Pensiuni in Romania:

Rediscovering and Reinventing the Countryside through Tourism

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I, Maria Miruna Rădan Gorska, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

To my grandfather, who told me once, when I was a child,
that the most important thing is to be curious about the world.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Rural tourism is a long-established practice in the industrialised West, but it is a comparatively recent and on-going development in postsocialist contexts. This thesis examines the development of rural tourism in Romania and draws on fieldwork carried out in one of the oldest and most popular destinations of the country, as well as in a newer and less visited location. As homestays are central to rural tourism, my research has an extensive focus on what happens with guesthouses and their owners.

Countryside tourism is a practice grounded in a discourse that praises images of unspoilt nature, close-knit communities, material and cultural heritage and natural healthy food. Discourses about rurality also suggest that for city dwellers, village stays in their own countries can provide a way of getting in touch with their national identity, building, at the same time a sense of belonging. In Romania, such discourses are promoted by NGOs, state institutions and tour operators that aim to develop rural tourism. In spite of their efforts, in the destinations that I studied, rural tourism has strayed away from the ideal model. Instead of bucolic cottages inspired by the vernacular architecture of the region, hosts welcome their guests into large, modern villas equipped with state-of-the art amenities. Tourists too show a strong concern with material aspects of their accommodation, they rarely venture in outdoor pursuits and have little interest in notions of 'heritage' or 'traditions'.

My findings show that the lived experiences of local entrepreneurs have shaped worldviews that in many respects are at odds with the ideal models and best tourism practices promoted by various institutions. I also show how hosts and guests share similar notions of achievement and success and how this has turned rural tourism into a house-centred event. In explaining why discourses have little grounding in reality, I pay close attention to the economics of tourism, trying to understand guesthouses as businesses interlinked both with the wider forces of the market and with the socio-economic history of rural Romania. I show how the development of *pensiuni* was influenced by specific material and social constraints, arguing that a long history of living under oppressive regimes actually endowed locals with qualities that made them ready to embark on entrepreneurial pursuits. I also examine how kinship can be both a catalyst for growth and a factor that contributes to the stagnation or decline of businesses. Most notably, however, it was the unstable and burdensome legislative environment that had perhaps the strongest impact over the evolution of guesthouses, determining over half of the owners to stay in the shadow economy.

My findings raise questions about the effectiveness and utility of many of the norms currently imposed on tourist entrepreneurs and I conclude by discussing a few ways in which institutions could respond better to the needs of guesthouse owners.

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A note on translations and conversions

I will be using the Romanian '*pensiune*' (sg.) and '*pensiuni*' (pl.) interchangeably with 'guesthouse' or 'guesthouses'. I believe the Romanian term describes a specific local reality and by using this form I can capture better the distinctiveness of these accommodation units. At the same time, alternating between the Romanian and English terms helps to avoid the tedious repetition of the same word. All other Romanian words used in this thesis are written in italics and they are accompanied by the English translation.

1 Km = 0.62 Miles

1 RON (Romanian New Leu) or simply Leu = 0.16 GBP

1 EUR (Euro) = 0.71 GBP

Although Romania is not using the euro currency, often people refer to larger amounts of money by converting them into euro. Especially in the realm of business, references to euro are very frequent.

Introduction

An idyllic countryside enchanting tourists and inciting ethnographers

These are people who recount with such carefulness and simplicity the story of their lives, the story of life in the countryside, with all the hardship, but also with all the satisfactions they experience. They have never let themselves be defeated and they have continued their way through life, so that today they can come before us with their warm smile, a smile that transmits a hospitality that only in these places you can find. We must look at them, understand them, respect them and take pride in such people, simple folk that have something to teach us, people that bring honour to this country, this nation, people that Romania is proud to have, symbols of our nation. [...] As we kept on walking, our attention was drawn by the locals' children who were wearing so proudly their traditional garb. Their innocence and purity were blending perfectly with the ancestral activities of these places. They are not simply village children, they are more than that, they are rural symbols, clear examples of the continuity of Romanian traditions, inherited from their parents and grandparents, traditions of which today, they are proud of. You can notice this from the warmth of their look and their smiles. [...] What is left for us is to stop for a few seconds, look at them, read the story in their eyes and rejoice, because today, in Moieciu, we encountered unspoiled tradition, in its purest form, far from any interest (Catană 2011:21).

I open with this lengthy passage because it brings into light many of the issues that will be discussed in this thesis. It is also a good illustration of a style of discourse that generated my initial curiosity about countryside tourism in Romania. The fragment was published in a glossy magazine called 'Holidays in the Countryside' (*Vacanțe la țară*) and it describes a scene witnessed during a local fair in the commune of Moieciu. The fair is an enhanced version of a village market, where local farmers come to sell their produce. With the support of an NGO, this event has been turned into a tourist attraction. Activities became more performative: villagers are dressed in their old embroidered folk garments and, apart from selling their produce they are also showing its production process, weaving or cooking in front of the public. This is a discourse

that extols the virtues of the countryside, placing local villagers at the centre and describing them as symbols of the Romanian people who safeguard 'traditions' and display them with pride. These people are also depicted as perfect hosts, extending a warm, uninterested welcome to their visitors.

The general aim of my research was to bring answers to three central questions: what generated this discourse? how do these images of the countryside spread? and what are the realities behind these representations? My thesis progresses from depicting the universe of idyllic representations that frame the practice of tourism through the challenges that people face when becoming guesthouse owners and to the worldviews and aspirations held by tourists and hosts engaged in particular social encounters and consumption practices.

As my title suggests, this thesis is inspired by Hobsbawm's seminal ideas about the 'invention of traditions' (Hobsbawm [1983] 2013). As he argued, an appendage of modern times, tied with the accelerated social changes they ushered in and with the emergence of nation states, is the 'invention of traditions', the process by which societies invest particular practices with meanings that are meant to link them with the past, establishing their continuity through time, while also predicating the unchanging nature of their form (idem). The invention of traditions can play an important role in shaping national identities and in legitimising political institutions (idem). By extending this notion and discussing about the 'reinvention' of the Romanian countryside, my aim is to show how a place, together with the particular practices it generates, can be made and remade, discovered and rediscovered, and even represented simultaneously in contradictory ways by the different groups of people and institutions that engage with it: both as a repository of 'tradition' and 'authenticity' and as a marker of modernity.

Broadly, the analytic strategies I follow belong to the 'post-modern' trend in anthropological thought. Rather than striving for a unifying theory, I try to account for both continuity and change, structure and agency and I also take into account various discursive fields which I try to understand as a type of action, not concerning myself with their truthfulness, but rather with their use value. I rely, therefore, on a sort of 'composite' theory, whereby for understanding different aspects of the social realities I studied, I resort to literature from a variety of research. In the comparative tradition of anthropology, I often play one category against another: domestic and foreign guests, local and migrant entrepreneurs, discourse and practice, the Apuseni and the Bran-Moieciu areas, the patterns and the exceptions. My approach is built with an awareness of the wider historic and economic context, while also keeping a self-reflexive

orientation. Below, I present in brief how my main research relates to these disciplinary frameworks and I also highlight the contribution I make to expanding some of these areas.

This thesis falls under more recent analytical approaches in the anthropology of tourism that encourage a holistic approach. I wanted to give a voice to all stakeholders involved in the development of rural destinations: governmental bodies, NGOs, tour operators, individual entrepreneurs, and tourists. Given the space and methodological constraints, the weight of my data comes from the last two categories, while the presence of the other groups is less prominent. My findings are discussed by revisiting some of the classic debates in the anthropology of tourism, but I also develop new lines of inquiry and I draw from literature outside the anthropology of tourism, such as post-socialism (Creed 2002, Hann 1996, Verdery 2004, Kideckel 2010, Heintz 2005), entrepreneurship (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2004, Gudeman 2005, Smallbone and Welter 2009), informal economy (Giordano 2013, Castells and Portes 1989, Portes and Haller 2005, Bovi 2005) or conspiracy theories (Grant 1999, Marcus 1999, Pelkmans *et al.* 2011, Sanders and West 2003).

Turning to tourism literature, in examining the advertising discourse used to promote rural destination I maintain awareness of current theories about the processual and negotiated nature of 'authenticity' (Cohen and Cohen 2012), and I also extend it to include ideas about 'traditions' or 'nature' – which also emerged in my research as constructed concepts that take different meanings for different actors.

So far, the study of destination promotion has often turned to brochures (Dann 1996, Yarwood 2005, Butler and Hall 1998) or postcards (Edwards 1996). My thesis develops this area by looking at evidence from internet advertising, a medium of growing relevance in the contemporary travel industry.

While the classic academic scholarship on tourism looked at destinations that have emerged in colonial and post-colonial contexts, more recent decades were marked by a growth in research done in European destinations (Abram *et al.* 1997, Boissevain 1996) which also takes into account domestic tourism. My thesis ads to this literature by discussing domestic tourism in a post-socialist context – a region from which there is still a limited body of ethnographic evidence. As I show in more detail in sections 2.18 and 2.1.9, a lot of the research coming from Southeast Europe is informed by policy and planning agendas and takes a macro approach (Kukorelli 2011; Przezborska 2005; Kizos and Iosifides 2007; Gosiou *et al.* 2001). The same is true for the case of Romania, where much of the research on rural tourism relied just on quantitative data

(Turnock 1999; Benedek and Dezsi 2004) or on brief episodes of fieldwork (Văetişi 2006, Iorio and Corsale 2010). Lengthier ethnographic research concentrated on one particular area of Romania, Maramureş, which is popular among foreign tourists and advertised as one of the most 'traditional' and 'authentic' regions of the country (Catrina 2009, Hristescu 2007, Cippolari 2002, Nagy 2008). In this context, my thesis comes with evidence from a tourist destination which, in spite of being one of the oldest and most developed countryside attractions, has not been the subject of any research. Moreover, by looking at tourism in its wider political and economic context, my thesis both builds on and adds to the anthropology of post-socialist societies and to the growing body of ethnographic work focused on rural Romania (Mihăilescu 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013, Şişeştean 2011, Vasile 2010a, Iancău 2011, Iorga 2014, Umbreş 2014).

Thesis outline

After introducing the sites of my fieldwork and discussing my methods and sources in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2 I capture the socio-economic history of the destinations that I studied, showing how past political regimes have shaped particular outlooks that have left their mark on current practices. I then move on to describe how tourism developed over the past 25 years, showing how the accommodation offer has changed from a few rooms in villagers' homes to modern purpose-built villas equipped with state-of-the-art amenities. One of the questions I try to answer here is how does the tourist offer relate to notions like 'nature' or Romanian 'traditions' and 'heritage' which play such central roles in organisational and advertising discourses about the countryside.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the discursive fields of rural tourism. Here, I start by examining academic discourse, which gives me an opportunity for laying out the conceptual framework and theories that have guided anthropological research on tourism. I pay particular attention to findings from Romania and show how my questions relate to the existing body of knowledge emphasising, at the same time, the contributions that my research hopes to bring. Another discourse I am interested in is the 'lay' one. Describing it, I try to explain the historical background that generated idyllic representations of the countryside, such as the one I used in the opening of this section. Closely linked to Chapter 3, Chapter 4 is dedicated to institutional discourses about rural tourism, focusing on the promotional material authored by state institutions, NGOs, tour operators and private entrepreneurs and placing a stronger empahsis on the

interplay between discourse and institutional and entrepreneurial actions. Here, I take a closer look at an NGO that had an essential contribution to the development of rural tourism in Romania. This is the same organisation that supports the fair presented in my opening quote and also publishes the Holidays in the Countryside magazine in which the passage was published. I conclude by analysing the variety of discourses and discussing their points of convergence while suggesting that empirical realities are far more complex and complicated.

Chapter 5 moves from an aggregated view of tourism in Bran, Moieciu and Albac, to an analysis of individual strategies and particular business practices. My leading questions here are: how did villagers respond to the challenges and opportunities brought by the economy of tourism and how did they learn to be entrepreneurs? I outline a number of business typologies and show how tourism knowledge was shared and transformed. Here, I argue, kinship relations and access to non-local networks have played an important role in the development and survival of *pensiuni.* In this context, I touch on the case of failed businesses owned by non-local urbanites to illustrate some of the contradictions with which models such as 'neoliberalism' or 'capitalism' are riddled.

In Chapter 6 I focus on the tourist-host encounter and examine what tourists understand through 'hospitality', what are the expectations and the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 2001) they bring in, and what, according to them, makes their experience in a guesthouse good or bad. Turning to what local hosts have to say about their guests, I analyse how *pensiune* owners understand and anticipate the demands of their guests. These accounts relate to notions of success and accomplishment and touch on the issue of national identity, revealing specific ways of understanding the natural environment. Apart from capturing the particularities of Romanian rural tourism, my findings also bring into focus a wider post-socialist context of transformations.

The final chapter looks at the informal practices I encountered during my fieldwork. In the destinations that I studied, as in other parts of rural Romania, over half of the accommodation units are unregistered making tourism 'on the black' [market] widespread. I outline a typology of informal practices, dividing them into intended, unintended, and contextual and I discuss it in relation to the legislative framework and to the actions of those authorities responsible for enforcing regulations. In explaining these informal strategies, I take into account local sense-making strategies as well as wider national and historical contexts. I end with a discussion of the positive and

negative implications of informality and I make a number of suggestions that could help to develop more appropriate norms and policies regarding rural guesthouses.

