

IDENTIFICATION, QUANTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC POTENTIAL OF FOLK SONGS SPECIFIC TO BIHOR, ROMANIA

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Abstract: The present study aims to identify, quantify and analyse the tourism potential offered by folk songs specific to Bihor, or by the triad folk music - folk ensemble - specific event. This approach is necessary in the context of the evolution and rise of tourism in the last period, together with the needs and expectations of tourists to spend their time in a more pleasant and also active way, integrated in the life of host communities.

Key words: ethnographic potential, folk songs, ensembles,

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INTRODUCTION

Bihor County, located in the north-west of Romania, due to the physical, geographical and historical framework in which it has evolved over time, is the beneficiary of greatly valuable ethnographic tourism resources (Stășac and Herman, 2010; Ilieș et al., 2009, 2010, 2014, 2015). Among them a special place is held by the folk song and dance. Cultivated and promoted in a scientific way, the folk songs and dances can become the main tourist resources in creating the tourism identity, along with natural and anthropogenic elements (Connell and Gibson, 2003; Herman and Wendt 2011; Herman, 2012; Ilieș et al., 2015, 2016; Palmer, 1999; Ury, 2001; Harvey, 1989; Mitchell, 2000; Tătar and Herman, 2013; Thrift, 2000).

Since ancient times until now, one of the most elementary and used forms of expression by man was and is the "*song*". It accompanies man throughout his entire existence, from birth (incantations), childhood (lullaby songs), maturity (songs of longing) and old age (songs of mourning), to death (wailing). Basically, "*every nook and cranny of modern life*" when "*practically every human activity in Western countries either relies on or has certain commodities associated with it, from births to weddings to funerals, at work or in the home, in peace or in war*" (Thrift, 2000, p. 96).

In this context, it is no wonder that the developing tourism has turned its attention in this direction due to the multiple valences and functions that songs, along with folk dances and other ethnographic features, incorporate.

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The folk songs and dances can help develop and promote local and regional tourism by converting them into an easily marketable tourism product, given that currently more and more *"local customs, rituals, festivals and ethnic arts become tourist attractions, performed for tourist consumption and produced for market-based instrumental activities"* (Gotham, 2002, p. 1737) and develop the image of tourist destination providing *"a new source of images and sounds for tourism promotion"* (Gibson and Connell, 2005, p. 14).

An important contribution to this is the fact that music is a portal of knowledge of places, people, past, identity, membership etc. However, the opinions expressed by certain specialists are divided, some believe that tourism is *"a homogenizing influence and its effects everywhere seem to be the same - the destruction of the local and regional landscape that very often initiated the tourism, and its replacement by conventional tourist architecture and synthetic landscapes and pseudo-places"* (Relph, 1976, p. 93), an element through which *culture is "being destroyed in order to yield entertainment"* for a consumer society (Arendt, 1993, p. 207), while others have identified positive features concerning the role and the importance of tourism in the local development and in the shaping of the tourism identity (Connell and Gibson, 2003; Herman and Wendt, 2011; Herman, 2012; Palmer, 1999; Ury, 2001; Harvey, 1989; Mitchell, 2000; Thrift, 2000).

Currently the institution dealing with the preservation and promotion of folk song and dance in Bihor County, Romania is *"Bihor County Center for the Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture"*. It is *"a specialized scientific and methodological institution, with the objective of knowledge through research, preservation through conservation and development, through specific ways of promoting, of the tradition and creative cultural artistic heritage and traditional art of Bihor county. It operates under the authority of Bihor County Council and is part of the main county institutions, in accordance with the Romanian legislation and the framework of its own Rules of organization and functioning"*.¹ In order to achieve its primary objective, the *"Bihor County Center for the Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture"* cooperates with a number of partners among which are the Cultural Center of Harghita, the Cluj County Center for Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture, the Cultural Center Dragan Muntean from Deva, the Timis County Center of Culture and Arts, the Covasna Centre of Culture, the Augustin Bena Center of Culture from Alba, the Liviu Rebreanu Center of Culture from Aiud, the Bucharest Center of Creation, Art and Tradition, the Gorj County Center for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture, the Satu Mare Center County Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture, the National Center for Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture.²

METHODOLOGY

From a methodological point of view this study is structured into three major research centre lines, namely: folk ensembles, folk music bards and organized events with specific character. The information needed to carry out the analysis of the previously mentioned lines aimed at both the quantitative and qualitative aspects. It was obtained from literature and field research. The analyses were performed spatially (reference units being considered: ethnographic sub-areas and locality) and temporally, in the case of the folk ensembles and organized events. The software used for their analysis was ArcGIS 9.3.

