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Cultural Thematic Tourism Itineraries: Mediators of Success

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Abstract

This article argues for the need of studying to which extent certain psycho-social features characterizing the cultural profile of the communities involved in tourism activities on cultural routes (like the community culture of openness, social distance, community traditionalism and institutional traditionalism, the ability to take risks, ethnic (in)tolerance, the level of intergroup trust or intergroup prejudice etc.) act as mediators or moderators of the impact of traditional cultural heritage on the successful implementation of tourism activities within the communities, the development and tourism performance output indicators and the willingness to collaborate with other traditional communities along the cultural itinerary axis.

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper argues for the need of studying to which extent certain psycho-social features characterizing the cultural profile of the communities involved in tourism activities along cultural routes (or in tourism projects in general), act as mediators or moderators of the impact of traditional cultural heritage on the implementation of tourism activities within the community and success outputs. In order to construct our central argument, in the first section the paper describes the practical context and research background from which stemmed the respective hypothesis, followed in the second one, by the discussion, based on the existing support in the literature, of the pertinence of the partial moderation or mediation effect proposed for the most relevant variables underlying the issues presented under section one. The paper also highlights the necessity of elaborating

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quantitative, structured and transparent assessment instruments for the cultural heritage (cultural representativeness, authenticity, etc.) of the thematic route candidate localities in order to transparently and unequivocally support the decisions of inclusion/non-inclusion of certain localities on these routes and, by doing so, to eliminate later resentfulness and sabotage during the integration and the process of providing the tourism services. The conclusions deliver a round-up of the arguments supporting the necessity of studying the implications of the communities` psycho-social variables in the efficiency of implementing tourism activities as they resulted from this research endeavor.

The inclusion, since 1987, of numerous routes in the Cultural Routes Programme of the Council of Europe has determined an increasing homologation process for cultural tourism routes in general, not only in Europe but on other continents as well. The main motivation for these initiatives varies greatly, from considering the cultural routes as the lever for the intensification of integrated tourism activities at an inter-regional and trans-national level (Berti, 2013), or as an opportunity for the development (sometimes by contamination) of the areas less mature from a tourism point of view (Mayer, 2004) or as another subsistence activity for the profound rural areas with an aged population (Yang et al., 2013; Klimaszewski, 2007), to deeper cultural or psycho-social motivations. In this latter case, cultural tourism routes are considered the (only) way of keeping alive the local ancestral culture and of appropriately preserving the endangered cultural elements of universal interest (UNESCO, 2005), as routes of memory that imply turning the immaterial culture into heritage, giving a collective connotation to memory (DiMeo, 2008), with the main function of the hosts being the remembering of the forgotten places and times and the opportunity to perpetuate, by conveying to tourists, their ancestral culture, the reappropriation of a common past or the rediscovery of their collective memory (Geronimi, 2003). The cultural routes are even contemplated sometimes as a support for an identity approach (Alais, 2013) that lays emphasis not only on identity factors but also on elements that are capable of developing a collective feeling of regional pride (Bourgeois, 2013). However, resurrecting the regional pride in several cultural regions along the route and creating a shared spirit (Aquilina and Mateo, 2013) have not been the easiest social objectives to attain simultaneously in a cultural route project. Developing tourism activities in a region, in general, was found to generate in certain conditions, social tensions and conflicts between stakeholders upon resources or tourists (March & Wilkinson, 2009; Ryan Yang et al., 2013; Robinson, 1999; Oberg, 1960; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Doxey, 1976), between host communities and tourists (Reisinger, 2009; Robinson, 1999; Triandis, 1994; Jafari, 1987; Butler, 1980) etc., up to the point of considering conflict as inherent (Yang et al., 2013). The outcome of conflict was identified without any preexistent social prejudices between the social or ethnic groups involved in tourism activities in the respective region or towards other groups from the neighboring regions along a thematic trail. Among the determinants of conflict established by Robinson (1999) in the conflict between the host community and tourism industry, the nature and the extent of the commodification of the host culture and the utilization of its natural and cultural resources are the most relevant.