Chapter 1

Tourist destinations in the Romanian countryside and my field site in the 'cradle of rural tourism'

The first attempts to institutionalise rural tourism in Romania date back to 1972. At that time, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism had identified 118 villages that were deemed suitable for domestic and international tourism, and one year later thirteen of them were officially declared to be of 'touristic interest' (Ministry of Regional Development and Toursim 2007:672). However, in 1974, a Governmental Decree banned the lodging of foreigners in private homes. With rural home-stays only intended for domestic tourists, institutional efforts to organise, register and certify houses destined for accommodation diminished significantly. The result was that most often the guests were not registered and the stays took place in an ad-hoc manner, based on informal arrangements with local hosts. Before the fall of the communist regime in 1989 there was basically no notion of rural tourism as an institutionalised practice. From 1990 onwards, rural tourism has been developing mainly through private small-scale initiatives and with the help of national and international organisations, leading, in some parts of the country, to a virtual 'boom' of tourism with the onset around the year 2000. Apart from the owners of guesthouses, there are not many tourist service providers in rural areas. The rural tourism offer is closely interlinked with home stays and this is why my research has an extensive focus on *pensiuni*.
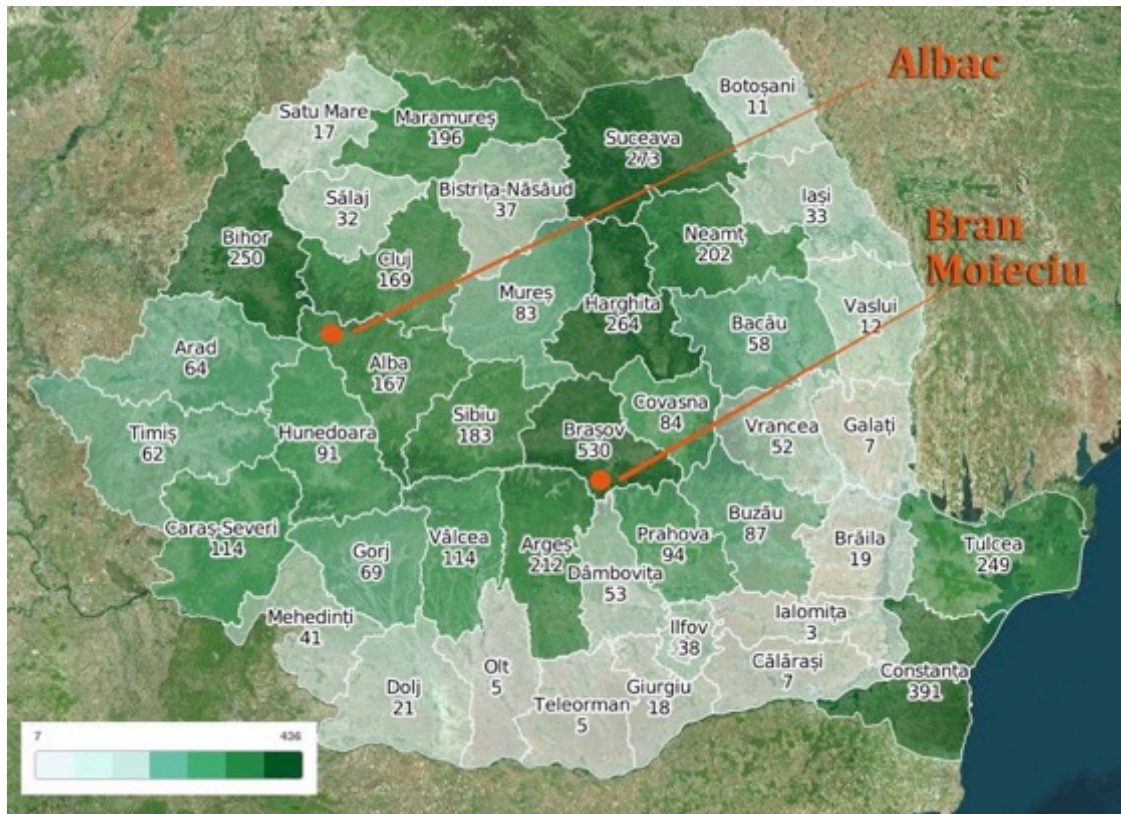
Figure 1 – The distribution of rural accommodation across the Romanian districts with the sites of my fieldwork marked with a red dot.

The distribution of guesthouse across Romania shows that rural tourism is a highly selective phenomenon, concentrated mostly around the Carpathian arc and along the seaside. 7 of the 42 administrative districts of the country gather over half of the existing *pensiuni*. Brașov has the leading position, with the highest number of guesthouses in the country. This is because, as mass media and promotional discourse often argue, this is the setting of 'the cradle of Romanian rural tourism' (Bădulescu 2011; Agrotour 2013). Bran and Moieciu, two adjacent communes[1] in the district of Brașov, grew into the most popular countryside destinations in Romania. Although official statistics suggest that there are around 500 *pensiuni* in the area, considering that a significant part of rural guesthouse in Romania are unregistered, real numbers are two or three times higher.

The commune of Bran covers a surface of 68 km², it encompasses the Bran, Simon, Sohodol and Predeluț villages and has a population of 5326 (INS Tempo), while its adjacent Moieciu spreads over 94 km², it has 4662 inhabitants (INS Tempo) and includes the villages of Moieciu de Sus, Moieciu de Jos, Măgura, Peștera, Drumul Carului and Cheia. These settlements are found in South Transylvania, in a pass in the

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[1] Villages in Romania are grouped in administrative units called communes (*comune*).

Carpathians between the Bucegi and Piatra Craiului mountains. They are located at altitudes ranging between 750 m and 1350 m, with villages along the valley more densely populated than the ones found on higher ground and on steeper terrain. *Pensiuni* numbers reflect this distribution, as the map below illustrates. While villages like Moieciu de Sus or Moieciu de Jos, lying mostly along the flat valley bed, have 77 and 66 guesthouses, Măgura, located on the hilly outskirts of the commune, only has 7.

Figure 2 – The distribution of guesthouses in the district of Braşov, including the villages that belong to the communes of Bran and Moieciu.

Although I did not spend equal time in all of the villages, throughout this thesis I mostly refer to Bran and Moieciu as a whole. This is consistent with the tourism promotion discourse that packages both communes as a single destination and it is also supported by the fairly similar empirical realities found across these villages.

Apart from the picturesque scenery, with hilly meadows bordered by forests and high mountain peaks, there were a number of other factors that created a favourable context for tourism in the area. Its proximity to the town of Braşov and to established mountain resorts such as Predeal, Buşteni and Sinaia, all within 50 km distance, and the relative short distance to the capital city (170 km) made Bran and Moieciu an accessible destination for a large number of urbanites. The region initially acquired visibility because of the medieval castle of Bran, which became the residence of Queen Mary of Romania at the beginning of the 20th century. The first accounts about tourism in the area date back to this period when, in the hot summer of 1927, there were 400 tourists

registered with the local authorities[2]. Apart from two small hotels, each with only two rooms, lodging was possible with 'all the residents of Bran's centre' as well as with locals from the surrounding villages (Moşoiu 1930:93). The development of tourism was curtailed during the socialist period when private businesses were banned. Nonetheless, a small number of urbanites continued to spend their holidays in the region and made informal hosting arrangements with the locals. After 1989, some of these urbanites have bought land and they have built their own houses in Bran and Moieciu, houses that were often turned into *pensiuni*. Their growing interest for the region, coupled with the advertising efforts of a very active NGO, have set Brand and Moieciu on their way of becoming the popular destinations they are today. Given that the Bran castle has been linked to the fictional character of Dracula, my Western readers may expect that tourism development in the villages surrounding the castle is a consequence of this myth. Indeed, many foreigners come to see the castle for this reason, but their trips are often brief and they do not visit the surrounding villages. 'Dracula tourism' and 'rural tourism' rarely intersect. Domestic tourists, who are the most numerous in the region, have very little interest for this myth and, with very few exceptions, tourism in Bran and Moieciu has not been built around this image[3]. To Romanians, the voivode Vlad Ţepeş who has been linked to the image of Dracula is a positive historic figure and, as Light has showed, they have been reluctant to embrace this myth (2007a; 2007b).

The other location of my fieldwork is Albac, a commune comprising 16 villages[4] with 2250 inhabitants, found in the centre of Transylvania, in the Apuseni Mountains (Western Carpathians) along the Arieş river valley (Berindei and Todea 2010:13-14). The administrative unit covers a surface of 54 km² and many of its villages are spread across the mountain slopes with altitudes ranging from 630 m to 1100 m. Compared to Bran and Moieciu, this is a young tourist destination with its dawn at the beginning of the 1990s. Official statistics register only 20 guesthouses in Albac and 40 in the neighbouring Arieşeni, an older skiing destination.

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[2] Moşoiu notes that real numbers could have been higher as not all tourists would register with the local authorities (1930:93).

[3] The main exception is the thriving souvenir industry in the vicinity of the castle, capitalising on Dracula's story. Also, in 2008 I came across a guesthouse named The Vampire's Nest (*Cuibuşorul Vampirilor*). It seems that the business was not very successful as today the *pensiune* has new ownership and a new name.

[4] Albac, Bărăşti, Budăieşti, Cioneşti, Costeşti, Dealu Lămăşoi, Deve, După Pleşe, Faţa, Pleşeşti, Potionci, Rogoz, Roşeşti, Ruseşti, Sohodol, Tamboreşti.
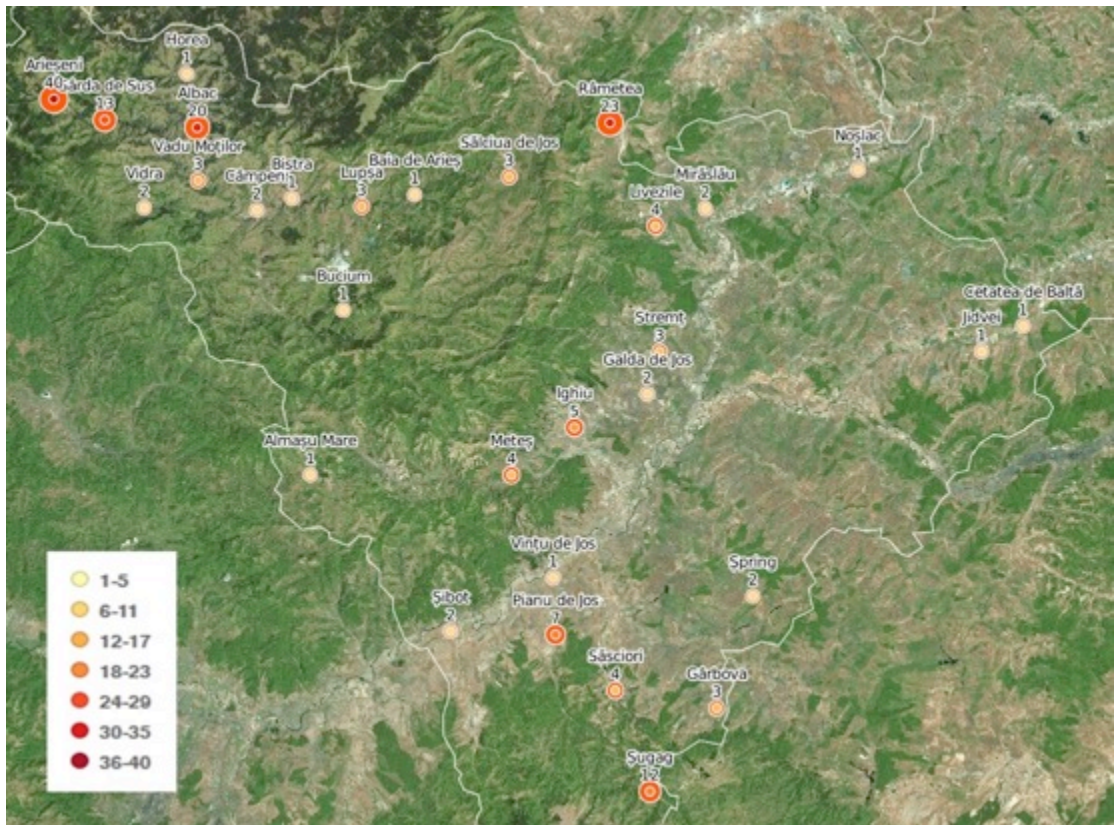
Figure 3 – The distribution of guesthouses in Alba district showing in more detail the number of *pensiuni* from the villages that belong to Albac.

The main attraction of the region is Scărişoara, a 4000 years old cave which shelters what is believed to be the largest underground iceberg in the world, with a volume of 75000 cm³. Ghețar and its neighbouring villages also have a large number of old houses, some of them with architecture that is unique in Romania and very rare throughout Europe, with roofs made of fir-tree branches and suspended foundations on rock piles called 'legs' (Corpade and Suciu 2009). Apart from Albac, I made short visits to nearby communes of Gârda de Sus, Arieşeni, Ghețar, Horea and Vadul Moților. Tourism promotion usually packages these destinations under the name of their neighbouring mountains, the Apuseni and throughout this thesis I will refer interchangeably to Albac and Apuseni. Although these neighbouring settlements have similar landscape and they are within comparable distances to local attractions, there is noticeable variation regarding the development of tourism. As the map above illustrates, *pensiuni* are concentrated in Albac and its neighbouring Gârda de Sus and Arieşeni.

1.1. Methods and sources

This thesis explores ethnographic data gathered during several periods of fieldwork in two of the most popular rural destinations in Romania, between the winter of 2007/2008 and the summer of 2013. My first visit was in Bran, in January 2008, when I did

research for my MPhil thesis. This was followed by longer stays, first in Albac, between August and September 2011, then again in Bran, from June to September 2012, and finally, in Moieciu, in July 2013. My main source of data comes from conducting over one hundred unstructured interviews with guesthouse owners, administrators, tourists, and other tourism practitioners. I have recorded and partly transcribed seventy of these discussions. The guiding criteria for selecting my respondents were their availability and willingness to take part in my research. On an average, I only succeeded in one out of three or four attempts at getting someone to speak to me[5]. I contextualised these interview accounts through participant observation carried out while I stayed in seven different *pensiuni* and worked as a volunteer in four of them. This gave me valuable access to the 'backstages' of tourism and many of my insights came from taking part in the day-to-day life of guesthouses. Given the sensitive nature of some of the topics, there are obvious limitations with the interview and participant observation methods. Most people avoided going into details about their negative experiences with dissatisfied tourists or about the thriving informal tourism economy. Fortunately, the Internet offered a way to overcome this shortcoming. Apart from fieldwork, I also engaged in extensive research online, looking at tourism advertising websites, accommodation reviews written by tourists and at mass media articles about the 'black market' of Romanian rural tourism. The online content proved a valuable resource and two of my chapters draw significantly from this material. Finally, I also attended two tourism promotion fairs and one international conference on rural tourism, dedicated to various practitioners in the field.

1.1.1. Deconstructing my own gaze: a brief self-reflexive journey

Urry (2002) famously argued that tourism builds gazes, that there are pre-set expectations and representations one acquires before travelling to a destination. In certain ways a tourist myself, I too arrived to the field with a 'baggage' of images and hopes. However, when many of my expectations were not met, I could not return home and dismiss the entire experience by writing a negative review on a travel advice website. I had, instead, to face the disenchantment and see things anew. Gradually I

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[5] There were a few recurrent discursive strategies people used for turning down my request. They were saying that they were just setting up their guesthouse so they did not know much about tourism, they would direct me to some of the biggest and most well-known *pensiuni* in the area, they would say that their children who happened to be out at that moment actually managed the business, or they would simply say that they have no time to speak - and in case I wanted to schedule another meeting, nor would they have any time later on. As Dresch and James point out, 'the forms in which they accept, reject or ignore one's presence are open to understanding and are integral to what one learns' (2000:21). I will discuss later in my thesis some of the reasons why people were reluctant to receive me.

began building different representations and stories that hopefully are more true to the experiences of people who participate in rural tourism. Part of this process meant turning the critical eye on myself and understanding why I was attached to certain pre-set notions and research questions. Because this transition was an integral part of my research I feel that the following self-reflexive account should not be left out.

