

FAIRS, FORMS OF EXPRESSION OF THE LOCAL IDENTITY CASE STUDY: BEIUȘ FAIR, BIHOR COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract: This study dwells on the role and the importance of fairs, and particularly about "Beiuș Fair", in conserving, promoting and capitalizing the identity of the local elements. The combined use of the observation, cartographics, analysis, deduction and historiographical methods led to the identification of the main identity elements specific to the place, namely: name, the space-time localization, the involved actors and the products that are bargained.

Key words: fair, local identity, craft, handcraft product,

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INTRODUCTION

The fairs are executive structures defined by a series of identity particularities, namely: name, the space-time localization, the involved actors and the products that are bargained. Over time the concept of fair knew deep mutations, so if in The Middle Ages and The Modern Age, it designated a human settlement of variable sizes, favored from a physico-geographic point of view and it benefits of "special rights having markets at regular intervals of time for local tradings" (Bulat, 2000), currently, it represents a "larger and specially arranged space in a town or at the edge of a city, where they sell and buy (daily or at certain dates) cattle, cereals, food, vegetables" (DEX, 2009).

Of the foregoing, we learn about the role and the importance of fairs in the development of the local comercial links, links that are defined through a series of specific particularities of the place, the space where it takes place. On this background, in the actual society context characterized by globalization (Drăghici et al., 2015; Herman, 2016; 2017), the fairs, through everything that they represent, are a binder, a keeper of the specific identity of the place. "Identity can never be circumscribed to an "object", but must always be interpreted as a "process" in continuous development with negotiating value, which is the result of community poetics and, moreover – because these projects involve social formations– they also become venues of political action. We may thus affirm that identity falls within an intermediary space, in a limbo between the poetic and policies, in an extremely delicate frontier area, which may only be explored and understood through the use of the instruments of social science" (Helga, 2016, p. 677).

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In the scientific literature the local identity problem it's not a new subject, being widely debated by a series of foreign authors (Angle et al., 2017; Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Del Biaggio, 2015; Downey, 2017; Hayward and Kuwahara, 2014; Helga, 2016; Mahammadbakhsh et al., 2012; Tu at al., 2012; Wang, 2017; Zaeem et al., 2017; etc.) and Romanian authors (Dincă et al., 2012; Filimon et al., 2011; Filimon, 2012; Filimon et al., 2014; Herman, 2012; Herman and Wendt, 2011; Herman and Gherman, 2016; Ilieș et al., 2009, 2010, 2016; Stașac and Herman, 2010; Tătar and Herman, 2013; etc.). Therefore, this study is intended to complete the previous studies, through by emphasizing and analyzing some aspects of identity (name, the space-time localization, the involved actors and the products that are bargained), related to fairs as forms of spatio-temporal expression.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The realization of the present study involved the passing of two distinct stages: office and field stage. In the office stage the following actions were carried out: the consulting of the specialized literature, drawing up the cartographic material and elaboration of the study itself. In the field stage were realised four observation sets, regarding the fair from Beiuș, one for each season, which targeted: time (when?), place (where?), the actors (who?), the object of activity (what?) etc. Among the methods used in drawing this material are distinguished: the observation method, the cartographic method, the analysis method, the deduction and the historiographic method. Walking through the office and terrain stages, as well as the combined use of the above-mentioned methods, have facilitated us to obtain extremely interesting results centered on history, the role and the identity elements of the fair from Beiuș. The approach continues by identifying the main opportunities and challenges faced by the fair from Beiuș, as a form of expression of local identity.

SHORT HISTORY

The City of Beiuș, transylvanian city, with a rich historical past, is located in Romania, Bihor County, at the confluence of Nimăiești Valley with Crișul Negru, in the homonym depression, at the cross roads of the West Plains and the Apuseni Mountains (figure 1).

