

## WOODEN CHURCHES OF LĂPUȘ LAND – SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

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**ABSTRACT. – Wooden Churches of Lăpuș Land – Sustainable Travel Destinations.**

The church is a holy institution founded for the salvation of people and consists of believers who profess the same faith, being an active organ in continuing the work of salvation in the world, where human life is united with the divine life. The church is joined in meditation, leads to the knowledge of itself in communion with heaven, with something that is not tangible, something that goes beyond human understanding and reason; in church we keep quiet to hear God's voice in our consciousness. Lăpuș Land is one of the most sustainable tourist destinations which have more than twenty wooden churches, masterpieces of outstanding artistic and technical achievements, elements that are harmoniously integrated in the specific land, evidencing the faith and unity of the Romanian people.

The oldest wooden church in Lăpuș Land is the wooden church in Rogoz (1663), included on the list of World Heritage Sites, followed by four other churches that belong to the seventeenth century: Sfinții Arhangheli in Libotin (1671), Sfânta Parascheva in Rogoz (1695), Adormirea Maicii Domnului in Lăpuș (1697) and Biserica Sfinții Arhangheli in Vima Mică. Eleven churches belong to the eighteenth century: Dobric (1701), Drăghia (1706), Cupșeni (1733), Răzoare (1740), Dobric (1740), Ungureni (1760), Larga (1771), Libotin (1776), Inău (1778), Cupșeni (1778), Boiereni (1782). During the nineteenth century, the faith and unity of the nation is strengthened by the building and conservation of eight churches: Poiana Botizii (1825), Peteritea (1842), Groape (1842), Stoiceni (1860), Costeni (1875), Răzoare (1875), Costeni (1888) and Fântânele (1900). Three elements were and are essential and obligatory for church building: Man, Wood and God. The paper will present the manner in which these places become tourist attractions and what they need to be a sustainable tourist destination.

**Keywords:** *sustainable tourist destinations, wooden churches, conservation, tradition, faith.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a sector in a continuous development of national and global importance. Romania has a varied natural potential, to which one adds the valuable cultural and historical heritage, represented by churches, monastic complexes, architecture and art monuments, historical centers and archaeological sites. The sustainable development of tourism is a continuous process and involves the monitoring of the impact that this activity has on environmental factors and aims at maintaining a high level of tourist satisfaction, increasing their awareness about the principles of sustainability and the promotion of the best tourism practices.

The most important principle regarding sustainable development concerns the protection and conservation of the values of the present generations, so that the needs of the future generations be satisfied without compromise. An exceptional heritage is represented by the wooden churches in Romania, which might be considered as sustainable tourism destinations. Useful contributions have been made over time by church and state authorities to preserve and improve the quality of these buildings. Wooden churches in Transylvania are very famous in the world, especially for their purely artistic qualities, proportions, soundness, clarity, details, contrast and also because they fit into the landscape. The wooden churches in Romania usually show a high artistic quality (Steinbrucker, 1932), being the popular soul expression (Petranu, 1934), mirroring the soul of the people (Bloch, 1932), proving a developed artistic taste and a long practice in the wooden art (Henry, 1930).

The Romanian people are essentially traditionalist and conservative. Popular art subsisted until today, preserving both wood and stone architecture (Petranu, 1934). Wooden churches express many of nation's attributes (Erixon, 1934). Architecture defines the people because there is a Romanian religious art which have its own personality unique in the world (Alazard, 1933). The wooden churches value consists of a distinctive note that manifests as a whole, presenting a number of common features, such as: rectangular planimetry, oblong between sunrise and sunset, nave arching roof of four slopes and workmanship quality (Petrescu, 1974). Technique, form and decoration vary very much from one region to another, depending on the different living conditions of the community. Woodworking requires both artistic sense, dexterity and also skills necessary for the processing. The ornamental style prevails over geometrical style and the wooden objects decoration includes floral, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs. Wood primacy in this sacred architecture is due to both natural potential and also the strong tradition in wooden art. The tradition to build wooden churches has been very important in the countryside until the second half of the nineteenth century, influencing some churches from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and even 20<sup>th</sup> century, built by using stronger

materials (Retegan, 1995). Over time, wood was the main raw material for Romanian people and it was used in constructions, in the manufacture of tools, objects and furniture products. The craftsmen, showing patience and talent, can give life to wood which identify the Romanians as a nation, by preserving the traditions of our ancestors. In this technique of wooden work, there are many types of wood which are used differently: strong essences such as fir and oak wood are used in constructions, beech is used for the chests of drawers, horn and nuts are used for beat herding, ash frames for doors and windows and maple and lime for distaffs, spoons and boxes.

### ***1.1. The aim and purpose of the study***

The main purpose of this study consists in outlining the strategies for the conservation and promotion of wooden churches in Lăpuș Land, for their inclusion in package tours.

To achieve the study purpose, the next steps are performed:

- the identification of the defining elements that provide value to these masterworks;
- the determination of the attractiveness depending on age, degree of conservation and accessibility.