Since I came to Anthropology after doing a BA in Sociology at the University of Bucharest, I should start with a few words about the historic and institutional background of ethnographic research in my home country. I must add, however, that it is difficult to untangle how much my pre-set ideas were shaped by a particular academic environment, and the extent to which they were drawn from a more general cultural background[6] shared by most Romanians. While 'anthropology at home' is a fairly recent development in British and American academia, for Romanian ethnographers the field was from the onset 'at home'. Ethnographic research in Romania was underpinned for a long time by a political project aiming to chart the 'essential' qualities and expressions of the 'nation'. Particularly during the late socialist period, this agenda was shaping all of the institutional contexts in which ethnographers were trained and worked. At the core of their research agendas were notions like 'traditional culture', folklore, and the peasant as the emblematic and 'authentic Romanian' (Hedeşan 2008:2; Mihăilescu 2009:8). Similar to the 19th century folklorists of Brittany and Gaelic Scotland described by Chapman (1995), ethnographers were 'freezing the frame', recording what they perceived as 'authentic' folklore, creating a 'snapshot' of otherwise dynamic aspects of social life at one particular moment in history and therefore denying and dismissing as 'inauthentic' any subsequent change.

In terms of methods, an older practice in the Romanian Sociological School that pre-dated the communist regime, involved teams of researchers, including students, conducting fieldwork together (Hedeşan 2008:21) and relied on short, repeated visits rather than on a long uninterrupted period (Vulcănescu 1998). In the post 1989 decades, mirroring trends in the Western academia, Romanian social sciences incorporated other fields of interest and methodological approaches. With newly found self-reflexivity (Mihăilescu 2009:9), one of the main missions of Sociology became the deconstruction of the model of the nation centred on ethno-folkloric elements and promoted by the communist-era ethnology (10). Added to this was a growing interest for looking at contextual, everyday practices and focusing on marginal groups (13). Institutionally,

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[6] I will return to this issue later on when I discuss how representations of rurality and peasantry are linked with the Romanian national identity.

Anthropology only sepparated from Sociology in the mid 2000s and currently only a couple of universities in the country offer both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the field. Ethnographic research carried out within these departments often follows the same collective and short term style of fieldwork, but there are also some academics who pursue more legthy and solitary projects.

Although much has changed in the recent period, there are some voices arguing that the pre 1989 past of Sociology is still 'casting its shadows' (Iorga 2014). I was recently part of a conference panel that challenged participants to examine this claim. My talk was based on a short biographic note and I tried to show how, in subtle ways, I had brought in my own work some of the ideas and practices I described above as dotting the history of social research in Romania. Born and raised in Bucharest, I only came to experience the rural side of the country when, as an undergraduate student, I volunteered for several projects involving fieldwork in rural Romania. Following my first experience in a mountain village, I wrote a paper about 'values and values systems', where, although mentioning exterior influences in the lives of villagers, I was describing the community in a rather idyllic and static fashion. When I presented the text at a students' conference and someone asked me if I am not essentialising the idea of community, I did not really understand the question. Still drawn to the countryside, I chose once again a village as the focus of my final year dissertation. This time, with a stronger awareness about the interconnectedness between the urban and the rural, I studied urban to rural return migration. It was only later, during my masters' at Oxford and while teaching a seminar titled *Ethnographies* at Kent University, that I developed a different understanding of ethnography, both as a method and as a construction central to Anthropology. Most importantly, I acquired a critical and self-reflexive stance that allowed me to see how, to some extent, I had shared an idyllic and romantic vision of life in the countryside. Wondering what had driven my sociological pursuits to the countryside, I realised that a similar aesthetic approach is central to rural tourism. This inspired me to focus my MPhil and later my PhD on how such elusive things as 'traditions', 'local identity' or 'authenticity' were being constructed and marketed for tourist consumption. It seemed that although following a deconstructive stance, I could not keep myself too far from the established themes of Romanian ethnography. The final lesson came from fieldwork, where I had to abandon many of my initial assumptions and turn to other, more pressing and contemporary issues. I describe this below as I tell a brief story of my time on the field. Apart from all that I learned about rural tourism, this experience has offered me a deeper understanding of ethnographic

research. To use Okley's suggestive phrasing, I had to move from a 'tunnel vision', where I relied on pre-set expectations and set ideas about what is relevant, to a 'funnel' one, where I was open and I could take everything in (Okely 2011). It was only through practice that I could truly grasp Dresch and James' cautionary words:

> *Anthropologists found out a long time ago that pre-set questions give back only what one chose to ask (11) [...] Until one stays and listens one genuinely does not know what the 'issues' are and everything pretending otherwise is obfuscation, an imposition of one group's vision on the complexities of others' lives* (Dresch and James 2002:14).

1.1.2. Field sites for an 'anthropotourist'

During the first two years of my PhD I was based in the UK and my only contact with rural tourism was through an online research of advertising material. I wanted to start by understanding the role of the Internet in the evolution of rural tourism. I believed that this new medium of communication played a significant role in creating inflows of tourists to particular destinations and in differentiating between successful and unsuccessful businesses, which I took as synonyms for *pensiuni* 'visible' or 'not visible' online. After I started fieldwork I had to shift my focus, as I understood that there are factors that have greater impact on the success of destinations and businesses. This did not mean completely abandoning my online explorations. Instead of making the Internet the subject of my research, I used it as a source of information: I looked at the promotional discourse created by tourism practitioners, I discovered some of the NGOs active in the area and I gained access to a wealth of information about tourists' experiences by looking at the travel stories and accommodation reviews that they wrote online.

My first trip to the field was in 2011 in Apuseni, where I went for the annual Rural Tourism Fair. I decided to return to Albac several weeks later to spend more time talking to guesthouse owners. During my stay there I interviewed owners from sixteen *pensiuni* and I documented eleven other cases from indirect sources. My methods were a mixture of unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Puri 2011:99) combined with chance conversations, followed by writing down what I considered to be interesting details. Most of the people I spoke to were villagers from Albac, the administrative centre of the commune. I also visited the neighbouring communes, documenting a few other cases and interviewing four owners in Vadul Moţilor, one owner in Arieşeni, and

one in Gârda de Sus. I wrote part of my upgrade paper based on this preliminary research. At the time I was contemplating the idea of a multi-sited fieldwork and I presented my plans to include in my research, apart from Apuseni, the area of Bran-Moieciu, as well as one or two other destinations. Perhaps owing to my training as a Sociologist, I was trying to cover as many 'case studies' as I could. Fortunately, my supervisor and my upgrade committee tempered my drive for more breadth, insisting that I needed to gain more depth. Finally, I decided to make Bran and Moieciu the main focus of my research. This seemed the best choice since the area was one of the oldest and most developed destinations for rural tourism in Romania and it was also the place where ANTREC[7] (Asociația Națională de Turism Rural Ecologic și Cultural n.d.) was established, the country's leading organisation in the promotion and support of rural tourism. Surprisingly, in spite of its fame, no one had done any in-depth research in Bran and Moieciu, so I was also motivated by the novelty potential of such work. Although my experience in Apuseni was rather short and lacked the depth that I gained in Bran and Moieciu, I decided to include it in my thesis because it presented good scope for comparison[8].

I had already been to Bran and Moieciu in January 2008 when I was writing my MPhil thesis. I spent about a week there, together with friends from the University of Bucharest who were also doing their postgraduate degrees in the social sciences. We recorded thirteen in-depth interviews with guesthouse owners and we had several unrecorded conversations with other tourism practitioners. Although short, the trip allowed me to glance at some of the issues that were distinctive for this tourist destination at that moment. Consequently, I spent a long time looking at the Internet advertising for Bran and Moieciu and I managed to convince myself that this was a picturesque corner of the Romanian countryside where rural tourism was thriving. However, when I arrived again to Bran in early June 2012, after a two hours walk in my first day in the village, I realised that I was probably the closest thing to a tourist there. Although this was one of the most popular rural destinations in Romania, most tourists came there during the months of July and August and in December and January, for the

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[7] Acronym for the National Association of Rural Ecologic and Cultural Tourism.
[8] There is an often-overlooked methodological conundrum underlining anthropology's mission of being a comparative discipline. The norm, although increasingly more permissive, is still of the solitary researcher carrying out extensive fieldwork in a single location. The research findings are then related to ethnographies of a different authorship focusing on other areas. The question is how comparable are two such sources? It is now generally acknowledged that ethnographers play an active role in the construction of the social realities they depict. Even though they follow similar issues, no two anthropologists will ask the same questions in the same way, and the different social contexts in which they find themselves will also dictate different research strategies leading to unique storylines.

winter holidays. Depending on the weather, June and September could also see some inflow of visitors, but mostly at the week-ends and for shorter stays. My first walk there was on a Monday when there was very little tourism going on. The only things bearing witness to the brand of the area were the occasional accommodation signs and the large villas that overcrowded the landscape. In the following days, as I started to meet guesthouse owners, I saw that their morale was down and many of them complained that tourists' numbers have been dropping since the 2009 economic crisis. People were disappointed with the way things were going and they were comparing the current bleak scene with a 'golden age' that existed around 2000-2008. This was my first 'disenchantment'. I was expecting to find a thriving tourist destination and instead I arrived in an almost empty village where I came across struggling businesses, some already sold or up for sale, others closed and seemingly abandoned.

I remained in Bran and Moieciu until September, interrupted by occasional trips to Bucharest, which is only 130 km away. During this period I lived in seven guesthouses and I worked in four of them, carrying out participant observation and at the same time interviewing other guesthouse owners, tourists and tourism practitioners. Comparing to Apuseni area where the number of *pensiuni* is around 100, in Bran and Moieciu the offer is seven or eight times bigger. Given this, I thought that I would have good chances of finding work in *pensiuni*. My general approach was as follows: whenever I saw a *pensiune* sign or a larger building that looked like it could accommodate tourists I introduced myself to the owners, mentioning that I am doing a study about rural tourism for my PhD. I explained that I would be very interested in having a chat about their *pensiune* and about their experiences with tourism and tourists. I was also adding that in case they are in need of staff or casual help, I could work as a volunteer, requiring only a room to sleep. Finally, I was handing them a paper with all this information in print, accompanied by my photo and contact details. I regret not keeping exact evidence of how many times I was turned down, but I estimate that more than two thirds of those that I contacted in this way refused to speak to me. Very few people showed an interest in my offer to volunteer and although I was sometimes told that there might be an opportunity to work in their guesthouse and that they will contact me, they never did. My way in seemed to be more difficult than I expected. Moreover, even when it looked as if I was getting 'in', I would find myself in what seemed to be an uncharacteristic situation for what I expected 'local tourism' to be. My first successful attempt was when the administrator of a *pensiune* owned by a top tour operator from Bucharest agreed to take me in. I worked and lived there for about a week

while they were hosting a group of people attending a workshop. During this period someone from the tourist agency in Bucharest came to supervise and help, so my main relation was with this person with whom I worked and shared a room. Given its history and current ownership, this guesthouse was not really representative for the region[9]. The second place where I stayed was a *pensiune* built by a non-local family who had lived abroad for ten years. Upon their return, they followed the example of a couple of friends, themselves returned migrants, and invested their money in a guesthouse. Unfortunately, none of these businesses proved successful: one of the friends sold his part of the house even before construction was completed, while the other gave up running the guesthouse after a while, rented it out to a local administrator and left the country. The family who took me in only very rarely had clients and their *pensiune* was up for sale. There was hardly any work to do in their guesthouse and I was hosted there for free, out of the pure kindness of the lady owner. Given that we were both outsiders in the village, both had spent a long time living abroad, and because the age gap between us was not very big, we got along well and developed a friendly relation. Again, this story seemed untypical of what I was expecting from 'rural tourism'. While I stayed in this *pensiune* I went to work as a volunteer in their friends' guesthouse, which was managed by a local young couple. At that time, they were hosting children groups on summer camp, something I once again thought to be falling outside the usual practice in rural tourism. My third experience came closer to the kind of pre-set 'gaze' that I had regarding how a *pensiune* should look like. I stayed and worked in a place owned and managed by a local family who also had a farm and provided home-cooked meals for their guests. I had initially stayed in this location with my husband on a short trip, and on departure, I asked the host whether I could return to work and live there for a while. The lady seemed unconvinced at the time, but when I paid her another visit a month later, during a busier period, she agreed to take me in. My work there involved cleaning the rooms, serving meals, watering flowers, washing dishes, doing simple food-processing tasks and tiding up the kitchen. I spent most of the time working alone or in the company of a teenage girl who started her job there a few days after my arrival. The host rarely got involved in discussions with us and communication was kept to a minimum. While there I only managed to interview her husband and a few tourists. Pretty soon I became anxious, feeling that my stay is not helping me learn much apart from mastering the technique of sweeping the patio perfectly. I started spending longer

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[9] I have actually written a bit about this place in my MPhil thesis. At that time (2007) the place was managed by a different administrator and I was told that the tour operator had invested 500.000 euro in the business.

hours away from the guesthouse, searching for a new base and talking to other people. I told my host in the beginning that I will need some free time for my research, but we never clearly discussed how many hours I will have off. Usually, if I saw that there was nothing to do at the moment and/or there were other members of staff available to help, I would excuse myself and leave. I was also influenced by the previous three situations where my work was very flexible, people did not ask much from me, and at the same time they expressed their appreciation for any help I would offer. The experience with my third host proved different: the lady owner demanded more and she even made critical comments regarding the speed and the quality of my work. Since our relation was never close and I felt I was not going to learn more by staying there, I decided to leave. The forth place I went to was one of the oldest and most popular *pensiuni* in the area, a place known by everybody, which would often come up in interviews as an example of a successful tourism business. This is a family owned guesthouse managed by the enterprising son with a BA in law and a Master's Degree in Project Management. His parents and wife also help, but he is the one taking the most important decisions. Given his background, we communicated very well and I felt that he was one of the few people who understood what I am really trying to do. He was supportive, giving me reading materials, offering a room whenever he had one available and letting me work along his staff in the kitchen. As he collaborated with many tour operators, there were often buses of tourists stopping at his guesthouse for lunch. During such times, his staff was very happy to get extra help and everyone was friendly and seemed happy to have me around. I enjoyed my work there and I was able to get a good perspective over what happens in a busy guesthouse. Apart from these five *pensiuni* where I stayed and worked for a longer time, I sometimes slept over in one of the smaller unregistered guesthouses, owned by a local family, who was always very happy to see me and to talk to me. I also shadowed a sales agent from an advertising website and I had a good chance to observe how local realities were 'converted' to online advertising. Finally, in October 2012, I participated in a four days international Rural Tourism Congress that was held in a town in the North of Romania.

Overall, fieldwork had been more difficult than I expected. People had not been very willing to talk to me and to let me work in their guesthouses. Although when I returned home I had more than thirty in-depth interviews and a good amount of field notes, I felt that there was more to do before I could start writing. I decided I needed to return to the field next year. Teaching commitments kept me from going back before the following summer, but I took this time to transcribe some of my interviews and write

more detailed field notes. I also revised some of the research questions and I changed the interview guide.