1.1. The social premises for cultural and social objectives of cultural thematic routes initiatives

The performance of a tourist destination and "the quality offered by a tourist destination is more than the sum of its parts; [is dependant] in important ways on how the organizational parts are interconnected, the way they act and interact and the relations between the actors involved; (…) value is created and delivered to tourists by a complex network of interacting and interdependent actors" (March & Wilkinson, 2009, p.455). Considering the issues of (cultural) identity and regional pride that cultural heritage tourism development can bring to surface, in order to estimate the potential success of implementing tourism activities within a cultural thematic route frame, preexistent social premises like inter-group prejudice, social distance or the community`s cultural openness towards alterity (e.g. especially towards international tourists) should be assessed as crucial variables for prospective chances of creating the shared spirit or reaching the level of cooperation those projects entail as well as the expected value of the tourist experience.

For example, the initial function in the case of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, was represented by the development of a framework to reflect on "an identity based on common citizenship as a tool of revealing a common European heritage and of restoring the collective memory of the communities" (Berti, 2013:150). Most of the times, this desideratum can be achieved without effort. In certain cases however, the restoration of the collective

memory and the reappropriation of the past of some communities or social groups bring along as well ancient social or historical antagonisms or rivalries. The cultural thematic routes sometimes cross neighboring regions that were in antagonist historical or social relationships. In defining the identity of a tourism region, Saarinen (2004, p. 176) suggested to use the following two elements, namely the discourse of the region (socio-spatial and mental representations, travel guides, advertising) and the discourse of the development of the region (institutional and political practices, infrastructure, etc.). The diverse texts and practices constituting the identity of a tourism destination are not necessarily neutral; they can even be competing against others (Saarinen, 2004). Saarinen`s model (2004) was tested (Ilies et al., 2010) on Romania`s tourism regions and it fitted the specificity of the relationship between the built space, history, culture and the destination image of those regions.

The dimensions of prejudice have been frequently related to problematic inter-group collaborative behaviors (Stephan & Stephan, 1996, Stephan et al., 2000; Stephan et al., 2002; Curseu et al., 2006). There is also extensive research literature on the correlation between the dimensions of the culture construct and the different understandings and operationalizations of the tourism hospitality concept and certain tourism services-providing behaviors (Reisinger, 2009; Reisinger & Turner, 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; McKercher & Chow, 2001; McAllister & Moore 1991; Doxey, 1976; Oberg, 1960; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), starting with the importance of cultural norms regarding what friendly behavior means (Reisinger, 2009) to the conflict between the value of generosity which underpins the Polynesian culture in tourism services. This provides along with the idea of little value of the financial gains, the Western main value of profit and financial motivations underpinning tourism providing services and the diminishing social interactions without financial stake (Berno, 1999; Gudykunst et al., 1987). Even in the same tourism region, the inter-group prejudices or the historical competitive relationships could interfere with the integration or the cooperation that tourism activities require(s). For example, in a study conducted by Malaescu (2013), aiming to assess the cultural heritage and the human capital of two of the most renowned Romanian shepherding regions, namely *Marginime* and *Northern Oltenia*, in order to establish the itinerary for a future cultural thematic shepherding route, in the case of the latter, based on previous research, it was mandatory to consider the impact of the intergroup prejudice between the two traditional shepherding groups on future tourism initiatives. The antagonist relationships between the two shepherding groups stemmed from the 12th-13th and 18th-19th centuries respectively, when the *Ungureni* group forcefully migrated from Southern Transylvania in Northern Oltenia, where the local shepherds (the *Olteni-pamanteni* group) had been using the most favorable land for settlements or farmlands. The *Ungureni* group settled on the terrains less suitable for buildings and cultures, but still managed to outperform, economically and socially, than the locals and developed a clear and obvious superiority stance. In the assessment of the level of *inter-group prejudice*, based on the framework of *Integrated Threat Theory* (Stephan & Stephan, 1993, 1996) and using the scale adapted by Curseu et al. (2006), the level of perceived symbolic threats (especially related to in-group culture and heritage) was significant for both social groups, and the level of real threats perceived was manageable in the case of *Ungureni* group towards the *Olteni-pamanteni* group, but considerable high concerning another autochthonous group - the *Roma* ethnic group. Also the social distance (Bogardus, 1925) measured towards the out-groups showed a difference of 1.7 (on a 5 point scale) in the social distance between the traditional *Ungureni* group (the group that gives the local traditional touristic flavor) and the autochthonous one (Malaescu, 2009). The local business operators and actors directly offering tourism services were coming from both social groups, the local authorities where mainly elected from the Ungureni group in the last two election periods. Considering a future cultural route initiative, those stakeholders should be "parts in networks through which value is co-created and co-delivered" as March and Wilkinson (2009, p.455) stated this imperative in creating quality tourism experiences. Another two social indexes not favorable to the implementation of tourism activities mentioned for this tourism area were *the level of interpersonal trust* and *inter-group trust,* which registered the lowest level in the country (Sandu, 1996). In this case, the two different historical backgrounds, two different cultures and those slightly unaltered inter-group prejudices made the idea of future cooperation and creation of a common spirit along the future thematic trail questionable: the more vivid the memory of a group's glorious cultural past, the more intense the remembrance of differences and the resentfulness towards the other cultural and social groups. If the natural instinct of those communities is not to cooperate and collaborate but to compare success and compete, the more appropriate approach would be to use socio-psychological constructs like inter-group prejudice conceptualized as social distance (Stephan & Stephan, 1993,

