Calimănești, Borsec, Frasin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of their objectives were stated to diminish the existing disfunctionalities are linked to improving urban infrastructure and public services (mainly in drinking water projects, central heating and public illumination), waste management (selective collection of waste or sewage systems). Some communities were interested in projects of tourist revaluation (of natural and cultural heritage, while promoting local traditions), integrating discriminated social categories (such a aged, female or gipsy population) and providing support for improving performance of the local administration or enhancing intercommunal cooperation.
In order to attain these goals the solutions envisaged for the town halls and local councils mainly refer to exogenous decisions and resources (budgetary allowances and funding access, legislative adjustments, better regional development strategies). There are also local solutions that should be considered by the authorities administrating the small towns (training human resources, local strategies for sustainable development, improving technical infrastructure etc.).

The perception of their own identity is also reflected by the way in which local specificity is illustrated on the official sites of the town halls. Beyond the will of most of the officials to promote the newly acquired affiliation to the European Union space (seen as a chance for getting out of the peripheral situation!), many mountain towns highlight the importance of keeping their own identity whether it refers to cultural and historical features (Abrud, Sâliște, Beiuș), urban-like image (Câmpeni, Oțelu Roșu, Tâlmaciu, Câmpulung Moldovenesc), tourist resort traditions (Băile Herculane, Slănic Moldova), ethnography (Tismana, Negrești Oaș) or natural environment (Vașcău, Moldova Nouă, Predeal).

In close relation to the perceived own identity, an opportunity for small towns to diminish the negative effects of peripheralisation is to turn to account their capacity to concentrate rural references, but also to cooperate with other urban localities of the same rank in order to create functional inter-communal entities. They could be based on the tradition of supra-local cooperation that is present in the Carpathian space, sometimes small towns playing, de facto, the role of central place in territorial structures such as „țări” (Negrești Oaș in Țara Oașului, Câmpeni and Abrud in Țara Moților, Brezoi in Țara Loviștei, Vatra Dornei in Țara Dornei etc.). Actually, the empowerment (even by legiferation) of these old historical entities around a functional urban nucleus could structure some of the intercommunal organisations (Săgeată, 2005). This could ground the (still) „missing link” in the Romanian administrative system - the micro-regional - LAU1 level.

![Figure 5. Carpathian Small Towns in Romania and their Territorial Identity](image)

(Data source: National Institute for Statistics; Săgeată, 2005)

In fact, these kinds of formations are becoming a political and administrative reality. According to present EU and national legislative context, as the main outcome of applying LEADER axis, the Local Action Groups (LAGs) may also include towns under 20,000 inhabitants
which is a chance for isolated areas to promote both a dynamic social, cultural and economic environment and a sound natural environment. This explains the functioning in the Carpathian area of 35 LAGs (43.21 % of the total number of LAGs), 20 of them including at least one of the small towns we analyze in this paper (figure 5).

At last, but not at least, small towns are best suited to host the headquarters of environmental conservation institution and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that could coordinate projects in natural environment protection.

Many of the Carpathian small towns include in their administrative territory significant protected areas (Bicaz includes 926.7 ha of protected areas while Tismana hosts 8 protected areas and Câmpulung Moldovenesc - 5), others are resorts valuating the mineral waters (Vatra Dornei, Borsec, Călimănești, Băile Herculane), while others host the administration of important natural or national parks (Beiuș, Herculane, Horezu, Vatra Dornei etc.) (figure 6).

**CONCLUSIONS**

Romanian Carpathians are a vast periphery, and this situation was a main factor of urbanisation. Even though nowadays the Carpathians are situated in the centre of Romania they are still borders for counties („județe”) and for regions (NUTS2). Therefore they continue to represent a dividing line between historically, socio-economically, politically or administrative units.

The peripheral situation of the Carpathians and the low accessibility of the mountain small towns are important factors that shape urban identities. Consequently many of the Romanian small towns deal with severe poverty as they have limited capabilities and resources. Our hypotheses were partially confirmed: the Carpathian small towns are sometimes disadvantaged because of their peripheral position as they are far from other towns or cities and therefore poorly connected to the general flows of the urban system. The fact is transposed in small budgets, a certain lack of opportunities, unemployment, emigration, ageing population, decline of small local business and service activities, lack of investments in houses and urban utilities, poverty and environmental degradation. Nevertheless the above assertion is not a rule.
Sometimes isolation from other urban localities preserves urban identity, helps keeping a clean environment, sustainably valuating the tourist potential and transforming small towns in true development centres by coagulating rural energies. Especially when former traditions exist, small towns can take the lead in a supra-local context when being a part of local action groups or coordinating natural and human heritage protection.

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