In July 2013 I went to Moieciu accompanied first by a team of five and then by a group of three Sociology students from the University of Bucharest. By this I was following the model of collective fieldwork, a practice that, as I have shown, has a long history in the ethnographic research of rural Romania. The students were working individually or in couples and in the beginning I let each of them observe one or more interviews that were guided by me. When they felt confident, they went on their own and they interviewed guesthouse owners and tourists by following the written guide I had given them. I advised them to be flexible and encourage other lines of discussion if they thought the respondent had something noteworthy to say. When I listened to the recordings of these interviews I was happy to see that some of them elicited very interesting stories. I feel that spending time on the field with my students helped me clarify many of my thoughts. The discussions we had and all the explaining I needed to do pushed me to articulate ideas that otherwise might have remained vague notions in the background.

In 2013 my experience with 'atypical' hosts continued. This time the students and I stayed in a guesthouse that belonged to an environmental NGO. The owner and founder of the organisation lived in the nearby town of Brașov, and a local lady took care of the house in his absence. The NGO aims to preserve the landscape and the biodiversity of the area, supporting at the same time traditional livelihoods and encouraging local communities to develop ecotourism. At the time of my stay there, some of their successful projects included establishing a popular mountain marathon and taking legal action to stop an investor who was going to build an amusement park next to a waterfall. These interests set apart the owner of this NGO from most of the local villagers, who, as I will show later, are little concerned with safeguarding the environment and the heritage of the region. Many villagers, however, acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the NGO's founder and he is well respected. This has helped us earn the locals' trust and the cases when people refused to speak to us were not as frequent as they were in my first year there. I believe that the students' presence also had a positive impact; people were less suspicious of them and they were often inclined to 'help them with their assignment', invoking the fact that they, too, have children in school who need to do all sorts of projects. Thanks to my supportive host and with the valuable help of my students, when I completed my last round of fieldwork I had thirty-one interviews with locals and owners of *pensiuni* and seventeen with tourists.

1.1.3. Limitations and alternatives

A few words are in order about the limitations of my methods. Given the time constraints of interviewing, I often had to focus on a narrow range of issues, most of them related to tourism. In hindsight, I feel I could have insisted more on the biographies of the household members in order to better understand how tourism linked with their lives. This is not to say that such details were completely left out. Many times when speaking about the history of their guesthouse or about their current challenges, people would refer to other aspects of their lives. Perhaps one of the risks of research was that once I gained some preliminary knowledge, I was tempted to confirm my findings over and over again. Although I was coming across recurrent answers, I only later realised that I could have ventured in exploring other aspects instead of asking the same questions. I believe that in fieldwork there is always the risk of becoming too comfortable, learning some successful patterns of interaction and seeking those contexts that will favour them. In this respect, the long breaks I took between my visits to the field were useful because they helped me distance myself from my routine and gave me a chance to revise some of the research questions.

Another notable drawback was that through fieldwork and by conducting interviews I was only gaining a superficial image of the tourists' experiences. Understandably, people on holiday were not inclined to spend a long time discussing their experiences with me. Most talks with them were ending after ten minutes and the answers I received were fairly conventional. To compensate for this limitation I turned to tourists' testimonies available on the Internet. This web-based approach has been successfully employed (Mkono 2011; Kozinets 2002) and some researchers use the term 'netnography' to speak about a new method (Kozinets 2002; Sandlin 2007). One of the advantages of working with texts produced by tourists is that it excludes any effects generated by the interview situation. On the other hand, the disadvantage is that people who write reviews online are likely to be a minority with age and education levels that are different to those of the average tourists. The loss of context has been also noted as one of the drawbacks involved by netnography (Mkono 2011:220), but in the case of my research this was compensated through fieldwork. Another potential issue which was pointed out by Kozinets is the very large volume of information available online (2002:3), which means that the researcher must establish some criteria and methods for selection. I decided to focus only on reviews about Moieciu, given that this is the location with which I was most familiar. I selected 222 tourist reviews about guesthouses in Moieciu from one of the most popular travel advice websites in

Romania. The portal is called 'Am fost acolo' (AFA)[10] and it resembles the widely known international web page called TripAdvisor. The site is highly popular, and according to the main traffic monitoring website for Romania[11] it ranks in the second place in the 'Tourism' and 'Tourism Guides' categories. During the month of July 2014, when the holiday season was nearing its peak, AFA had 923,510 unique visitors[12]. The numbers suggest that this site is among the most influential online resources accessed by Romanians when choosing their holiday destinations and their accommodation[13]. On the AFA website, people willingly contribute their time to write detailed accounts about their travel experiences, upload photos from their trips and comment on other users' reviews. This virtual space has a number of moderators who intervene whenever a review seems unsupported by evidence and who generally encourage contributors to provide specific examples to illustrate their claims. One other reason for using AFA is because it is a less biased source. Many of the advertising and booking portals also enable tourists to leave feedback. However, during fieldwork I learned that negative comments are sometimes removed at the request of the guesthouse owners. Given that the owners pay these websites to promote them, it is understandable that they are not interested in receiving any bad publicity. Because AFA is not sponsored by accommodation owners, its content cannot be controlled by them. Moreover, on advertising portals reviews are often kept short and general and it is rare to find the kind of detailed accounts that AFA encourages.

There are other ways in which the Internet proved to be a valuable resource. Because online adverts provide rich depictions of guesthouses and feature numerous photographs, I was able to gather a wealth of information regarding the size of *pensiuni,* their architecture, the facilities they offer, and their interior design. As I have shown, because of the reluctance of owners to receive me, I was denied access to many accommodation units. Event in those places where I did interview owners, the hosts did not always have time to give me a complete tour of their *pensiune.* Tourism advertising portals gave me an opportunity to make virtual visits to three or four times more guesthouses than I could enter during my fieldwork. The information I collected in this

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[10] Romanian for 'I was there', from now on abbreviated as AFA.
[11] www.traffic.ro
[12] According to data available from Traffic.ro at http://www.trafic.ro/vizitatori/top-siteuri-turism/luna-iulie-2014-pg1 [Accessed 28 October 2014]
[13] It is perhaps worth noting that some of the regular users of the website started to organise annual meetings. More than one hundred people took part in a three days gathering in the fall of 2014, which was held in a hotel in Moieciu.

way was useful in uncovering the various typologies of guesthouses that I discuss at length in Chapter 4.

I turn now to the ways in which I analysed this material. In the early days of my research I was tempted to place more weight on comparing people's discourse with their behaviour. I was looking at participant observation as a way of checking the truthfulness of the stories and statements people expressed in interviews and conversations. I was missing the point that 'verbal statements and observed behaviour generate data which describes different areas of social reality' (Russell 2011:166). The implication here is that there is no need to always seek congruence between speech and action. Discourse itself is a kind of action and within this realm people have more freedom than in that of the actual behaviour that they can carry out at a certain time. What people like to say and what they do may not always overlap. As I read through the interview transcripts and the online reviews I tried to remain aware that accounts had been produced in socially situated contexts (Roulston 2011:285) and they reflected a particular way of constructing social reality, in a given situation (Silverman 2004:104). One of the criticisms of the interview method concerns the 'authenticity' of the stories one elicits in an interview, arguing that often people's answers might just reproduce cultural stereotypes (Silverman 2004:11-12). This, however, comes from a positivist/objectivist perspective that is not usually embraced by anthropologists. To us, it is precisely these 'cultural stereotypes' that are worth studying and understanding. An advantage of the rather large data set that I gathered – over 200,000 words of interview transcripts[14] and almost 75,000 words of tourist reviews – was that it enabled me to look for patterns. Since I was concerned with the meanings and norms people associate with tourism, I took recurrent stories to reflect some of their shared values and understandings. I should add that although my interviews were usually carried out with only one person and I often write of singular guesthouse owners, the household should actually be taken as the main unit of analysis. *Pensiuni* are usually family-run businesses and the type and amount of work and resources invested are the result of a household strategy in which members combine various economic activities.

Trying to put together observations based on almost one hundred cases, each of them the unique and particular story of a family or an individual, can be a daunting task. After reading once through my transcripts, I compiled an initial list of codes. Some of the codes I produced corresponded to questions in my interviews, while others were

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[14] About half of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, while for the rest I made notes and I only transcribed passages that I found to be particularly relevant.

rather unplanned or unexpected issues that seemed to be more salient in my discussion. I then read through the texts identifying and coding recurrent ideas. On subsequent readings, certain patterns started to emerge as I noticed how different codes cluster into a common theme. For instance, although I avoided asking explicit questions about money, people often brought up financial issues themselves. I only noticed after transcribing my recordings and starting to analyse the interviews in more detail that money talk is so pervasive. High taxes, low profit, lack of money for initial investment and for further development, or loans were often discussed.

One of my attempts at finding an order into this wealth of information was by creating typologies. Throughout my thesis I compare and discuss the categories that I identified/created, but I also shift my focus from the pattern to the exception, trying my best to do justice to the variety and complexity of empirical realities. And because I came to the notion of 'doing justice' to the subject of one's research, I should add a few words about how I faced the ethical concerns that were involved in my fieldwork. Understandably, my respondents would not be very happy to share information about their businesses with everyone else in the village, and even less so with the local or regional authorities. In order to protect them, all the names that appear in this thesis are fictive and I tried to keep out any details that may help pinpoint particular guesthouses. However, my overall research location is quite distinctive and can be easily identified by a number of features that I was not able to mask or ignore in my account[15]. At the same time, someone very familiar with the region may identify some of the *pensiuni* that I am writing about based on my descriptions or from the images that I have used. In these cases I did my best to filter out any sensitive information.

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[15] Such as the nearby presence of a well-known tourist attraction – the so-called Dracula's castle – or the fact that the area was the base, and to some extent the creation, of one of the largest and most active rural tourism NGOs.

Chapter 2

Mountain villages into tourist destinations:

a socio-economic history

This chapter starts by describing the more distant history of Bran, Moieciu and Albac and then pays particular attention to the transformations brought by the socialist period. In the second part I turn to the onset and the evolution of tourism in the period that followed the 1989 political regime change. In asking what kind of economic resources have been channelled into tourism, I examine how and if owners of *pensiuni* relate to concepts such as 'nature', 'tradition', 'culture' or 'authenticity' that are at the core of the rural tourism imagery. This chapter aims to bring into light the history and the wider social, economic and political context of the villages that I studied. This descriptive material will provide the ethnographic background for the more analytical oriented discussion in the following chapter, where I compare different types of entrepreneurial ventures and I try to explain what were the challenges posed by the economy of tourism for a rural population that was mostly specialised in farming and factory work.

2.1. Feudalism and foreign rule

Moieciu and Bran, as well as the Apuseni area, are located in the historical province of Transylvania, which became part of the Romanian Kingdom in 1918[16]. For a significant period in its history, until the Great Union, Transylvania was under the administrative power of Austria, Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Gilberg 1979:87). Although the majority of the population is Romanian, Transylvania was, and still is, home to a significant Hungarian minority. Another notable minority of the region were the Germans, or Saxons, who, until their exodus during the socialist and post-socialist periods made up to 10% of the population. During the most part of Transylvania's foreign rule, rural areas were administrated by feudal landlords who focused on taxation and showed little concern for the needs of the autochthonous population. Gilberg argues that this long history of foreign rule and oppression has shaped particular outlooks and practices among the Romanian villagers. Most notably, they developed the linked skills of 'accommodation and transformation' allowing them to both handle the rulers' demands, while at the same time finding ways to transform and bend the rules in their

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[16] Joining Moldova and Wallachia that had united in 1859.

favour (Gilberg 1979:86). One way to do this was by developing a system of bribes and favours called 'bakshees' which, as Gilberg points out, was an important mechanism for avoiding or changing some of the rules (*idem*).

> *Through various means of evasion or reinterpretation, there was the possibility of living with foreign rule and exploitation while subtly changing it, carving out some autonomy for yourself and your family or perhaps the entire village. [...] Through this process, maturing over centuries, the peasant became a skilled practitioner of partial autonomy, of remaining an "island unto himself" and his village in the face of regime efforts to break him down into a psychological slave* (Gilberg 1979:86).

Gilberg continues to explain that another reaction in the face of feudal and usually foreign domination was to establish strong internal cohesion, manifested through rituals, customs, and dress codes, something that helped peasants maintain their sense of nationhood (86). Trying to keep a sense of freedom from the ruling class also made villagers individualists, but this individualism had as its main units of reference the family and the village, not the unique individual (*idem*).

After 1918, as Romania emerged as an independent nation state, its political elites pursued a modernising programme inspired by Western models. However, the institutional and political changes were directed at a society with very different socio-economic realities (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:6). The population of the country was overwhelmingly rural, lacking in technology, with low levels of education and very little or no culture of political participation (*idem*). Following a number of more or less successful agrarian reforms, a peasant middle-class only emerged towards the 1940s-1950s, but as the communist regime came to power, it was soon undermined and dissolved (6). In spite of the relative improvement in the condition of the peasants, the inter-war period was marked by political turmoil and corruption and the governing elite remained largely detached from the masses (Gilberg 1979:86). Villagers were still uninvolved in the political and administrative life of the country and they maintained their passive resistance to political authorities (114).

While this general outline captures well the historic context shared by Bran, Moieciu and Albac, it is important to note that Bran and Moieciu have a rather atypical history. While Albac is located deep in the territory of Transylvania, Bran and Moieciu find themselves right at the border with Wallachia. This position, coupled with their

mountainous geography and their pastoral economy, gave them a distinctive advantage over other rural settlements as it stimulated an opening of the area and encouraged locals to travel and trade across wider distances. Shepherds practiced transhumance, spanning wide geographic areas, reaching with their herds all the way south to the Danube planes and sometimes even crossing to what are now the territories of Romania's neighbouring states. These journeys allowed them to establish economic links with other regions as they started trading their dairy and meat products for cereals. Consequently, in the region of Bran and Moieciu, the labour intensive and relatively unproductive cultivation of cereals was gradually abandoned (Prahoveanu 1998: 44). Today, even if the climate allows for some cereals and vegetables to grow, there are not many villagers who still keep gardens. The pastoralists' freedom of movement added to their sense of independence and self-reliance. Historic records from the 17th century offer some suggestive examples. At the time when Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Wallachia and Moldova were under Ottoman influence, villagers from Bran and Moieciu were said to be crossing the border and re-settling on one side or another in order to escape taxing (Moşoiu 1930:30). Shepherds were avoiding payment of the border tax by going around the customs points, through the mountains. They were also trying to avoid the prerequisite of selling their products to Turkish merchants for their fixed and inconvenient prices by secretly seeking alternative trade deals (45). Looked at through a Weberian lens, these shepherds might resemble budding capitalists, following money-saving and profit maximising strategies.