1996; Curseu et al., 2006) in order to assess those natural tendencies and establish a critical cut-off point value, behind which future cooperation is not likely to happen. The need for a cut-off point value emerges from the fact that up to a point, during tourism development, due to new economic interests and allegedly newly formed alliances between stakeholders, not always ancient out-group tensions increase and as a consequence, more in-group cohesiveness follows, but sometimes ancient tensions quiet down temporarily in sight of new economic mutual gains (Coser, 1956; Yang et al., 2013). We appreciate that this is the right time in the development of the theoretical field to acknowledge the existence of such critical constructs that need to be measured, and more importantly, the existence of cut-off point's values which could/might/can change dynamics. If not one, but several socio-psychological variables of the human capital have critical values for implementing tourism activities due to a competitive or hostile historical relationship, it is very unlikely that they will develop a sense of community or a shared spirit along a cultural route. Hence the need to consider and study certain psycho-social factors *as moderators* of successful implementation of tourism activities.

The utilisation of the Integrated Threat Theory framework (Stephan and Stephan, 1993, 1996), where inter-group prejudice is conceptualized as social distance, and symbolic threats as threats to cultural identity or interaction and contact (Curseu et al., 2006) are studied as antecedents of prejudice, allows for the prediction of future willingness to cooperate among communities and tourism actors, especially because it assesses antecedents of prejudices like inter-group symbolic or real threats that frameworks proposed before hadn't acknowledged as being important. Yang et al. (2013), who were using the theoretical framework of social conflict proposed by Coser (1956), (have) stressed out the importance of considering antecedent conditions for tension (like cultural norms, social positions and social structure) as factors that facilitate analysis of conflict and the finding of resolution measures. However, in their proposed tension-directed tourism development system model they don`t include any type of psycho-social variables.

Rural localities which preserve, in a high proportion, the traditional habitat and the traditional architectonic elements, practices and artifacts, customs, traditional clothes and cuisine (due to the high human and geographical isolation which reduced the contact with modern practices), present at the same time a human capital with some psycho-social characteristics that are not the most favorable neither for the development of tourism activities nor for the inter-communities cooperation (Robinson, 1999; Malaescu, 2010; Malaescu, et al., 2010) such as a high *level of institutional* and *community* (identity-related) *traditionalism*, a reduced *generalised trust in people* (Sandu, 2004, p.190) and *closed type of social relationships* (Sandu, 2004, p.194), a reduced *culture of openness towards alterity* (Sandu, 2004, p. 187) up to the point of cultural shock at the intrusion of tourists in these formerly isolated (ethnic) communities (Yang et al., 2013). This hypothesis of the juxtaposition, in broad lines, of the rural villages with high cultural heritage tourism potential and the villages with human capital (or culture) of traditional type, was confirmed also by the superposition, in the case of Romania, between the spatial distribution of the traditional type villages as a dominant type in the county, and the spatial distribution of the lowest total number (0 to 5 per county) of SAPARD Programme (Component: Rural Tourism) projects adjudicated in rural tourism (Malaescu et al., 2010).