The research results will be supported by maps and photos.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study is the result of the activity of documentation and information, the interpretation of bibliographic material from the involved scientific literature and also the result of the fieldwork and the interpretation of data and the information obtained.

The scientific research methods used for the study are: the direct observation method, the indirect observation method, the analysis method, the induction method, the deduction and selective method, the dynamic method, the comparison and the hystorical-geographical method.

## **3. THE RESULTS AND THE INTERPRETATION. CASE STUDY: THE CHURCHES OF ROGOZ AND LĂPUȘ**

Lăpuș Land is considered one of the most important areas especially for wood architecture and artistic achievements, which have left prints of the solid faith and skillful craftsmen of the past.

“Wooden churches were the first cultural centers which have ensured the preservation and circulation of Romanian old qualities” (Bott, 2014).

On the UNESCO World Heritage List, there are eight wooden churches in Maramureș, including “Sfinții Arhangheli Mihail și Gavril” Church in Rogoz village, Lăpuș Land. This church was constructed in 1663, as stated by the inscription at the entrance, after the Tartar invasion from 1661.



**Fig. 1.** The church in Rogoz  
(photo: author)



**Fig. 2.** Church rood screen  
(photo: author)



**Fig. 3.** Painting fragment  
(photo: author)



**Fig. 4.** “Horse heads” and “the old men table” (photo: author)

Some of the fundamental features of the church are the following:

- Architecture: elm solid wood beams concluded as mails with seven sides, the nave with aisles without the porch;
- A unique element is the end of beams which supports the eaves, having a “horse head” form (125 heads) and in the East a gallop is represented, which symbolize the running toward eternity;
- The door frame has a gothic element in the upper side in the form of accolade;
- The roof was made asymmetrically with a very expanded north side, having the purpose to protect the wood old ancestors called “the old men table”. This table is designed for official “alms” in the memory of those people who passed away and consists of two hewn beams and cross sectional notched lines.
- The tower has an element rarely found in the area, an almost conical coif with turrets at the corners.
- Outside, on the southern side, the median wall shows the twisted rope motif which symbolizes the tree of life and the connection between earth and heaven.
- The painting made by Radu Munteanu and Nicolae Man is similar in style with the painting made in the church of Desești, showing bright colors and thick limes.

As opposed to the church in Rogoz, meant for peasants, the church in Lăpuș was built in 1582 for the nobility, being called “Nemeșilor (Noblemen’s) Church” (Bott, 2014). It is also registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List and it has the following fundamental features:

- The architecture preserves the traditions of Maramureș wooden churches, so the church was built of wood carved with the axe and has a stone foundation;
- Like the church in Rogoz, the church in Lăpuș also has an “old men table” but in this case the table is situated on the southern side, near the entrance in the church;
- The tower is simple, the turrets are no longer present as in the case of the church in Rogoz.
- A remarkable piece of a great artistic value is the entrance gate from the vestibule in the nave. This door has geometrical motifs such as triangles which simbolize the mastery of the feelings;
- The entrance door is simple, as it is decorated only on hinges;
- In the vestibule, some fragments of the original painting are preserved, including episodes from “The Last Judgment” and “The Passion of Christ”;

- The west wall shows a rarely seen scene, named “The wheel world”: a wheel with eight spokes. On each spoke there is a number and a phrase which reveals the manner in which people think about when they have a that age (25 years old – the world is delightful, 40 years old – who is like me, 60 years old – oh, world, how wrong I was);
- The painting was made by the same artist as in the church of Rogoz (Radu Munteanu);