As nation states emerged on the European map and new state borders became more restrictive, the movement of shepherds was limited. With fewer grazing areas available, they had to reduce the size of their flocks (Moşoiu 1930:56) and some turned to alternative activities such as logging. Because Bran and Moieciu were located near an important trade route between the Principalities of Transylvania and Wallachia, locals still had good opportunities for selling the surplus from their farms (Moşoiu 1930:61-62). At the beginning of the 20th century, Moşoiu writes about merchants from Bran and Moieciu who made their living by wide scale trade, commercialising dairy products in the nearest towns of Câmpulung, Făgăraş and Braşov (Moşoiu 1930:63). Moşoiu also gives interesting details about a nascent tourism economy in the first decades of the last century, noting that apart from the registered merchants, most locals were selling products to tourists visiting in the summer (Moşoiu 1930:63). He writes that before the war, there were some families who used to come to Bran regularly and take refuge from the Bucharest heat. After WWI, following the queen's choice of living temporary in the

Bran Castle, interest for Bran grew and in 1927 a total of 400 tourists were officially registered with the local authorities (93). At that time, stays were much longer and the fact that Moşoiu lists the monthly, not the daily rates for accommodation, is telling (94). With the onset of the communist regime, further development was restricted, although on a small scale, informal hosting arrangements still carried on between locals and a few families of urbanites who were fond of the area and wanted to spend their holidays in the mountains.

Turning to Apuseni, the local population is portrayed by historians as originating from the mixture between the Dacian tribes and the Roman colonists, having a history that overlaps with the formation of the Romanian people. According to Abrudeanu, the link with the Dacian tribes was still obvious in the locals' clothing and in their distinctive haircut. Because of their hair-style, they later received the nickname '*moţ*' and '*moţi*' which would translate as 'tuft', or 'tufts' (Abrudeanu 1928). The name remained until today, although the distinctive hair-style disappeared during the 18th century (*idem*). Villagers of Apuseni are known for their role in the peasant uprisings against the Austro-Hungarian domination in 1784 and 1848. The three leaders of the 1784 mutiny, Horea, Cloşca and Crişan were born in Albac and in the neighbouring villages. The revolution was not successful and the three were executed, but nevertheless they became local and national heroes, symbols for Romanians' fight for independence. Today their image is part of the local identity-building rhetoric. A recent monograph commissioned by Albac's village hall and written by two of the commune's school teachers illustrates well some of the representations commonly associated to the local population of Albac, in particular, but also more general, to the *moţi*. The inhabitants of Albac are said to have strength of character, courage, patriotism, determination, pride and integrity (Berindei and Todea 2010:46).

2.2. Communism

Given that their hilly and mountainous geography made them unsuitable for agriculture and industrial farming, villages in areas like Bran-Moieciu and Albac were among the 7% localities of Romania to escape collectivisation (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:20). In contrast to rural regions in the plains, here people kept their animals, they retained more control over the land and the links with their traditional livelihood survived better. In spite of this, the political and economic transformations of the communist system were so far-reaching that they were bound to have a sizable impact even over villagers that remained uncollectivised. In what follows, apart from stories

collected through my own fieldwork, I rely on research by Gilberg (1979) and Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe (2002), as I give a picture of what was life like in rural Romania during the socialist period. While Gilberg looked at official documents of the Communist Party and studied texts written by the state's historians and economists (1979:115), Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe draw from fieldwork carried out in 2001 in two Romanian communes: Nucșoara and Scornicești. The first, located in the mountains, escaped collectivisation and was emblematic for being the home of the strongest communist resistance movements, led by a group of partisans who hid in the mountains for almost ten years until they were eventually caught, jailed or executed. Scornicești, on the other hand, was the birthplace of Ceaușescu and became the target of the most ambitious policies of collectivisation, systematisation and industrialisation (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:7-8). In spite of these marked differences, the study revealed many similarities between the villagers of the two communes.

Even if in mountain villages locals did not lose their lands and animals, the state enforced strict control over what people were supposed to do with their resources and their labour. In 1946 a system of quotas was introduced requiring villagers to hand in part of their production to the state. These quotas were formalised as contracts between people and the state, legally binding them to hand in every year a part of their products[17] and some of their animals. In a constant drive to increase national production, the law forbade villagers from slaughtering young cattle and using the meat for household consumption. Instead, cows had to be kept for dairy, while male calves were supposed to be reared for beef and they were collected by the state as a part of the mandatory quota. Industrial products were distributed to the villages only if they had met their designated rations (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:36). According to a law passed in 1949, those who were found destroying, hiding or damaging the produce, were liable of 15 years of forced labour (37). The quotas system was completely insensible to the ecology of farming, ignoring the fact that the number of animals a household could keep depended on the surface of land it had. Extra cattle could turn into a burden and people struggled to find alternative strategies for feeding them. To escape this problem, one solution was to suffocate calves immediately after birth by placing a bag over their head. Then, with the tacit cooperation of the veterinarian, they were declared stillborn. Another way of evading the quota system was to keep some of the animals undeclared. This, again, was possible because many of the local authorities that were supposed to

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[17] For instance, those who owned more than 5 hectares of land and two cows had to pay a quota of over 220 litres of milk (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:37).

enforce regulations agreed to turn a blind eye. Villagers' interactions with state authorities were often negotiations, rather than acts of compliance[18]. A woman from Moieciu recalled how she managed to avoid paying a fine by having the terms of her contract changed and at the same time by resorting to some of her undeclared animals:

If you didn't give the milk quota, you were in trouble, they were fining you. I go and they tell me: 'you must give one extra sheep' – we had to give sheep, too, on the contract. I said: I don't give a sheep because I have beautiful sheep and for the contract you give what is bad'. Because you give it, but get nothing in return. And I had another cow that was not registered. So they told me: 'then, you make another milk contract'. 'Better I do that, I don't eat milk anymore' – but I had [that extra undeclared cow], I had hope. Where should you get the milk if during the winter [a cow] had no milk and during the summer you took it to the [cattle-pen on the] mountains, where they milked it for four months and gave you cheese [in return]? And then, you were getting fined for not giving [milk for the quota] (Dorica Pop, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).*

Still, members of the communist administration always kept an upper hand. Since local authorities received from their superiors the value of the quotas for the entire commune, it was up to them to calculate the contribution of individual families. This created opportunities for arbitrary decisions, abuse and oppression (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:41) and in the end the scope for negotiation was limited by one's personal relations to local Party representatives. The communist period permanently altered the customary hierarchies of rural communities. Traditional authority figures in mountain villages were priests, teachers and small entrepreneurs, owners of shops or logging businesses, who in time, managed to buy more land and who had comparatively larger properties (78-79). As Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe point out, these people were behaving like patrons without having monopoly over resources: they offered jobs to other villagers, granted loans, arranged marriages and baptisms (79). Their authority was legitimised by their prestige and good reputation (79). These elites became the first targets of the new political regime and were gradually replaced by the new Party authorities. The strategy of the communist state was to replace local intellectual and political elites by assigning roles of authority to individuals recruited from the marginal ranks of dispossessed peasants, usually with low levels of education (75). Often such

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[18] I am thankful to historian Nicolae Pepene for pointing this out to me.

people were brought from other parts of the country. Their alien status added to people's distrust towards them and the new group never managed to achieve the same type of legitimacy as the old elite.

Another major change brought by the communist regime to the economy of rural areas resulted from the intensive industrialisation programme. Since Bran and Moieciu were located close to one of the largest industrial centres of the country, many of their inhabitants, men as well as women, became commuting factory workers. These jobs offered them a stable, albeit small source of income. Many villagers describe the socialist past as a period when, in spite of the hardship and scarcity, life was more predictable and people had a stronger sense of material security.

> *[In a married couple], having one of the two in employed work, it was different... with the household* (gospodărie) *and it was enough, you didn't need anything else* (Veronica Moga, Moieciu).

For many villagers, the socialist period was a time when they had secure jobs and when it was much easier to find buyers for their farm products. The demand was high among factory workers and villagers seized this opportunity and developed a successful trade system:

> *When they were exiting the factory, it was thousands of them – when they were receiving their paychecks, we used to go, twice a month. We had a big* burduf[19] *of cheese and if it was good, in half an hour, it was gone. Or, if you had* caş[20], *maybe you had twenty pieces, and there would be a queue forming, and whoever managed to grab… and it wasn't just me [selling], there were plenty* (Dorica Pop, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

Echoes of a nostalgic discourse still exist in Bran and Moieciu and similar stories where documented by Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe in Nucşoara, where villagers remembered communism as a period of affluence, when middlemen were coming straight to their gate in search for cheese and milk.

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[19] A type of cheese that is stored and aged inside a pouch made out of a sheep's stomach or fir tree bark.
[20] Fresh cheese.

As for Albac, prior to 1989 the region was more isolated and characterised by a history of poverty[21], scarcity and difficult working conditions (Văetişi 2006, Vasile 2010b). Locals were mainly raising cattle and had no large herds of sheep entailing transhumance. They were also rather far from any trade routes, so the area did not achieve the same opening as Bran. Wood was an important resource in the region and during the communist period many people worked in the state-owned forestry enterprises. Mining also developed in the area and some of the locals were commuting to work in the quarries. At the same time, there was a significant underground economy. Although private trade was officially forbidden, by having the right connections and by bribing state officials, people generally managed to trade or sell timber on their own (Vasile 2010a:6). All across Romania the authorities were aware of villagers' economic hardship and they turned a blind eye against small scale theft from collective farms, forests, or factories (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:104). Tolerating the informal economy and allowing people to 'take' from the state prevented them from voicing their discontent and organising protests and actually helped the regime to survive (*idem*).

2.3. Worldviews and sociality

So how did these new political and economic arrangements influence villagers' relations and worldviews? To start with, at a very general level, a reality that was documented by different studies across Romanian villages and that was found rooted in the policies of the communist regime was the deterioration of social relations (Gilberg 1979; Mungiu-Pippidi 2002; Mihăilescu 2013; Şişeştean 2011). The cohesion of rural communities was gradually eroded by the new work regime imposed by the communist party. Since most villagers were dispossessed of their lands, the system of mutual support for agricultural works became obsolete (*idem*). The case was slightly different in uncollectivised mountain areas, where people still helped each other when the time came for scything and haymaking and maintained a somewhat higher degree of unity. However, factories nurtured new contexts for socialisation and villagers formed new networks and relations that disembedded them from their local neighbourhoods (Mihăilescu 2013). Moreover, changes in the village administration and the persecution of local elites had a gradual but long-lasting impact, even in these more remote mountain areas. In the new order of things, status and financial rewards were no longer given on the basis of being hard working, educated or enterprising, but on the account

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[21] A telling indication are local statistics showing that forty years ago in Albac households had, on average, 1 or 2 rooms which were inhabited by 10 or even 15 people, while at present there are 5-6 people living in an average of 3-4 rooms (Berindei and Todea, 2010:43).

of one's willingness to implement Party policies. Added to this was the permanent suspicion and fear that one's neighbours might be Party informants. The Party encouraged people to denounce any unruly behaviour observed among their fellow villagers. This became a handy tool for managing conflicts and some even resorted to false accusations against their opponents. The actual grounds of the claims were not so important for the authorities as was their contribution to the undermining of social trust and unity (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:42). In Nucşoara, a further incentive for denouncing others, came with the fact that the lands of people who were imprisoned were redistributed among other villagers (64).

The regime's failure to provide the promised economic prosperity, coupled with its administrative inefficiencies and corruption, nurtured resentment and opposition among most Romanians (Gilberg 1979:115). Analysing official documents of the Communist Party, Gilberg found telling evidence for the resistance and reactions of the peasantry to the regimes' policies (*idem*), concluding that

> *the peasantry has withdrawn into a shell which insulates its members from the mobilization efforts of the activists, and in this process, the family and the village have once more become the social universe of the average peasant, while consciousness of the larger society and its needs and requirements is inadequate or lacking* (Gilberg 1979:116).

The epoch's documents also present accounts of corruption, seen both as a survival from previous political regimes, and a consequence of more recent inadvertencies of the system (117). Gilberg argues that old worldviews have largely persisted among the Romanian villagers without giving way in the face of the new values promoted by the socialist regime. Moreover, the contradictions and tensions between these two different outlooks and the socioeconomic reality were found to be the source of new values and practices (117-118). One of these new developments was that villagers started to recongise an informal hierarchy that placed at the top 'the most ingenious members in the community in terms of extracting value from public agencies in return for minimal services' (Gilberg 1979:116). Another consequence of the system's shortcomings was that Romanians could not develop a genuine concern for 'public' space or for collective resources (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:15). In theory, resources were supposed to be collective and belong to 'the people', while in reality they were under state control, a control increasingly perceived as illegitimate. Consequently, whatever happened outside

one's household was not seen as the realm of a 'public' good, but rather as the state's domain. Since this was a monopolist and totalitarian institution, people felt entitled to reclaim and appropriate some of its resources, whenever the channels of the informal economy allowed them to do so.

Overall, changes in Romanian rural society were so profound that some describe it now as a 'post-peasant world' (Mihăilescu 2013; Şişeştean 2011), arguing that peasantry disappeared during communism, transforming into the hybrid category of farmer-worker (Şişeştean 2011:2) or peasant-worker (Gilberg 1979:100), a group that shared new worldviews, underlined by a growing individualism, where standards of achievement are based on income and on competition (Şişeştean 2011:2). Compared to the rather conservative traditional peasants, contemporary villagers are more flexible and willing to adapt and change their strategies. This, Mihăilescu argues, is a trait shared by Romanians in general, and it is a consequence of the fact that they are no longer relying on long-term expectations (Mihăilescu 2013). Villagers from the uncollectivised mountain regions have retained and indeed accentuated their individualism and their self-reliance during communism, and there is indication that this made them better prepared for capitalist pursuits in the new economic order of post 1989. Discussing peasant strategies in the context of development projects, Mihălescu found the inhabitants of the mountain and hilly villages to be more profit-oriented, as opposed to villagers from the plains who have a tendency to reproduce poverty (Mihăilescu 2000:11).

2.4. Post 1989 changes and the backdrop of tourism development

The collapse of the industry in the post-socialist period left thousands of people unemployed. Comparing the number of employees in factories around Braşov, we find that a weapons factory that had 12,000 workers in 1991 (Dabija, 2005) only employed 499 people in 2008 (Bursa 2009). Between 1999 and 2012, the restructuring or closing down of three other large factories specialised in the production of bearings, trucks and tractors left a total of 47,200 people without a workplace (Cojocar 2013). According to statistical data available for Bran, in 1999 there were 920 unemployed people in the commune. In search for alternative sources of income, for a short while soon after 1989, many local women from Bran and Moieciu started knitting jumpers and selling them to non-local merchants who were re-selling them abroad. Unemployment gradually dropped, as the industrial sector was restructured and new independent ventures started to emerge in the area, with logging and tourism being two of the most lucrative sectors.