FOLK MUSIC SINGERS

They are image vectors, responsible for disseminating and fostering the folk songs in specific events attended by folk ensembles. After the bibliographic and field research, we identified in Bihor 102 folk music singers belonging to 4 sub ethnographic areas: Barcău (13 singers) Crișul Repede (48 singers), Crișul Negru (12 singers) and Crișul Alb (5 singers).³

¹ <http://www.culturabihor.ro/>

² http://www.culturabihor.ro/index.php?s=8&lang=ro&id_page=2

³ <http://www.culturabihor.ro/index.php?s=11&lang=ro>

The name of the ethnographic sub-areas derives from the name of the main hydrographical arteries that drain Bihor County from east to west (according to the general inclination of the territory), namely: Barcău, Crișul Repede, Crișul Alb și Crișul Negru. Over time, these rivers were true axis of concentration for human communities or their cultural, social, political etc. manifestations. The analysis of the singers in terms of place of origin revealed their membership to 56 rural and urban localities grouped in five categories: localities with 1 singer (39 localities); localities with 2 singers (12 localities); localities with 3 singers (Marghita, Salonta, Ștei and Dobrești); localities with 12 singers (Oradea) and localities with 14 singers (Beiuș) (figure 1).

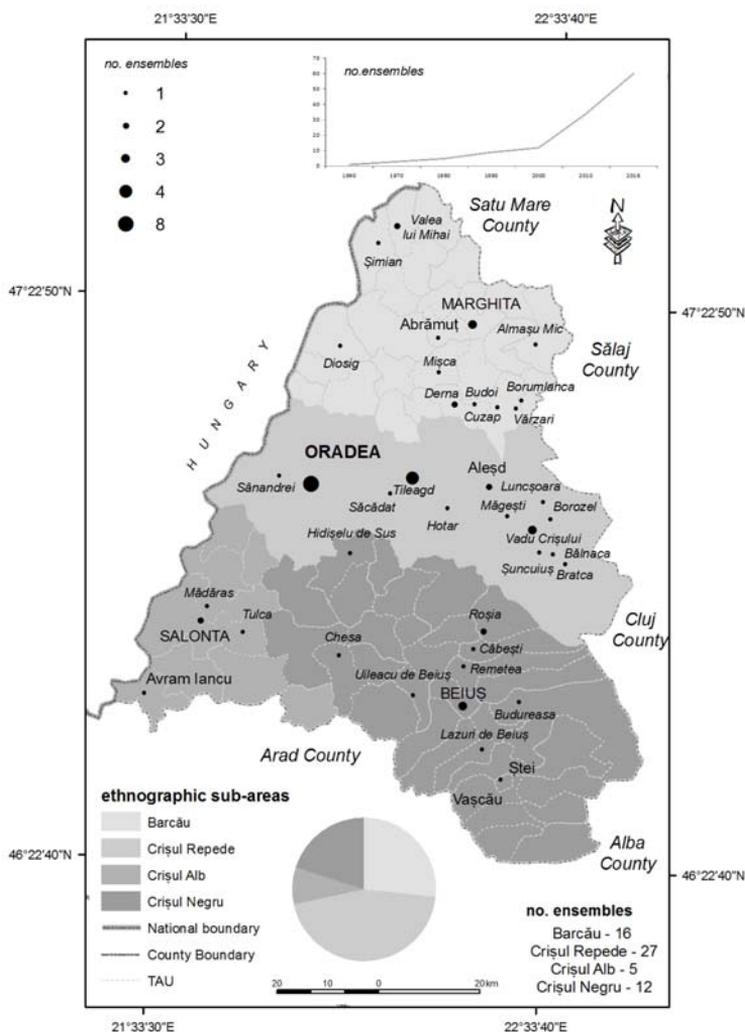


Figure 1. Folk music singers in Bihor

FOLK ENSEMBLES

They represent the institutional framework through which folk music and dance is grown (identified, reconstituted and preserved) and promoted through the enhancing image of folk music bards within specific events. Each ensemble has a few specific basic elements: the name, location, structure and repertoire.