Although implementation difficulties regarding the coordination at intra-or inter-regional level have been reported and modest results in the implementation initiatives of some tourism activities (including cultural routes) or European Funding absorption have been recorded (Aquilina & Maheo, 2013; Sofield, 1996; Babey & Courvoisier, 2013; Malaescu, 2013, Klimaszewski, 2007; Malaescu et al., 2010; Alexandru, 2009 etc.), no previous study analyzed the psycho-sociological characteristics of those communities involved in supplying services activities for tourists, bound to cooperate at an integrated level with other communities, in order to correlate them with the level of success the project had or with the level of inter-community cooperation, along the axis. Moreover, evidence of reluctance or a neutrality stance on the communities part towards the development of tourism activities was already reported and discussed (Babey & Courvoisier, 2013; Yang et al., 2013). Yang et al. (2013) point out that even if ethnic minorities have the right to reject tourism and that can be a valuable argument of the available power, in practice, most societies welcome it for the opportunities that it generates and tolerate the negative impact it brings at least up to the point of the conditions fulfilled in the hostility phase described by Doxey (1976). Considering this empiric facts the research endeavors should have looked at, among the causes that led to the lack of success, the implications of the particularities of social groups which are involved in the carrying out of tourism activities. Being

aware of the fact that the tourism activities along cultural thematic routes represent levers for the identity-related manifestation of collective mental attitude and regional pride (Alais, 2013; Bourgeois, 2013; DiMeo, 2008) because of the strong self-defining feelings, the approach of systematically analyzing certain features that stand at the basis of these identity-related manifestations as unfavorable premises of the cooperation and integrated actions involved by such projects represents the next logical step to be achieved by the research literature.

The objective of this paper is to argue for the necessity of studying to what extent certain psycho-social features contained by the cultural profile of the communities involved in tourism activities along the cultural routes or tourism projects in general, act as mediators or moderators of the impact of the traditional cultural heritage on the implementation and performance of tourism activities and the willingness to collaborate with other traditional communities along the cultural itinerary axis.

2. Mediators and moderators of successful tourism initiatives

There is reasonable theoretical and logical support for considering the approach of extending the number of concepts drawn from the social psychology and sociology applied in tourism resource prospecting and tourism product design as a productive research field, taking into consideration the potential to economically increase the effectiveness of rural tourism development`s financial allotment and European Funding absorption. Even though in the case of a numerous variables we proposed here as moderators/mediators the existing theoretical support regarding a possible mediation and moderation effects (as conceptualized by Baron & Kenny, 1986) is scarce, the research in testing the implying assumption of these models should have definitely been started a long time ago. After we reviewed the existing literature, we summarized the research evidence available concerning the on rapports established between several psycho-social variables in interplay, which lead logically, to the hypothesis of moderation effects or even mediation effects in the conceptualization established by Baron & Kenny (1986). In order to test a possible mediation effect, the conditions established (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981) were the following: (a) the causal variable is correlated with the outcome; (b) the causal variable is correlated with the mediator; (c) the mediator affects the outcome variable. If the impact of the causal variable changes when controlling for moderator, the partial mediation is indicated. If the effect of the causal variable is zero, the impact of the causal variable is completely mediated by the mediator. Contrary to the mediator which explains the relationship between the two other variables, a moderator represents a variable that influences the strength of a relationship between two other variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

There has been enough evidence that the most isolated rural areas, located far from urban areas and modernization processes, possess a superior level of material and immaterial cultural heritage which, in terms of tourism prospect, represents exactly the resources needed in order to develop tourism activities. However, regions very distinctive and renowned for their cultural heritage, with similar levels of preserved traditional architecture, registered very different results in terms of success as tourism destinations (Yang et al., 2013; Ilies et al, 2010; Olaru and Armanca-Ancuta, 2010; Malaescu, 2008, 2013). In order to explain the variance in success, the input variables must be identified also in the area of the human capital of the communities involved in tourism - from their psycho-social profile to their education stock and entrepreneurial and cooperative culture. March and Wilkinson`s work (2009) contributed considerably to the understanding of the way the relations and networks connecting the actors involved in a tourism destination affect its behavior and performance by demonstrating some of the ways in which such relations and networks operate and affect the tourism experience and the business performance of a destination. Testing the value nets model (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996) of interactions between tourism actors on Hunter Valley (Australia) they found that the relationship types among councils, neighboring tourist associations, partnership in transport services within and towards to a region are competitory.