In 2014 there were only 37 people registered as unemployed in Bran (INS Tempo). According to the local administrations, currently about 35% of the active local population is employed in the manufacturing industry and many of these workers commute to work (Gal Transcarpatica 2013:31). The same source shows that another 30% of the locals work in the services sector while 20% of the workforce is found in agriculture and 15% in the trade sector (Gal Transcarpatica 2013:31). Apart from what is recorded by the official statistics, there are many people who earn an income without being formally employed. Popular unregistered activities – apart from tourism - include small trade with dairy products, casual work in restaurants and guesthouses, construction work or scything.

In Albac the dissolution of the communist regime was followed by forest restitution and by an expansion of private timber enterprises (Vasile 2010a). Alongside registered businesses, the informal economy that developed in socialist times has gained momentum. As Vasile found in her fieldwork in Apuseni, wood was often exploited illegally by bribing foresters who were supposed to monitor and limit the cutting of trees, while most of the sawmills functioned without authorisation (Vasile 2010a: 9, 19). In mountain villages such as Bran, Moieciu, or Albac locals own parts of the forest and they are shareholders in a property system called *composesorat*. In theory, this institution is supposed to represent the collective interests of its members and manage the exploitation of wood, selling the timber and returning the revenue to the villagers. In reality, transactions are often arranged for the benefit of those who are responsible with the administration of the *composesorat* and the legal owners of the forest have little to gain.

2.5. Farming

Throughout all the political and economic changes, cattle and sheep remained the most constant and reliable resource for the majority of villagers living in Bran, Moieciu or Albac. Animal husbandry has been at the heart of these local economies for a very long time and the way farming is organised has not changed much during the past decades, if not centuries. From June until October, people leave their animals in the care of herders who take them up to the mountains to graze. The cheese is prepared in these mountain sheepfolds and later given to the animal owners. Herders charge a fee for their services and they also get to keep a quota of the dairy. During the summer, people scythe the grass from the hilly meadows surrounding their villages making hay to feed their livestock in the winter. Increasingly over the more recent period, day labourers from

other villages are hired to do the scything. Often this is because people have other work commitments or they are too old for the difficult task of haymaking and their children have migrated from home, no longer being able to help. People also need to pay the shepherds, the veterinarian and the people guarding the sheepfolds, rising the overall costs of farming. This would not be a problem if people had the certainty that they would sell their products. However, because of the growing number of legislative barriers, commercializing dairy and meat is not as easy as it used to be. Products sold in the market must come from a certified farm and for many sheepfolds and cattle-pen the sanitary and veterinary constraints imposed by the European Union are hard to comply with[22]. In remote meadows located high in the mountains, it can be very difficult to have electricity and to set up mechanised milking and separate rooms for various stages of milk processing. Even for most village households this is a daunting and costly task. The alternative to local production would be to have the raw milk collected and processed in a factory. However, the few schemes that existed in the past proved unprofitable and largely disappeared. The price of milk produced in industrial farms was no match for the high costs and time consumed to collect milk by travelling long distances on winding roads, some of which were unpaved and dotted with potholes. Competition is also a problem. After Romania joined the European Union, an increasing number of foreign companies entered the market, absorbing smaller, locally owned enterprises and turning to cheaper sources of dairy from large factories in other countries. Milk is now imported from Hungarian or Dutch farms instead of being collected from local producers, leaving villagers to use their surplus of high-quality organic products as food for pigs. Wool too is no longer on demand and accounts circulate of shepherds abandoning large quantities of it in the forest or burning it as a waste product. Under these circumstances, many argue that the profit made from farming does not justify all their hard labour and expenses.

This is the trouble, you send them [cows] to the mountain, they stay in the cold, in the rain, they measure the milk on Saint Peter's Day and about three nipples go to the herder, and one they leave for you[23] [...] If you give [the cow] with 15 kg [able to give 15 litres of milk]... they say it [only] had 5 kg [...] they cheat.

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[22] In 2014, 39% of sheepfolds in one of the most farming-intensive districts of Romania did not have a sanitary and veterinary certificate (Autoritatea Națională Sanitară Veterinară și pentru Siguranța Alimentelor 2014).

[23] At the end of June, on St. Peter's day, herders measure the milk given by each cow. Based on this, they calculate how much cheese they need to give to the animal owners when they bring the herds back to the village. Saying that 'three nipples go to the herder' means that they keep 3/4 of the produce.

Then you pay for mating [the cows] one million [RON], you pay for the bladders and then you add the guarding five million [RON]. You don't get [enough] cheese in return to [sell] and recover the money. [...] You calculate, how much cheese you need to get in order to recover the money you invest in the cow. With what you pay for scything and for gathering the hay… [in the end] the cow is a 'lady' (cucoană) *and you are the cow's servant* (Viorica Panciu, local from Moieciu who has three cows).

Since 2007 when Romania joined the EU, villagers have been receiving small government grants according to the number of animals and the surface of land that they have. Many argue that if it was not for these funds, they would keep fewer animals, or even none at all. Without adequate policies to help producers sell their goods, these subsidies contribute little to the long-term sustainability of local farms. Faced with more lucrative opportunities, villagers have started to direct some of their time and resources elsewhere. With farming becoming less profitable and with younger generations migrating to the city, land in Bran and Moieciu lost some of its role in the survival and reproduction of households. In parallel to this, a growing interest from urbanites in building holiday houses and accommodation businesses in the region triggered an increase in land prices. Although at first people were reluctant to sell, gradually the perspective of quick financial gain silenced the old conservative discourse regarding the inalienability of family plots. As prices went as high as 150 € m², many locals sold some of their properties, investing the profit into accommodation businesses[24]. Meanwhile, in Albac the inflow of urbanites was modest, prices stayed low and locals remained reluctant to sell their properties.

Although in Bran and Moieciu I heard worries being voiced over the fact that villagers sold their land and their animals, I never actually came across households that were struggling on this account and I am inclined to take these concerns as a way in which locals express their attachment to the land and to farming as part of their local identity. Indeed, people seem more connected to their identity as farmers, than to any other.

Always in our area the main occupation was animal husbandry, the area was not collectivised… the love for the animals… it is hard work… life is harsher…

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[24] While someone who bought land in 2002 in one of the less central villages of Bran paid only 5 € for a m².

but people worked, they didn't give up and they kept their households. Look, for instance, in Moieciu de Sus many sold their lands (Ana Popa, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

'Since always, everybody here was with the animals' (Dora Mihăilă, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

If you sold [land], what will you give to the children? (Elena Vasile, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu)

Now in Moieciu they sold, if tourism stops working, they have nothing to live from (Rodica Ilie, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

Undoubtedly, land and animals are still part of the economic base of these mountain villages. According to Gudeman, the base represents resources that are linked to a group's identity and to the reproduction of the community. Along material resources, the base includes skills, knowledge, practices and values (Gudeman 2005:98). For a household, the economic base can be seen as the means of production (Gudeman 1990:60) necessary for its survival and reproduction. Parts of the base may be used on the market, but the base itself cannot be alienated in its entirety. This is because

often, the base has central symbols, 'sacra', that signify its power and continuance. Above all, persons in a community are connected to one another through and in relation to the base that lends them an identity' (Gudeman 2005:98).

Urbanites who moved to Bran and Moieciu comment about the strong normative element involved in animal husbandry and they suggest that locals keep their animals not because it is profitable, but because it would be shameful to give them up. Villagers in other parts of Romania have also been described as keeping up labour intensive practices that are rendering almost no material gain, only to safeguard their image as *gospodari* – good householders (Mihăilescu 2000:10). Returning to Bran and Moieciu, a number of anecdotes come to illustrate how far locals go in expressing their strong sense of ownership and attachment to the land. I heard the first story from a foreigner who settled in Moieciu and married a local woman. Wanting to park his car in front of

the gate instead of driving it onto the lawn, the Frenchman had moved his fence a couple of meters towards the inside of the yard. Since his garden was quite big, this posed no problem at all and the 'lost' space seemed negligible. Not, however, according to several of his well-intended neighbours who came to warn him that he is losing land. Another frequent advice he received from the locals was to build something new and big, instead of keeping the old small house. Similar to the first story, a couple of urbanites who moved in the area and opened a guesthouse sought to solve the problem of their very narrow access road by moving the fence with half a meter inward. The plan had to be abandoned, as there was no way of convincing their neighbours to do the same. Even more, each time the fence needed repair after being knocked down by heavy snow, locals were said to actually have a tendency to move it a little bit outwards, gradually incorporating the sides of the road and making it narrower. Perhaps the most surprising is the story of a biologist who was doing research for her PhD and needed to collect flora growing in a villager's meadow from a surface of exactly one square meter. When politely asking for permission from the owner of the land to cut and take the plants, to her dismay, he refused to allow her. Seeing how much locals value their land, it may seem surprising that so many of them agreed to sell. However, most only parted with small surfaces that were contributing little to their farming. For feeding either one cow or five sheep, the surface needed is one hectare, while for a house with a small garden, about 0.2 hectares are enough. If we imagine villagers had a choice between having the material base for raising one sheep, and earning 25,000 € to 300,000 €, land sales seem very sensible decisions. Moreover, in-migrant buyers were interested in land in the valley, closer to the main road, while locals preferred to hold on to their allotments up on the mountain, which are more suitable for haymaking and for keeping animals. For the new urban owners, land was only a base and the location became more relevant than the biological qualities of the soil.

Looking at regional statistics there is little evidence that farming gave way in the face of tourism. The data shows that at least between 1996-2003, animal numbers in Bran did not fluctuate much, staying just a little above 20,000 for sheep and 2,500 for cattle (Bran City Hall 2008:3). Later, in 2010, another source published by the Brașov district council shows that in Bran there were 2,157 cattle and 20,050 sheep, suggesting a small drop in cattle numbers (Brașov Town Hall 2010). A slight decrease in cattle numbers was also registered in Moieciu, but it was paralleled with a growth in the number of sheep. If in 1994 official statistics registered 2,121 cattle and 11,141 sheep (General Urban Plan Moieciu 1999), in 2010 the numbers changed to 1,512 cattle and

14,520 sheep (Brașov Town Hall 2010). These fluctuations may be related more to the growing difficulties faced by people in selling their products, and less to a direct impact of tourism. In fact, tourism is more likely to encourage farming. As the opportunities to sell farm products diminished, people needed alternatives and tourists were a welcomed group of buyers. *Pensiuni* that offer full board or have a restaurant open to the public actually intensified their farming. Even owners of smaller guesthouses or those who are not providing accommodation can benefit as they sell some of their surplus to the larger businesses or directly to tourists.

While homes were the target of constant investment and improvement, farming facilities and techniques saw little change. In the winter, the animals and the hay are kept up on the hills in stables called *odăi*, some of which can be located as far as one hour away from villagers' homes. People go there every day to feed their animals and since there is usually no water source around, they climb the steep slopes carrying heavy canisters of water. They also collect the manure from their cattle and sheep and invest a lot of work into spreading it across their pastures in order to fertilise them. Although I noticed a case where someone had build a trolley to help carry things up and down, others did not imitate this model. Villagers were not very interested in the technological improvement of their farming activities. Indeed, investment in the equipment and certification of micro-farms was very rare. I believe that turning farming into a profitable business, able to sustain an entire household, is in fact more challenging and demanding than combining different activities, including tourism. I met one family that after too many encounters with problematic tourists[25] decided to give up tourism and concentrate their efforts on making and selling dairy products. This business was more labour intensive than catering for tourists and it involved the husband and wife spending a long time away from home. The man was running a sheepfold in the vicinity of Moieciu and he spent most of the day there, while the woman had to process the diary at home and commute to town to sell the products.

2.6. Tourism economy

As already mentioned, the earliest accounts of urbanites spending vacations in Bran and Moieciu date from 1927 (Moșoiu 1930). In spite of the optimistic outlook in Moșoiu's monograph regarding the area's future as a tourist resort, this development was curtailed by the onset of the communist regime. Since the state did not tolerate private businesses, locals could not run any official or visible tourist accommodation. Villagers

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[25] I discuss more about 'bad guests' in Chapter 5.

who happened to have the extra room would sometimes host guests, but the practice had a small scale and arrangements were entirely informal. For a short while, state authorities did attempt to organise some tours for foreigners to the region. They focused on the Bran castle but also on the nearby commune of Șirnea and on Moieciu. The tourists were taken to see Moieciu in horse-drawn carts and then brought to Șirnea where they had a meal in a 'peasant house' and listened to locals playing folk music. Rarely, some of these tourists were returning on their own, hoping for longer stays. Although it was illegal and dangerous for villagers to host foreigners, some of them still did. At the same time, the restrictions were not so harsh regarding domestic tourists and the authorities were more tolerant of the informal arrangements between certain households and their guests. The scale of this practice remained small and less than 10% of the guesthouse owners that I met said that they hosted tourists before 1989.

2.6.1. Mediators and pioneers

After 1989 the legal restrictions were lifted, but the villages of Bran, Moieciu or Albac had little visibility among potential visitors. At the time, mass media and advertising were only budding industries in Romania, with a prime focus on everything Western and little concern with autochthonous products and experiences. Although Bran castle was a known landmark that presented touristic interest, it had little connection with the surrounding villages and nature. Visitors who came to see the castle were usually accommodated in the older and established mountain resorts of Prahova Valley – something that to some extent is still going on in the case of foreign tourists. If Bran, Moieciu and Albac are today some of the most popular rural destinations in Romania, this happened with the significant contribution of a group of mediators who, throughout the 90s, worked on connecting the local with the outside world.

Making the business visible on wider stages is a key feature of tourism entrepreneurship (Koscak and O'Rourke 2009:266). In the tourism economy, the actual 'goods' produced are bound to particular geographic locations and their 'circulation' or 'exchange' depends on the circulation of the consumers. They, however, must be incited to travel and this depends on knowledge about the destination being available and reaching them. This is where various intermediate agents or locals with non-local connections played an important role. On their own, regular villagers had limited access to wider stages of display, particularly in the early days of tourism development. Moreover, in the early 90s, most Romanians had not been exposed to the type of discourse on which rural tourism was built in the West. Even if peasants and villages

were part of the representations on which the Romanian national identity was built, these concepts functioned as static symbols, standing for what Romanians were supposed to be, essentially and existentially, not for what they were meant to do. In other words, the actual lived experience of life in the countryside was not required and indeed it was not even desired by many Romanians, particularly at a time when most of them were drawn by the promises of a Western modern lifestyle.