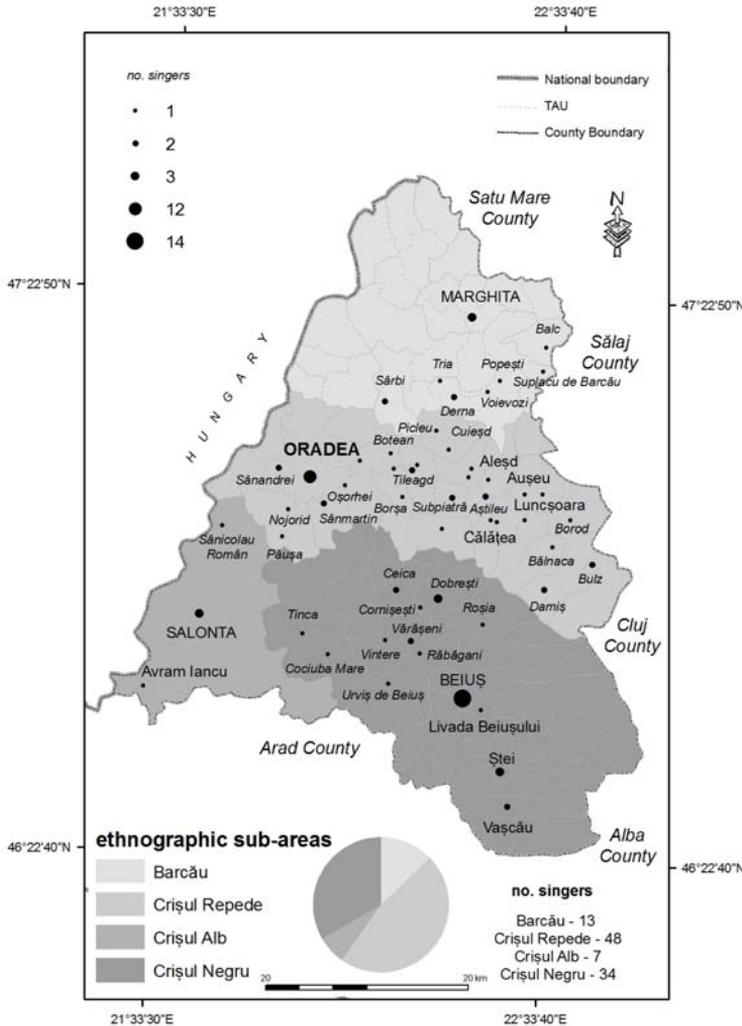


Figure 2. Folkloric ensembles in Bihor

In 2016, in Bihor County a total of 60 such structures were active, including 1563 people (singers, dancers, choreographers etc.). The analysis of the folk ensembles was performed in relation to: the spatial distribution (town, ethnographic sub-area), ethnicity, structure and foundation year. The spatial analysis reveals that the ensembles are located in 39 municipalities, of which 7 with urban status (Oradea, Beiuș, Marghita, Salonta, Aleșd, Valea Lui Mihai și Ștei), and the rest with rural status, and in 4 ethnographic sub-areas: Crișul Repede sub-area - 27 ensembles (45%); Valea Barcăului sub-area - 16 ensembles (27%); Crișul Negru sub-area - 12 ensembles (20%) and Crișul Alb sub-area - 5 ensembles (8%). The historical conditions in which this area evolved, drained by the left tributaries of the rivers Tisa, Barcău, Crișul Repede, Crișul Alb, Crișul Negru, entailed the diversification of folk ensembles on ethnic criteria as it follows: 47 Romanian ensembles, 11 Hungarian ensembles and 2 Slovak ensembles. The biggest ensembles in terms of the number of people involved are: the "Nuntașii Bihorului" Ensemble from Oradea, Crișul Repede ethnographic sub-area (70 people), the "Gyongyvetok" Ensemble from Marghita, Barcău sub-area (70 people) and the "Ezsustperje" Ensemble from Șimian, Barcău sub-area (70 people).

At the opposite pole we have the "Junii Bihorului" Ensemble from Oradea (8 people), the "Doina Șteiului" Ensemble from Ștei (10 people), the "Fii satului" Ensemble from Almașul Mic (10 people) and the "Crișul" Ensemble from Oradea (10 people). The first ensemble of those currently still active in Bihor county was the folklore ensemble "Brățuța" from the Crișului Repede valley, founded in 1960, in the town of Bratca. From 1960 to 1990 the growth rate of the number of folk ensembles was relatively low compared with the time interval between 2000-2016, when it was more rapid, especially after 2010 (figure 2).