2.1. Independent and dependent variables

The variables usable as a measure of successful tourism development could vary depending on the targeted information and final practical issue to solve, from a tourism prospect report or tourism favorability diagnose, an assessment report of

structural funding absorption, tourism development, rural sustainability, to the enhancing competitiveness` tools etc.). Depending on the objective, it could consist of the number of tourism initiatives (number of tourism funding proposals, number of projects financed, number of sustainable tourism initiatives that took off 5 years after the funding and structural support was withdrawn, number of accommodation structures, total number of places in tourism accommodation infrastructure, etc.), the total number of over-night stays, homogeneity of tourism flows during the year (Bossetti et al., 2007), tourist arrivals, average length of stay of international tourists (Assaf & Josiassen, 2012), technical efficiency (overall performance) and quality performance (Assaf & Tsionas, 2015), total amount of tourism-related-development funding absorbed, etc. (for an extended presentation of the variables and methods used in assessing a tourism destination performance, see Barros et al., 2011 and Assaf & Tsionas, 2015). Other variables could impact also on the efficiency of tourism activities implemented. Actually, the difficulty in predicting tourism performance also stems from the multitude of determinants that can affect tourism performance (Assaf & Josiassen, 2012). The predictor variable could also vary in order to respond to a certain research question. Due to its clarity, we use here the conceptualization of the tourism destination as "a firm with inputs (its tourism attractions – e.g. in our discussion, limited to cultural heritage resources), and outputs (bed-nights, employments …) and a Destination Management Organization's objective is to achieve maximum efficiency through a proper use of its inputs", where "the technical efficiency in the utilization of tourism resources can be considered as a proxy for the concept of destination competitiveness" (Barros et al., 2011, p.143). We have limited the aim of this paper to advocating for the necessity for some psycho-social characteristics of the cultural profile of the communities involved in tourism activities or just targeted as tourism project regions to be researched as mediators and moderators of success or efficiency and, further on, prospected for favorability much earlier than the beginning of tourism initiatives. It was not our intention here to explore and suggest exhaustive models; we still consider the theoretical support too scarce for such initiatives, but starting the testing of possible moderators not taken into consideration before in explaining the variance of tourism success initiatives is a natural step in the research literature.

In 2004, based on a cluster analysis of 12.057 villages, Sandu (2004) proposed a 6-type cultural taxonomy of rural villages. Among the labeled cultural profiles, *the traditional-type* (basically opposing *the modern type*), representing one of the most spatially and geographically isolated type of village, was characterized by the most reduced educational stock, village development index and a reduced share of inhabitants who go to town at least once a week, the most reduced share of the population who generally trusts people, the highest median of aged population and level of poverty (Sandu, 2004). In profiling the traditional village with relevant dimensions from tourism` perspective, we add a number of other important characteristics, namely: the reduced *bridging-type relational capital* (Voicu & Voicu, 2006), reduced *sanitary culture*, *isolation* from urban areas and reduced *media consumption* (Sandu, 2004).