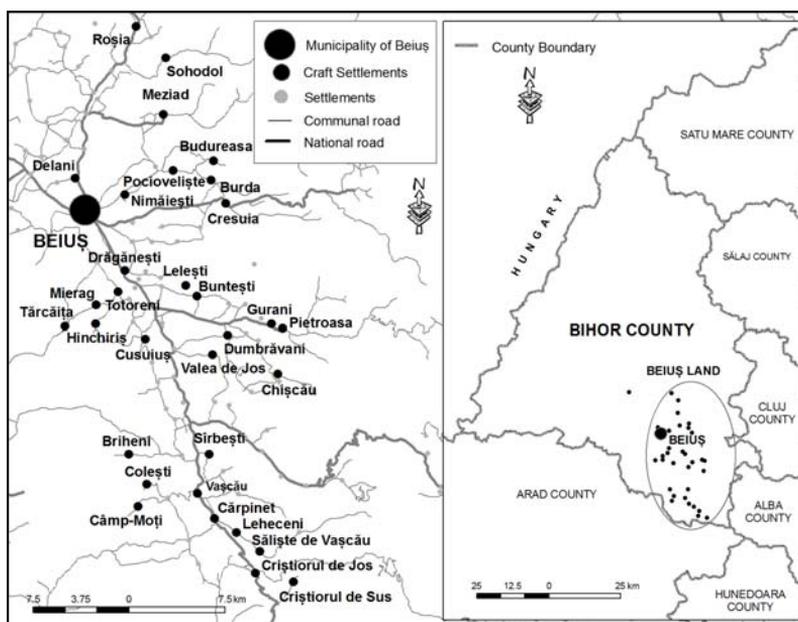


Figure 1. The location of Beiuș Land

From a temporal point of view, the town Beiuș was marked by four major moments, namely: 1270, 1451, 1454 and 1787. The analysis of these moments must be seen through the light of the fact that the history of the *"Beiuș Fair"* is closely linked to the one of the town Beiuș. Documentary certified from 1270 (Suciu, 1968), in the year 1451, Beiuș was raised to the rank of a city, being strengthened as an administrative center, receiving territorial attributions for the settlements of the depression. Another important event was the Diploma of King Ladislaus V of Hungary, dated September 29, 1454, through which Beiuș is invested with new privileges, in the field of commerce, the city having the right to hold (organize) weekly fairs and markets. In the period that followed, during the 15th-17th centuries, the Beiuș fair, helps to the development of the specialization phenomenon of the villages around Beiuș, woodworking, blacksmithing, shelling, etc., encouraged by the fact that they were exempt from the payment of taxes and assessments. Furthermore, in the locality, the first guilds appeared and affirmed, namely: tanners, weavers, shoemakers, bricklayers, etc., which also gave the names of some streets from Beiuș: Vasile Lucaciu Street - *"the tanners Street"*, Devei Street - *"the street of the bricklayers"*, Brândușei street - *"the street of lăutari/ musicians"* (Degău and Brânda, 2008).

Another decisive moment in the history of the Beiuș Fair is the date of July 5, 1787, when Emperor Joseph II gives Beiuș the right to hold 4 annual country fairs (February 16, May 4, August 3, November 9) and each Thursday, the weekly market. The spring fair was called *"the sluguțe fair"*, promoting the hiring of the servants and taking place in the current park from the center, the summer fair was called *"the harvest fair"*, *"the Sâmedru Fair"*, the winter fair *"The Frog Fair"* (Degău and Brânda, 2008; Filimon, 2012).

Thus, at present, the Beiuș fair, *"Biniș"* becomes one of the largest and richest fairs in the region, being recognized for the crafts and agrarian products, for the *"teujderit"* (meaning the smuggling with cattle and horses, the animals are bought at lower prices from *"moși"*, and after a few weeks, at the Beiuș Fair, they are sold at higher prices, generally to the buyers from the Arad area), and as a distinct element of the unextinguished lime from Meziad.

THE ROLE OF THE BEIUȘ FAIR

The Beiuș Fair represented and represents one of the defining elements of the homonym city. The existence of this fair, or *"market"*, as it is called, in the local language, has led to the intensification of housework, trade, and highlighting urban life with a series of liberties, favors and privileges (Degău and Brânda, 2008). Since ancient times, the Beiuș Fair has been of great importance, both commercially and socially, the fair being a convergent place where young people from distant or neighboring villages, came to know each other and marry after meeting their chosen one at the fair (Degău and Brânda, 2008). The commercial aspect of the fair transpires from its role in the diffusion of the craft products needed in the everyday life of man. The handicrafts are produced by folk crafts, preserved from ancient times. *"The role of this fair has become more widespread, than the commercial one, Beiuș becoming, on Thursday, a meeting place for the local community, a sort of -corso- of the Land of Beiuș"* (Filimon, 2012).

At present the importance of the fair derives from its role in preserving, capitalizing on and promoting some elements of identity and authenticity specific to the place. Among these are the folk craftsmen, handicrafts practiced, handcraft products, etc.

ELEMENTS OF IDENTITY

Following the bibliographic and field analyzes regarding the Beiuș Fair four elements of local identity were identified, namely: the name, the space-time location, the actors involved and the products traded. Each of the above mentioned elements are characterized by a number of defining aspects regarding the creation of local identity.

The name *"Beiuș Fair"* is the first element that locates us from the spatial point of view, deriving from the morphological unit *"Beiuș depression"* where the town with the same name *"Beiuș"* is located.