ORGANIZED EVENTS WITH SPECIFIC CHARACTER

They represent the territorial and temporal context for the manifestation of the folk ensembles, folk dancers and singers. In 2016, in Bihor County, Romania, 29 events were organized, during which folk ensembles performed, represented by folk singers. The monthly distribution of the events organized in 2016 in Bihor reveals an unequal distribution, the months with the highest number of events being September and October (with 6 events), followed by December (4 events). In January there were no events (figure 3).

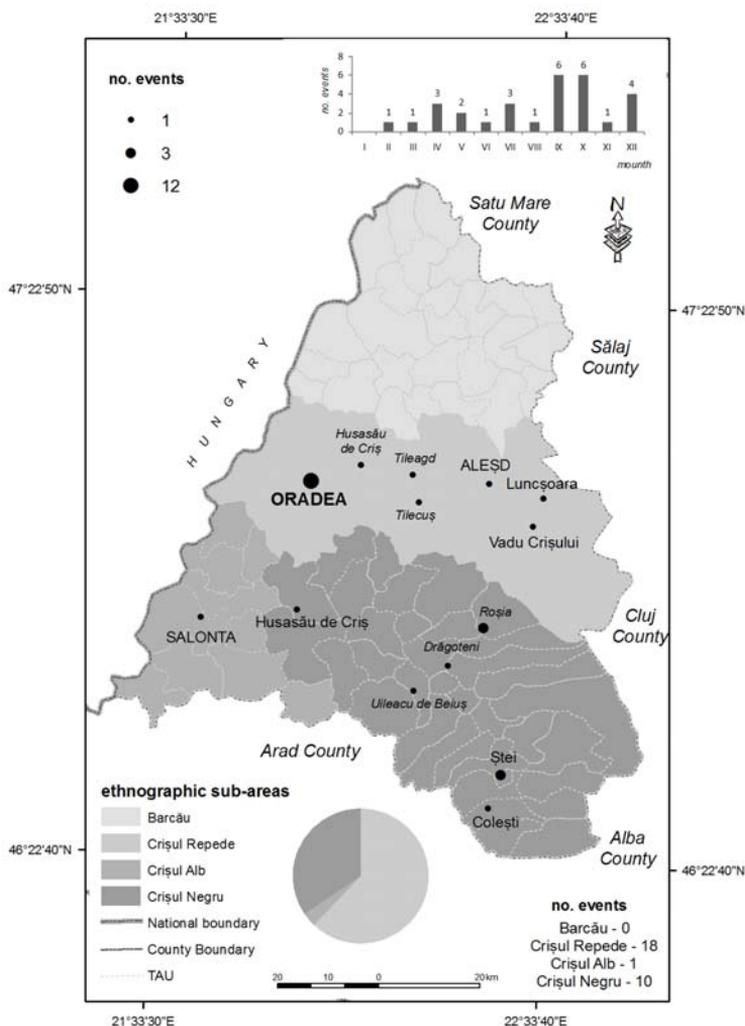


Figure 3. Organized events with specific character in Bihor County, 2016

CONCLUSIONS

After analysing the ethnographic potential of the folk music from Bihor, we reached the following conclusions: in 2016, in Bihor county were organized 29 events with specific character, to which were invited 60 folk music ensembles, within which evolved a part of the 102 singers of folk music; in the case of the ethnographic sub-areas, the situation was as follows: Barcău (13 singers, 16 ensembles, 0 events) Crișul Repede (48 singers, 27 ensembles, 16 events) Crișul Negru (12 singers, 12 ensembles, 8 events) and Crișul Alb (5 singers, 5 ensembles, 1 event); the distribution of singers, ensembles and events highlighted the importance of the urban centres like Oradea (12 singers, 8 ensembles and 12 events), Beiuș (14 singers, 3 ensembles), Marghita (3 singers, 3 ensembles), Salonta (3 singers, 2 ensembles) and Ștei (2 singers, 1 ensemble). The results obtained from the present study may be an opportunity in terms of tourism development through these impressive ethnographic tourism resources. In order to achieve this desideratum, several recommendations need to be made, including: increase the number of events, keep the events calendar relatively constant from year to year, thus transforming them in traditional events, initiate various actions to promote the events both locally and regionally etc. In what concerns the development through tourism of the folk music and dance specific to Bihor, currently there are no specialized studies that could highlight the connection between the number of tourists and the ethnographic tourism potential of the folk music and dance specific to Bihor.

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