2.2. Community culture of openness as mediator

One of the most relevant variable for tourism activities in the case of a traditional type village is represented by its level of *community culture of openness* (towards alterity), characterized by tolerance, acceptance of diversity, availability to communicate with the external world, relational capital, high empathy level, and openness to accept the calculated risk (Sandu, 2004, p. 187). Dimensions like *the opacity to community foreigners* and *the lack of trust* constitute also elements of the larger concept of the reduced culture of openness. Conceptualized as an aggregated index of several characteristics, based on previous works (Sandu, 1996, 2004; Voicu & Voicu, 2006; Malaescu, 2010; Ilies et al., 2010) there is enough logical and empirical support for the interaction between the level of traditional, preserved cultural heritage and the community culture of openness regarding the success of tourism implemented initiatives in order to suggest a model of moderation of cultural heritage impact on the success of tourism initiatives. Generally, high levels of isolation (in terms of communication - *"cul de sac"*) of a village was associated with higher architectural traditional heritage (Malaescu, 2008, 2010) and lower levels of the culture of openness (Sandu, 2004). More than that, although traditionally moderation implies a weakening of a causal effect, a moderator can amplify or even reverse that effect (Kenny et al., 2003) and that is exactly the measure of how the community culture of openness can actually alter the effect of high cultural heritage potential. However, if the causal factor is changed to geographical isolation, considering that in the case of the moderation effect no relation should be established between the causal variable and the moderator, and the underlying factor for both (low)

community culture of openness and high cultural heritage is the geographical isolation, a partial mediation effect should be tested. The traditional isolated type of village developed a culture of a *"closed type" of social relationships* (Sandu, 2004, p.194) with reduced social capital, a lack of living experience or of contact with foreign elements (either geographically, ethnically or religiously) considered 'closed' either due to tradition or to isolation. (Sandu, 2004).

2.3. Social distance, intergroup prejudice and interpersonal and inter-group trust as moderators

In a rural community the tourist is either included or kept at a great social distance, meaning tolerated in the public space, using common facilities or closer (in the case of the owner of an agritourist bed and breakfast). Hence the tourist represents in the rural space an allochthonous element of alterity "tolerated" in different circumstances according to the base level of social distance in that community. Locals may view tourists as either "good" or "bad" (Yang et al., 2013, p. 90). The concept of social distance (introduced by Bogardus, 1925), assesses the distance individuals interpose between themselves and the members of another group or strangers, following the predisposition to tolerate the presence of a member of the out-group in different situations - from marriages to refusing the citizenship (Curseu et al., 2006). Most of the times, the social distance at which the individuals are willing to tolerate the presence of the strangers in their proximity is influenced or even dictated by the socially shared model. In the traditional type societies people can predict "in general, only the behavior of those with whom they come into direct contact, with whom they have a long experience of interaction." The strangers, as Simmel points out, "are regarded suspiciously" (Voicu & Voicu, 2006, p. 45), individuals that know each other or belong to the same race or tribe are more inclined to interact in comparison to the individuals that don`t know each-other or belong to different social groups (Triandis, 1977). The perceived cultural similarity facilitates cultural interaction because it reduces the uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Gudykunst, 1985) and the volume of information hosts possess about tourists and vice-versa also facilitates cultural interaction (Nozawa, 1991). Reisinger and Turner (2003) described extensively the cultural conflict between the rules, norms and the laws of social interaction between tourist and host cultures, ranging from the voluntary character of the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) in the Western individualist cultures to the different underlying values for the tourism services providing in different parts of the globe. In the case of an isolated village without too many contacts with the alterity, sometimes an ancestral reticence surfaces, that an inhabitant should overcome when engaged in a tourist service activity which involves free access in the household (for agritourism pensions), the belief that the tourists will respect the reciprocity norm of paying for the services, namely the standard services and the additional ones based on a preceding agreement (Malaescu et al., 2010). Considering previous works is more and more obvious that the planning of a sustainable development for a traditional community based on tourism activities without consideration and assessment of the social distance at which the individuals of a traditional community are ready to tolerate the presence of the strangers (e.g. domestic or inbound tourists), have more modest premises for success.