**Fig. 5.** The church in Lăpuș  
(photo: author)

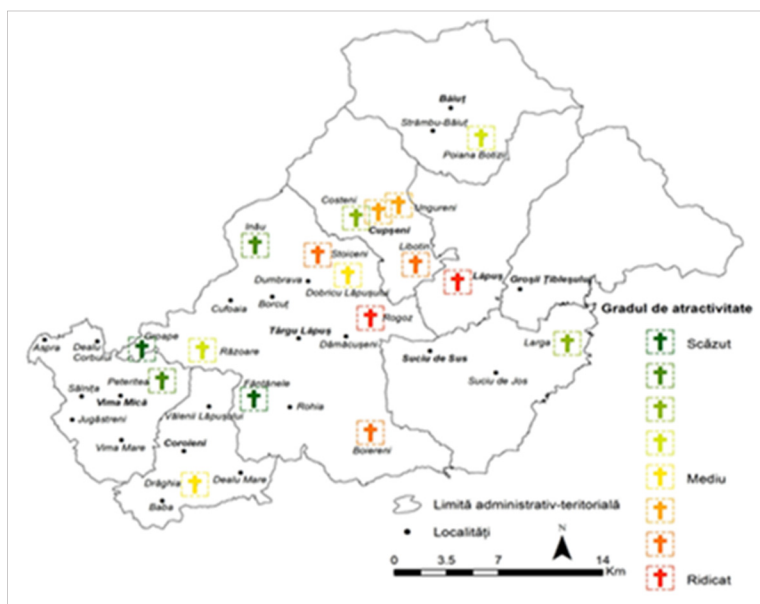


**Fig. 6.** The gate entrance to the  
nave (photo: author)

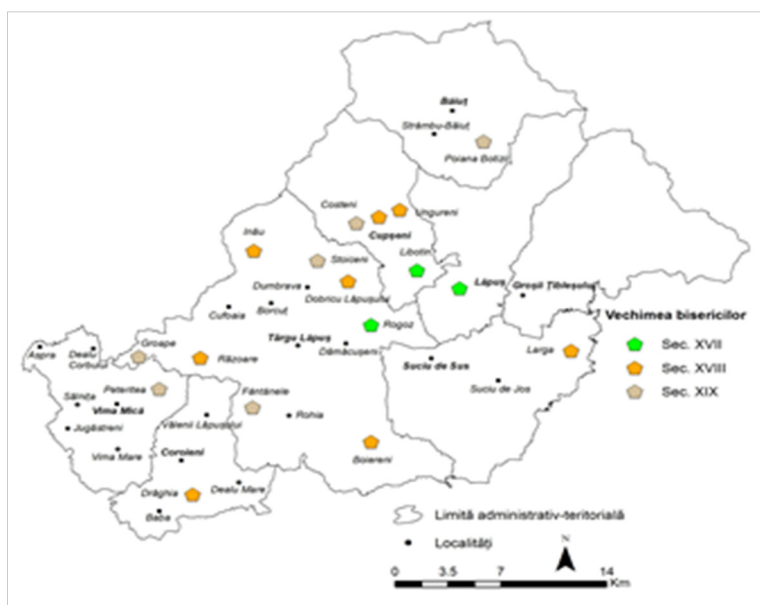
Arrived in front of this church, one does not know what to admire first: the spirit of meticulousness and patience of the rural craftsmen, the brilliant manner in which they blended certain architectural laws, “the artistic beauty of the entire sanctuary and the lonely parties, clarity of lines, the solid building, groomed design, light changes and shadow, harmony with surrounding fusion power and grace of the entire” (Steinbrucker, 1932).

In Lăpuș Land geographical space, ancient faith and the culture of these people have left clear traces in these churches that last from unbridled human care to earth and country and also for soul and traditions.

In order to highlight the attractiveness of the wooden churches of Lăpuș Land, we took into account: the age, degree of conservation, the distance to polarizing centers and accessibility. Thus, it came out that the churches in Rogoz and Lăpuș have the highest degree of attractiveness, followed by the churches in Libotin, Stoiceni, Boiereni and Cupșeni. In the analysis of the maps, one notices that the oldest churches are in a high state of conservation and they are the most attractive ones, thus emphasizing the sustainable development character of the wooden churches in Lăpuș Land.



**Fig. 7.** The attractiveness of the wooden churches in Lăpuș Land (source: the author)



**Fig. 8.** The age of the wooden churches in Lăpuș Land (source: the author)

### ***Strategies of conservation and promotion of wooden churches in the area studied***

General strategic objectives:

1. Ecclesiastical heritage conservation;
2. Tourism promotion of wooden churches;
3. Sustainable maintenance of wooden churches;

Programmes, measures, policies:

- 1.1. The renovation of facades;
- 1.2. The restoration of the painting according to the specific and authentic painting in the area;
- 1.3. The inclusion of the churches on the built heritage lists of the area for their protection;
- 2.1. The creation of promotional flyers;
- 2.2. The creation of websites for promotion;
- 2.3. The setting of common tourist information points, represented by panels and information offices;
- 2.4. The setting of pilgrimage tours and cultural-religious tourism circuits;
- 3.1. The rational use of funds for the preservation of wooden churches;
- 3.2. The development of a climate of cooperation between locals, church and local government, whose purpose is to protect the religious buildings concerned;
- 3.3. The development of access infrastructure.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

**Table 1.** SWOT Analysis of Lăpuș Land

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ High number of wooden churches;</li> <li>➤ Important objectives in religious, architectural and historical terms;</li> <li>➤ A high degree of attractiveness based on seniority, conservation and accessibility;</li> <li>➤ An abundance of ornaments, sculptures and motifs;</li> <li>➤ Their inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Poor infrastructure;</li> <li>➤ Insufficient/lack of promotion of local tourism (information points, boards, leaflets);</li> <li>➤ Large distance from the polarizing centers;</li> </ul>



OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Awareness and involvement of people in the protection of ecclesiastical heritage;</li> <li>➤ The development of local partnerships;</li> <li>➤ Installation of information boards and leaflet distribution;</li> <li>➤ The development of cultural tourism circuits and religious pilgrimage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Insufficient promotion attracts a small number of tourists.</li> <li>➤ Lack of education and training systems to support sustainable development.</li> </ul>

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