Generating an inflow of urbanites and foreigners to rural destinations like Bran, Moieciu or Albac relied in the beginning on personal networks. In the area of Bran, the most important contribution came from a network that was quick to grow and achieve its formal identity and structure as ANTREC – The National Association of Rural Ecologic and Cultural Tourism. The founders of this organisation were a retired teacher from Bucharest together with her daughter. The two started by encouraging selected locals to host tourists, while at the same time using their urban – and many say political – connections to bring in groups of visitors to the area. Most locals today acknowledge their merit of bringing visitors to the region and spreading valuable tourism know-how. While they succeeded in establishing long-lasting connections with some villagers, others were reluctant to collaborate with them or renounced their partnership after a while. ANTREC's work in Bran and Moieciu is, in fact, quite controversial and deserves closer attention. Since this organisation provided locals with some of the first models for doing tourism, it is important to understand the social and the economic underpinning of this process. Unfortunately, in this I have to rely mostly on what villagers had to say and on mass media accounts, as the founders of the NGO proved difficult to approach. During my first fieldtrip to Bran in 2008, I tried to meet them and I visited the ANTREC office, but since they were away, I could only have a short phone conversation with one of them. After briefly introducing myself and my research interest and mentioning that I had been in Bran for a few days, the response came on a rather hostile tone and I was criticised for my attempt at studying tourism in the area without consulting them first. My second contact with them was in Moieciu in the summer of 2012, when I managed to have a short meeting with the senior lady after showing up at her house unannounced. The interview however was quite brief[26] as she was unwell, so we decided to reschedule it. In the meantime, she promised that she was going to recommend me to guesthouse owners that I could interview. I never managed

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[26] I could not find out from her more than the official story of their organisation, with a strong emphasis on her and her daughter's role, the same story available online and in the mass media.

to continue my interview, although I called several times trying to set up a new meeting. I did not get the promised recommendations either. Each time we spoke I was told to call back, until finally she advised me to consult their website for whatever information I needed. When I suggested that perhaps we could meet at the upcoming Rural Tourism Congress, she became very inquisitive, asking how come I am participating, whether I paid the fee and where will I be staying. When we did meet at the Congress, she barely responded to my greeting. Overall, these brief interactions with the founder of ANTREC left me with the feeling that I was relating to a gatekeeper. To push the metaphor further, I am tempted to say that there is no longer a fence attached to the gate being guarded. Today tourism businesses are all too visible, there is a constant inflow of tourists and information about setting up a *pensiune* is freely available online.

However, this is not to deny the role of this organisation along the years. Apart from providing them with clients, ANTREC has enabled guesthouse owners to travel abroad, take part in tourism fairs and undergo trainings. In 2012 only, through collaborations with companies that provide courses in guesthouse administration, management, cooking or waiting, ANTREC helped over 160 people get credentials that would enable them to work legally in a *pensiune*. According to its founders, they supported over 100 guesthouse owners who travelled to the Loire Valley in France in order to get inspiration from EuroGites. On the other hand, many *pensiune* owners suggest that the selection procedure for taking part in such programs was not very transparent and it often came down to the personal preferences of those with important roles in the organisation. ANTREC was also involved in implementing a rating system for rural accommodation similar to the five star classification scheme used for hotels. Although the Ministry of Tourism was responsible with issuing the certificates, ANTREC representatives were responsible with the paperwork and with the on-site assessments. Some of my respondents insisted that villagers' requests to have their guesthouses certified were met selectively, according to the founders' personal affinities. As I was led to believe in several occasions by people I interviewed, something influencing such preferences would be one's responsiveness to the senior lady's requests and a general willingness to comply. Some of the younger and more resourceful *pensiune* owners suggested that they were expected to run different errands or to provide farm products, particularly around Christmas or Easter. It seems that apart from the formal aspect of this network, which nowadays seems to be limited to online advertising in return for a membership fee, ANTREC has a more important informal side. At the time of my fieldwork I heard comments suggesting that the NGO has

connections with the control authorities, people claiming that ANTREC can influence when and how inspections are carried out. Someone even went as far as to argue that the membership tax people pay for joining the network is in fact a 'protection tax' against the authorities, since it does little in terms of advertising and attracting tourists. Some of the NGO's actions suggest that there might be some truth to this 'conspiracy theory'. Shortly before my arrival in Moieciu, ANTREC had organised a meeting with representatives of the different control bodies in order to instruct people how to prepare for an assessment. It seems however that many *pensiuni* had been left out and a few people complained to me that only the owners of bigger guesthouses were invited. Incidentally, soon after this meeting, a large-scale control operation was carried out in the village and many of the targets were owners who had not been invited to the meeting.

Among guesthouse owners who are pleased with their collaboration with ANTREC there are a number of families who established closer connections to its founder and who regularly attend social events organised by her:

> *Miss M [i.e. Antrec's senior founder] gathered us, she united us [...] she kept calling us until she united us* (Ioana Pop, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

More recently, this group sought a formal identity and established another association called 'Clubul ANTREC' – the ANTREC Club. There is a stronger collaboration between owners who belong to this group, they send tourists to each other when they have no vacancies or they might share their employees. They also try to oppose those who rent without being registered and who, they argue, are 'damaging the market'. However, this group of owners who declare themselves very pleased with ANTREC is now a minority. Most people I interviewed were generally reserved and sometimes even critical of the organisation's management. Many of them describe their partnership with the NGO as an obligation, explaining that they only affiliated because in the beginning ANTREC was responsible with rating guesthouses. The typical complaints concerned the high commission that its founder was charging for bringing in tourists. Others mentioned delayed payments, arguing that after hosting a group sent by ANTREC, they had to wait one year to receive their payment[27]. Finally, it should be stressed that

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[27] Evidence from the mass-media suggests that the two ladies might have indeed had an inclination towards keeping more than their fair share of a deal. In 2010, media reports showed that the daughter received a suspended three years prison sentence for embezzlement of European funds in a project she managed during 2003 (Agenția 2010). The EU grant was supposed to finance a two weeks training in France for ten Romanian tourism practitioners. The district attorneys discovered that only six people actually went to France for a programme that lasted only four days and their expenses could only account for one quarter of the funds that were used by ANTREC (*idem*).

ANTREC developed into a nation-wide organisation with offices in many parts of Romania. The experiences that people in Bran and Moieciu had with this NGO may have to do more with their interactions with its founders figures, than to the workings of the organisation.

Turning to the Apuseni area and to Albac, the NGO that stimulated tourism there in the early 90s was OVR - Opération Villages Roumains. As I showed in more detail in the previous chapter, this organisation had a foreign origin and all of its advertising efforts were directed outside the borders of Romania. This has left a mark over the type of tourism inflow that developed in the Apuseni Mountains. The absence of an organisation focused on the domestic tourist market was compensated in Albac by the efforts of the local and the district administration. One of the mayors went to Belgium in 1992 and returned with knowledge and motivation for stimulating tourism, backed by useful connections to a future source of visitors. These connections became more official with the establishing of 'sister localities'. Currently, the Rural Tourism Fair organised by the local authorities in partnership with the District Council serves not just as a promotion tool, linking the village to potential visitors from outside, but as a booster of local pride and identity. The event gives people a sense that they are the collective owners of valuable resources that are worth sharing with others. The current mayor has plans to establish a tourism vocational school and an 'experimental *pensiune*' where children would be able to learn the trade (Berindei and Todea 2010:70-71). Finally, thanks to the mayor's efforts, Albac was classified as a 'touristic resort'. According to the legislation, a touristic resort is 'a locality that has specific touristic functions and where economic activity is exclusively directed towards developing a touristic product' (Governmental Decree regarding the organisation of tourism activities in Romania 1998).

While in Albac everyone speaks highly of the local administration, appreciating their efforts to promote tourism, in Bran and Moieciu the situation is in stark contrast. People complain that apart from a general lack of support from the authorities, bad administrative decisions have even created barriers for tourism. For instance, road works for installing the water pipes were carried out in Moieciu during the peak touristic season, causing a nuisance for many tourists. Poor infrastructure is an old problem and people were complaining about it back in 2008, when I first came to Bran. The only exception was one of the villages belonging to Bran, where the road had been asphalted, but I was told that this was because one of the locals was a member of the Romanian Parliament.

2.6.2. Tourism in numbers and buildings
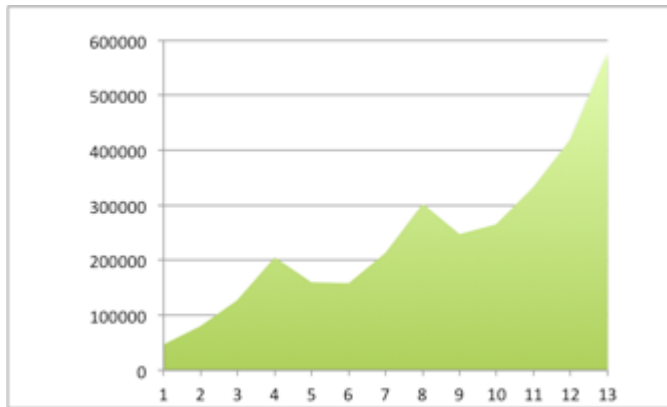
Figure 4 - Number of nights tourists spent in guesthouses in Bran and Moieciu from 2001 to 2013 (INS Tempo).

Since *pensiuni* are at the core of tourism development, a meaningful overview of the touristic landscape can be gained by looking at the evolution of their architecture. I start this section by looking at some aggregated data regarding tourism and the built environment of Bran and Moieciu and then I move to a

closer examination of both present and past architectural styles. Although new building styles with an urban influence could be noticed throughout the second half of the 20th century, the period following 1989 was marked by a much more accelerated rhythm of changes. Architecture offers probably the best illustration of the concomitant processes of rediscovering and reinventing the countryside. The desire of a growing number of people to spend time in a rural destination has inadvertently contributed to a radical alteration of the very landscape that was supposed to be their aesthetic inspiration for traveling. From the mid 90s onwards, it became obvious that the tourist interest for Bran and Moieicu was on the rise. When comparing tourism statistics from 1998 and 2009, there seems to be a tenfold increase in the number of visitors to the area. While in 1998 only 2,987 Romanian tourists and 1,316 foreign ones were registered by the local authorities (Mihalache 2002:8), eleven years later, the number of domestic guests had grown to 50,555 and the number of foreign ones to 6,211 (Braşov District Development Strategy 2010:112). These numbers also reveal that Bran and Moieciu became a destination predominantly visited by domestic tourists. While in 1998, the ratio of Romanians to foreigners was 2.2 to 1, more recently these values were 8 to 1. The rise in the number of Romanian visitors to Bran and Moieciu was not paralleled by a similar increase in the number of foreign guests. Another way of measuring tourist interest is by looking at the number of nights tourists spent in *pensiuni*. Data from the National Institute of Statistics presented in the graph on the left shows a visible increase in tourists' stays in the region, with numbers ranging from 46,947 in 2001 to 575959 in 2013. The image also illustrates the slight decline that was recorded in the years of the economic crisis. It should be stressed that these numbers are significantly underestimating the reality. Since more than half of the accommodation units are

currently unregistered, and those that do have a licence, often avoid declaring all their clients, real figures could be two or even three times higher[28].

The increasing demand for accommodation triggered a building boom. Although official tourism statistics are not giving the complete picture, it is worth noting that the number of registered guesthouses grew from 69 in 1998 and 103 in 1999 to 204 in 2000 (Mihalache n.d.). The graph below shows *pensiuni* numbers growing and fluctuating between 2001 and 2014, reaching a total of 542 at the end of this time frame.
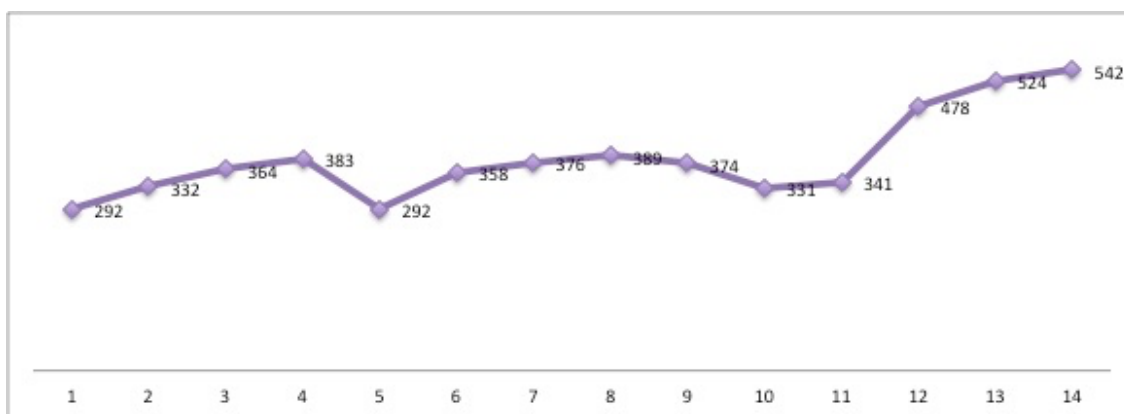
Figure 5 - Number of *pensiuni* in Bran and Moieciu between 2001 and 2014 (INSSE – Tempo).

Data regarding the number of new constructions is even more indicative. In Moieciu, the number of houses doubled over a period of 18 years. While in 1992 there were 1,519 dwellings (General Urban Plan Moieciu 2002), in 2010 their number had reached 2,923 (Braşov Town Hall 2010). Some of the new houses were built by city-dwellers, former tourists to the area, coming from the nearby town of Braşov, from Bucharest and from Constanţa, a Romanian district bordering the Black Sea. The perspective of having a profitable touristic business tempted many of these non-locals, even if initially they only bought the land with the intention of building a second home. The line between a holiday house and a *pensiune* proved to be a thin one when many of them opened accommodation businesses. The 2011 Census data allows for a fairly good estimate of how many buildings in Bran and Moieciu are intended for tourist accommodation and/or designed as holiday houses. The numbers show that Bran had 2,653 dwelling, but only 1,668 households[29] while in Moieciu the number of houses was 2,172 and the households were only 1,428 (CJRPL 2012: 8-9). The difference suggests that the villages of Bran and Moieciu have together a total of 1,729 houses that are not

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[28] Perhaps in the case of foreign tourists who tend to come through touring agencies and stay with registered *pensiuni,* the difference between the official data and the real numbers may be smaller.
[29] According to the definition used by the Census Bureau, a household refers to a group of two or more individuals who live together, generally share kinship ties and they pool resources together, contributing all or part of their income to the budget of the household (National Institute of Statistics 2011).

permanently occupied. Another set of data suggests that, as time passed, new constructions had an increasing number of rooms and beds. The 99 new *pensiuni* registered in 2004 had an average of 3.49 rooms and 7.07 beds, the 81 new units that opened in 2005 had an average 4.9 rooms and 9.95 beds, while one year later, the 72 guesthouses that opened had an average of 5.8 rooms and 11.8 beds each (Bran City Hall 2008). Data from 2014 shows the extent to which this trend continued, indicating that the size of newly built accommodation units doubled over a period of ten years. Currently guesthouses in Bran have on average 8.4 rooms and 19.25 beds, while *pensiuni* in Moieciu have on average 8.6 rooms and 17.5 beds (Ministerul Turismului 2014). As the spaces destined for tourists multiplied, they also became more removed from the hosts' living and working areas. Whenever possible, freestanding buildings designated entirely for accommodating tourists were erected. If this was not financially possible, refurbishing and extending the old house always included creating different entrances for hosts and guests and delineating separated areas for the two parties.