The rapports between intergroup prejudice and social distance was extensively documented (Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Stephan et al., 2000; Stephan et al., 2002; Curseu et al., 2006) but no steady relation between intergroup prejudice and cultural traditionalism or isolation was proven. Moreover, evidence has been found of the coexistence between the predominant *modern-type* cultural profile (Sandu, 2004), as opposed to *traditional-type* cultural profile, and the lowest levels registered in the country of *interpersonal* and *inter-group trust* (Sandu, 1996) in the case of two historical tourism regions of Romania (Oltenia and Muntenia). Hence, in the presence of evidence of inconsistent relations between social-distance, interpersonal trust and inter-group trust on one hand, and isolation or traditionalism, on the other; the more appropriate hypothesis suggested for testing is the one of a partial moderation effect of the respective variables on the successful tourism initiatives. The level of nationalism or ethnic intolerance should also be tested when historical evidences have been recorded, especially in the case of border rural areas to be integrated in inbound tourism projects. In his comprehensive study, Sandu (2004) found that the ethnic tolerance was more correlated with the share of minority ethnic population in the village than with the traditional-type culture, supporting also the possibility, if present, of a moderator role in the case of ethnic tolerance.

2.4. The social choice behavior and the ability to take risks as moderators

In the theoretical founding of his proposed cultural typology, Sandu (2004) points out that such a typology should have relevance for wider classes of behaviors and attitudes, "variation of opinions, attitudes and social actions in the rural world, could thus be related not to "factors" but to community "contexts" (Sandu, 2004, p. 180). Among the most relevant ones *the social choice behavior* was considered, which, in the case of agritourist pensions, became a strategy or a way of life. A social transformational process of ethnic communities ranging from subsistence farming to business operation and management requires, as Yang et al. (2013) emphasized, a change in attitudes, norms and other psychological adjustments. The social choice behavior, the ability to take risks and the reluctance towards initiatives, the resistance to change, the institutional traditionalism, the personal choices according to the traditional norms and not according to efficiency also represent relevant characteristics of the human capital for the development of tourism activities. Yang et al. (2013, p.90) stressed out the necessity that "local administrations become knowledgeable about the culture they wish to promote as tourism product, to be patient with cultural difference, to be prepared to negotiate and value difference". These variables should be tested especially in explaining the spatial variance registered in tourism initiatives, like the number of tourism projects funded per community. Considering the fact that previous studies found stronger associations between the institutional traditionalism, the ability to take risks and reluctance to initiatives with different factors from the ones targeted in this study (see Sandu, 1996, 2004; Voicu & Voicu, 2006), their effect in explaining the variance of tourism initiatives should be tested as mediators.

2.5. Sound assessment instruments could contribute to reducing negative perceptions and cooperation reluctance

In assessing, ranking and deciding which traditional settlements should constitute the spinal cord of a cultural thematic route, equity, transparency and if possible, unanimous recognition of an authenticity hierarchy of cultural representativeness and preservation of each community`s cultural heritage became an imperative for practitioners, not an optional desideratum (Malaescu, 2013; Malaescu, 2015). Quantitative, structured and transparent assessment instruments of the cultural representativeness and specificity for the thematic traditional activity of the cultural heritage possessed by the localities aspiring to be included on the tourism itinerary are of paramount importance for making the difference, and to transparently and unequivocally advocate the decisions of inclusion or non-inclusion of certain localities on the patented route. This type of instruments should present a high level of operationalization in territory, in order to discriminate between those localities with rich authentic and truly valuable cultural heritage which were included in the itinerary and those which were not. This approach is mandatory especially due to the competitive relationships previously mentioned, which could negatively impact future activities. The rivalry issue, hence the necessity of the transparent assessment and hierarchy of the cultural thematic heritage was pointed out before in the case of the wooden UNESCO churches in Maramures (Romania) or the UNESCO fortified churches in Transylvania (Romania) and the implicit heritage thematic routes they were included on (Malaescu, 2013). If members of communities, especially delivering tourism services for tourists, are not convinced of the genuine ranking and decision-making process, they are resentful and sowing in the tourists' minds the idea of the doubtful plenty representativeness or specificity, undermining everyone's interest and tourism reputation without doing any favors to the (allegedly) left-out communities or their cultural resources. The likelihood of incidence of such a negative effects is lower when a cultural transparent ranking of representativeness and richness of cultural heritage, if possible, acknowledged by all the local and regional stakeholders or simple inhabitants was made. There is a danger, as Yang et al. (2013) pointed out, "that if the local government overlooks the possibility of realistic conflict (…) the local administration will only look for therapeutic measures of short-term nature instead of investigating the causes of conflict" (Coser, 1956, p.52) which brings again to the necessity of fair and transparent decisions and of the investigation of the antecedents of existent social tensions, prior to implement tourism initiatives.