The space-time location, is the second element that plays a key role in creating a local identity. From a spatial point of view the "*Beiuș Fair*" is located in Romania, Bihor County, Beiuș, Burgundia Mare Street. From the time point of view the first documentary testimony of it dates back to 1454, when through the Diploma of King Ladislaw V of Hungary, Beiuș city received the right to organize weekly fairs and markets. Over time it has known mutations in how it is going and how complex it is. Thus at present the "*Beiuș Fair*" takes place every week on Thursday.

The actors involved refers to all the persons involved in the fair, namely to buyers, sellers, officials, etc. At the fair participate people from Beiuș and neighboring villages, craftsmen and tradesmen (of various types of products) and accidentally some tourists. From a methodological point of view the fair from Beiuș is conducted according to a relatively simple pattern which involves a variable time interval. The program starts early in the morning, with merchants displaying the merchandise and continues throughout the whole day by conducting fairs, sales. The closure of the program, as well as its debut, is relative from the schedule point of view, but with all this from the discussions with the factors involved it turned out that we speak about 16 o'clock. The length of the program depends on several factors among which it is noticeable the speed of sales, of goods exposed and the number of participants to the fair.

The bargained products are the central object around which the whole action takes place, on one hand, and on the other hand it is constituted by elements of identity and authenticity specific to the place. From a typological point of view, these products are grouped into two major categories: craft and agricultural products. From the category of craft products is remarkable: the wooden stairs from Cresuia; The limestone of Meziad; wooden boxes from Budureasa; forks, rakes, scythe tails and axes from Mierag, Tărcăița, Hinchiriș and Sâmbăta; braided objects from Totoreni; ceramic objects from Criștior, Criștior de Jos, Criștior de Sus, Lehecenii, Cărpinet, Lelești and Săliște de Vascău; the blacksmith products from Briheni, Chișcău, Drăgănești, Pociiovești, Vărzari de Sus, Vărzari de Jos and Vașcău; clothing products from Roșia, Sârbești, Drăgănești and Dobrești; etc. Regarding agricultural products, we can mention the zootechnical ones (animals: horses, cows, sheeps, pigs etc.; birds: hens, geese, ducks, turkeys, etc.; processed products: meat, milk, cheese etc.) and agrarian (cereals: corn, wheat, oat, rye etc.; vegetables: onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes etc.; fruits: apples, grapes, pears etc.; processed products: pălincă, wine, etc.).

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The struggle between values, meaning globalization and regionalization, is also present at the fair from Beiuș. It manifests itself in the form of competition between the sales volume of craft products, compared to that of industrial products. "*We all know and see every day that passes, and from the experience of other countries, that globalization does not always imply only progress. For example, its extension, with everything it implies, over an area which is not properly prepared to assimilate it, can lead to regression or in some situations even to the decline of that territory*" (Herman and Wendt, 2011, p. 87). In this context, the promotion of the fair from Beiuș, as the main promoter of the specific identity of Beiuș and Romanian space, is a priority, which is increasingly emphasized on the background of the disappearance of some crafts and along with them the related products, as outcome of the competition made of mass products, of industrial type.

In addition to the role of the Beiuș Fair in the direction of preserving, keeping and asserting the identity and authenticity specific to the place, in the area Beiuș Land there are efforts still made on this line by organizing some events like the Christmas mini-fair organized in Beiuș, the fair organized on Easter holidays, the fair of craftsmen etc. However in order to prevent the adverse effects of globalization some measures are needed such as: "*territory development through tourism in line with sustainable development principles; public involvement, involvement of local and county authorities in the protection, capitalization and promotion inside and outside the country of the identity and specificity elements; involvement of education of higher institutions in creating a tourism exploitation model of identity elements ... etc.*" (Herman and Wendt, 2011, p. 93).

CONCLUSIONS

The Beiuș Fair is an element of the city's identity, the existence of this fair leading to the intensification of the trade and of the local manufacturing industry. In this way, Beiuș has become a place of confrontations between old (traditional handcrafts) and new (the industry focused on new technologies). With a deeply rooted history in the darkness of time, Beiuș Fair is a defining element of the Beiuș space, with deep implications in the genesis, evolution and dynamics of shaping the specific spatial identity as a result of facilitating the development of handcrafts and the dispersion of craft products in time and space. The existence and practice of crafts in the area from the immediate vicinity of Beiuș Municipality is a strong element around which it is necessary to create a viable strategy of development of the territory in accordance with its development needs and capabilities, without losing sight of the identity elements specific to the place, which are after all testimonies of the way in which previous generations knew and managed to live together in accordance with the principle of sustainable, responsible development of the territory.

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