3. Conclusions

The approach of continuing to consider the traditional communities strictly as a tourism resource, as obedient aesthetic "exhibits" drawn from other times, instead of vivid, dynamic communities, having implicit particular out-group attitudes explained by the historical context, is inefficient and unrealistic taking into consideration the fact

that in the case of the thematic routes, the entire success of implementing tourism activities depends on the cooperation of these communities. Even the success in fulfilling the communitarian purpose of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe must be questioned when the shared collective mentality presents some indicators of the cultural profile that register critical values. Those itineraries imply a certain homogenization according to at least one cultural feature for the birth of a new emulation, meant to associate the local actors and the stakeholders situated/located along the initiative axis. The main social objective of those routes, namely to produce the necessary change in mentality for identifying the service providers with the itinerary theme, of cooperating under a common objective, as in the case of the objective "esprit canal" (Aquilina & Mateo, 2013, p.56) (where the introduction of Breton channels as navigable touristic routes had to strengthen and reinforce the spirit of this space), could be compromised. Other secondary functions, as the social and cultural objectives of the implementation of a cultural route could be in danger in the presence of an identity approach based on elements capable of developing a collective feeling of regional pride, the later could constitute a double-edged sword in developing tourism because:

- Tourism activities development based on cultural heritage can enhance cultural identity awareness and regional pride.

- Tourism activities development has been frequently associated with social inter-group competitiveness and conflict over resources, tourists, etc.

- Value in quality tourist experience is created and delivered to tourists by a considerable amount of cooperation and collaboration between a complex network of interacting actors.

- Communities with strong ancient cultural heritage were associated with a historic of inter-group tensions or competitiveness.

- Settlements with high cultural heritage potential frequently present a psycho-social cultural profile of the communities less favorable to cooperation, tourist welcoming attitude and entrepreneurial initiatives.

- Considering the identity lever, on the long term, of all tourism types, cultural heritage tourism could re-kindlere-light and fuel most efficiently (ancient, previous) inter-group prejudices and tensions;

We appreciate that the current existing support in the literature justifies the next logical step of elaborating new models on the rural and cultural tourism premises and testing certain psycho-social dimensions defining the cultural profile of the communities involved in tourism activities along cultural routes as mediators or moderators of a rich traditional cultural heritage on the successful implementation of tourism activities and the willingness of the communities to collaborate along the axis. After gathering enough evidence about the soundness of those mediation and moderation models, using different output variables to measure the overall tourism development of the route or the communities` willingness to collaborate, a set of critical psycho-social variables for tourism activities implementing should be established. Then, a more refined set of studies should identify critical cutting-off point values in the case of those psycho-social critical dimension in order to facilitate tourism favorability diagnoses and efficiency diagnoses in allotting and spending funding for developing tourism activities in rural areas.

Apart from this potential economic impact, a social impact of this methodological endeavor should result through a social diagnose regarding the cooperation proneness, the cohesion and the premises for developing a shared spirit that such an axis entails. Prospecting those psycho-social characteristics before starting a tourism initiative could contribute to improving the training of authorities implementing the projects regarding the challenges expected to overcome. Assessing critical human capital feature for tourism development helps the authorities and the stakeholders contemplating the idea of implementing tourism activities in a traditional village with shorter and less costly means of "pre-diagnosing" how reliable the human capital of the respective village is for developing such activities. Some of the attributes though, if they have critical values, are not to be overcome (critical mistrust culture, critical social-distance or inter-group prejudice, critical low level of openness towards alterity, etc.). Proposing and testing widely new moderation

and mediation models on tourism performance will contribute to addressing previous gaps identified in the literature such as the lack of a holistic view and systematic research in order to understand the impact of tourism in ethnic (Yang et al., 2013) or rural communities in general, the heavily contextualization of the characteristics of studies on tourism`s impacts (Ryan et al., 2011) and the relative lack of empirical evidence as to the functions of social conflict and its relationship with tourism development (Yang et al., 2013).

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