Looking back to a time in history when rural tourism was yet to come, we find that vernacular architecture in Bran and Moieciu was adapted to the environment and to the pastoral economy of the region. Up until the beginning of the 20th century, dwellings encompassed the rooms where people slept, as well as large storage areas for hay and tools and for drying fruit, a cellar, barns for animals and annexes for preserving and processing food (Prahoveanu 1998:169). Such houses were laid out in an 'U' shape, often with a gate at the opening, resulting in an interior yard. For this reason, they are known as 'houses with a yard' (*casa cu curte*) and in the past they were the most widespread form of dwelling in isolated mountain areas, where people sought protection from the elements, from the wild animals or from villains (199). As the communist state restricted the practice of transhumance, larger numbers of sheep had to spend the winter in the village, so bigger stables had to be built to accommodate them. New annexes were built away from the main dwelling and the former stables were then transformed in living areas for people (203). Starting with the 18th century, influences from the nearby town of Brașov became visible in the architecture of homes belonging to members of the educated elite, such as priests or local administration (221). Houses with two floors appeared at the beginning of the 20th century. The ground floor of these dwellings was used for economic activities such as cheese processing or trade and storage, while the living quarters were at the upper level (224). Typical materials for building were wood, stone, earth, lime and sand and, starting with the 20th century, increasingly bricks, ceramic tiles and cement (226). Wood, however, remained

ubiquitous, as many houses had shingled roofs and even entire walls covered in a type of shingles called *draniță* while most fences were also wooden.

Figure 4 - Houses in Moieciu dating from the period 1920-1980.

The overwhelming majority of *pensiuni* and holiday houses that appeared in Bran and Moieciu after 1989 were built without any concern for preserving this architectural tradition. Quite the opposite, their owners hoped to surpass local history and prove that they belong to the modern world[30]. Many of the new buildings were initially erected by resourceful urbanites and they provided models that were not easy to miss. These houses introduced new ideas in terms of design and building materials and locals strived to incorporate them in their own projects. New constructions were often done without the input of engineers or architects, based only on the ideas of the owners and with some advice from the builders. Someone once confessed that when they began working on the second level of the house, the floor started to bend and they realised that they should add another structural pillar to hold it. In their new villas people emphasised size over any notions of landscaping, urban planning, and even safety. This was helped by the authorities' lax attitude concerning building heights or the minimum distance between houses. Given the villagers' long experience with bending the rules and with contesting the legitimacy of local authorities, it is not very surprising that building

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[30] A point to which I return again later on and in Chapter 3.

norms have been disregarded to such an extent. The result is that many guesthouses today find themselves at a distance of only a few meters from their neighbours, they have small gardens and insufficient parking for their guests, while the overall image is of an overcrowded built landscape. The absence of a coherent and integrated design is also a consequence of the piecemeal building processes whereby owners kept adding extra rooms and bathrooms over the years.

Figure 5 - Built landscape of Moieciu de Sus (2013).

Figure 6 – *Pensiuni* in Moieciu.

Building materials are also responsible for the new house aesthetics. Some of them, such as concrete blocks or bricks, were preferred for their perceived durability. The practical aspect overlapped with a growing taste for things associated with modernity, such as double glazed windows with a white plastic frame, flooring with ceramic tiles or stainless steel balcony railings. In order to improve the thermal efficiency of old houses, many locals insulated them with polystyrene. This material was simply glued on the facades, covering the wooden shingles, not only changing the look of the house into something more 'modern', but also restricting the 'breathability' of the walls and creating a favourable environment for mould. At my first visit in 2008, I noticed that many of the new villas were painted in flashy colours like red, orange, pink or yellow. Five years later I found that some of these houses had been repainted in white or in paler nuances. This process is similar to what Iancău observed in rural Bucovina, another touristic destination in the north of Romania, where locals initially embraced intense bright colours in painting the facades of their guesthouses, only to gradually abandon them later. The change in their preference is put on the account of criticism from other villagers or from tourists (Iancău 2011:92). It is likely that the same things contributed to the change I observed in Bran and Moieciu.

The actual functionality of the guesthouse as a potential living space for their owners seems to be of little concern. On few occasions, I interviewed someone who was in the process of building a future *pensiune* and I was surprised by how small the quarters planned for the hosts were. One married couple was going to have a single room in a house with eight rooms, while they decided that their children were going to stay at their grandparents. Another young family with two children had designed a separate apartment with two bedrooms for them. However, this was located at the back of the house, next to the dining room and the kitchen, which were going to be the noisiest areas of the *pensiune.* The family bathroom was tiny, while the two children

were sharing a room that was not just very small, but had windows so narrow that hardly any light was coming through.

In the context of a touristic destination, it is tempting to see the emphasis on large houses with many guest rooms as a maximising strategy. However, in rural Romania house-centred strategies are not particular to touristic destinations. They have been documented, for instance, among labour migrants who invest most of their earnings in building large villas. Nagy talks about a 'frenzy' of building, which does not seem to exist in Romania's neighbouring countries (Nagy 2008:95) and Mihăilescu speaks about '*case făloase*' – proud houses – as an important status symbol for the Romanian villagers driven by the need for social recognition (Mihăilescu 2010, 2011). A large house with many rooms certifies that its owner has good housekeeping skills, thus being a trustworthy person of good reputation (Mihăilescu 2000:10). A similar outlook comes through from what locals in Bran and Moieciu have to say about their houses.

Can you see this area developing? Nobody knows to spend money better than these brăneni [people from Bran], *than the people from this area. There is a beneficial competition. Each [of us] wants to have… Us* brăneni *have this tradition, have this tendency to own a beautiful house. Like others have the tendency to visit, to sit, like yourself, and discuss… we have people who almost don't know where Braşov[31] is… but they have a beautiful house! This is it, and they die happy! This is the essence. This is why this village looks so beautiful* (Mihai Dumitru, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

A guesthouse is an important testimony of one's character and work discipline.

…this is how we were formed, carrying manure with our backs on the hills, working with animals. And with the products that we sold, one leu [Romanian national currency], *one* leu, *this is how we raised ourselves up. And we made a room, and another room.* (Gheorghe Apetrei, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu)

Moreover, in a touristic destination, the local community is no longer the only frame of reference. What matters even more is the impression a guesthouse makes on tourists

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[31] The nearest town located 40 km away.

and, consequently, the number of guests one receives becomes a new marker of achievement.

> *'so that the tourist sees that you did something with the money, you didn't just sit around...'* (Stefana Rupea, *pensiune* owner, Bran)

> *'...you should know that a tourist who came the previous year, and comes again this year and sees that compared with last year you did [improved]... he is happy and he says, hey, this guy did something also from the money that I gave him. He wasn't a looser, he didn't drink them or... He did something. Some other guy, just sits, if he made a house, he keeps it like this from his birth until he dies and he takes the money and wastes it'* (Petrea Vasile, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

Locals distinguish between owners who built their *pensiuni* quickly with money made from selling land and those that had put in a long sustained effort. Those who spent many years extending and refurbishing their *pensiuni*, by gradually investing small amounts of money made from tourism, like to compare themselves with villagers who made quick and easy money by selling land.

> *Those who made themselves [guesthouses] sold land, because... from honest work it is very difficult to do something'* (Ioana Flutur, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

> *I got married in 2000. I strted renting in 2006. Only with my [own] hands and with struggle* (Eugen Roman, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

Gradual development through constant hard work is valued as the ideal model and people always try to stress how hard they had to work to achieve what they have now. Even though many owners of *pensiuni* have aquired some funds by selling land at some point or another, or by wage labour, these details are usually left out of their stories.

2.6.3. Tourism in Apuseni

Compared to Bran and Moieciu, villages in Apuseni have seen a more moderate tourism development. In 2014 there were less than 70 registered guesthouses in the region of my fieldwork: 19 in Albac, 11 in Gârda de Sus, 4 in Vadu Moților, 1 in Horea and 32 in the

larger resort of Arieșeni. Of course, there are also many locals offering accommodation without registering a *pensiune*. During my stay in Apuseni in 2011, I learned that only 3 out of 10 *pensiuni* were registered in Gârda de Sus, and 10 out of 50 in Albac. A significant part of the local economy was, in fact, informal, and the situation of guesthouses was very similar to Vasile's findings concerning the logging businesses in another Apuseni village, where, she noted, only 3 out of 40 sawmills were authorised (Vasile 2010a:19). The slower pace of tourism development in Apuseni is explained by the regions' relative remoteness from any large urban centres. This area did not benefit from the same inflow of tourists and urbanites in pursuit of second home locations like Bran and Moieciu. Consequently, land prices stayed low. Even when occasional buyers appeared, people were reluctant to sell, so today most of the *pensiuni* belong to locals. On the other hand, logging was a more lucrative and widespread business and it presented an alternative to tourism for many villagers. In the recent years, however, the extent of illegal deforestations in Romania turned into a debated issue in the media and authorities are trying to enforce stricter controls, forcing many of the small informal ventures to shut down. During a short visit to Apuseni at the beginning of 2015, I heard locals complain that just a few large-scale businesses were accountable for most illegal deforestations, while the ones who had to suffer the consequences of the heightened controls were villagers who were only taking an occasional cart of wood.

The business landscape of Albac is dominated by smaller ventures. Even the largest accommodation business in Albac is still far from the massive developments carried out by some of the growth-oriented entrepreneurs in Bran and Moieciu. Although new building styles are noticeable in the villages of Apuseni, the transformations in architecture of the area are not as radical and pervasive as in Bran and Moieciu. In Albac even though wood is not always a structural material, it is often used for covering houses, as the pictures below illustrate.

Figure 7 – *Pensiuni* **in Apuseni (Albac and Vadu Moţilor).**

When I asked *pensiuni* owners about their decision to use wood, they seemed surprised and they argued that it was the obvious choice because they are in a mountain region. The only village where I noticed more modern-looking and colourful houses was Arieşeni. Owing to its skiing slope, this is the oldest and most popular destination among the Apuseni villages. My stay there was brief and I only have one interview to rely on, but I was told that some of the new houses belong to urbanites. Perhaps, then, it is not a coincidence that the houses in Arieşeni are more similar to those in Bran.

Figure 8 – New villas in Arieşeni.

2.6.4. Tourism inflow and the Crisis

As in most of the Romanian countryside, tourism in Apuseni and in Bran and Moieciu is seasonal: the highest inflow of tourists can be observed during the summer, starting from May-June, peaking in August, and decreasing throughout September. During these months people generally stay a longer time, spending five, six or seven nights in a *pensiune*. From October to December and March to May tourists come for shorter stays, mostly during week-ends. Tourists come from all over the country, but certain patterns can be noticed depending on the season – during the summer months, when holidays are longer, more people tend to come from afar, while week-end stays in the autumn and spring are mostly for those living in the surrounding areas.
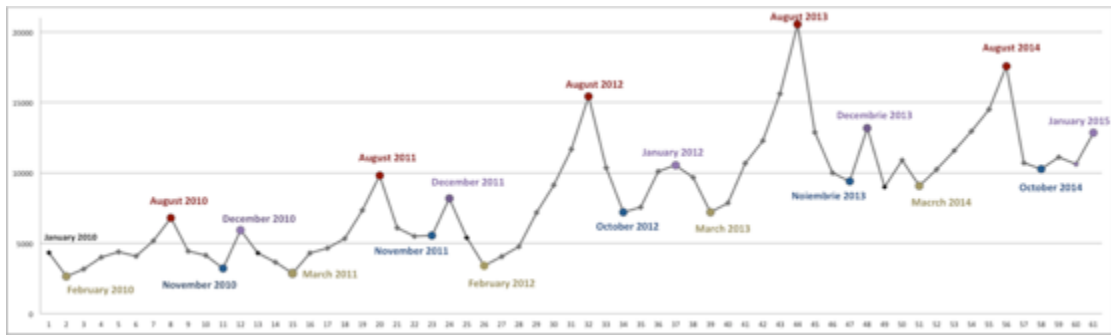
Figure 9 - Monthly distribution of tourists arriving in Bran and Moieciu between January 2010 and January 2015.

Starting with the economic recession in 2008, tourists' numbers dropped and their sojourns became shorter. During my 2012 and 2013 fieldwork, most people were talking about a significant decline of tourism in Bran and Moieciu and the morale was often down. People expressed disappointment with the way things were going and compared the current bleak scene with a 'golden age' that existed around 2000-2008.
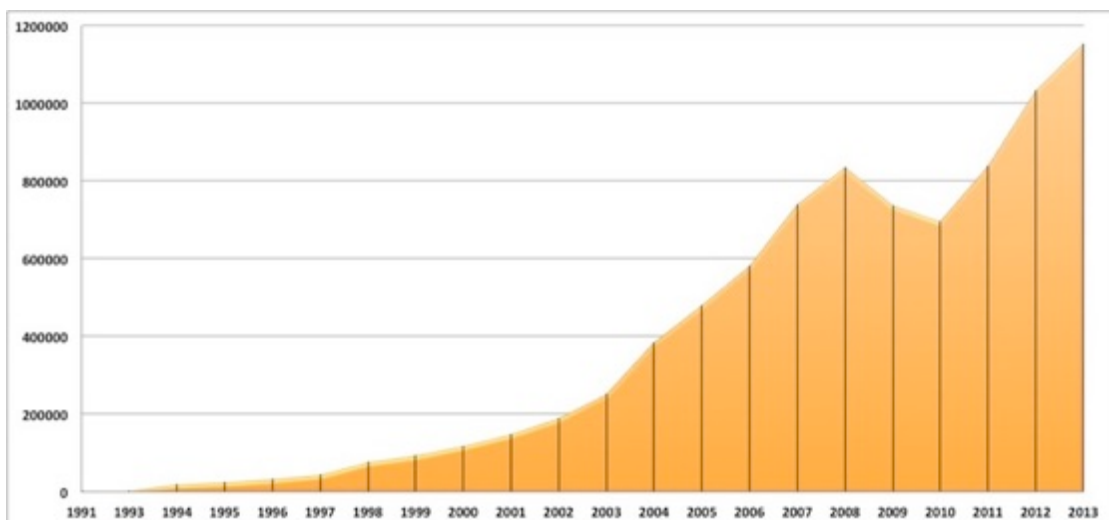
Figure 10 – Number of tourists arriving in rural guesthouses across Romania from 1991 to 2013 (Graph based on data from INS – Tempo online database, 2014).

Tourism statistics from Bran and Moieciu show a similar decline after 2008, but they also point at quite a quick recovery, with incoming tourists reaching similar numbers in 2011 as during the peak period of 2008.
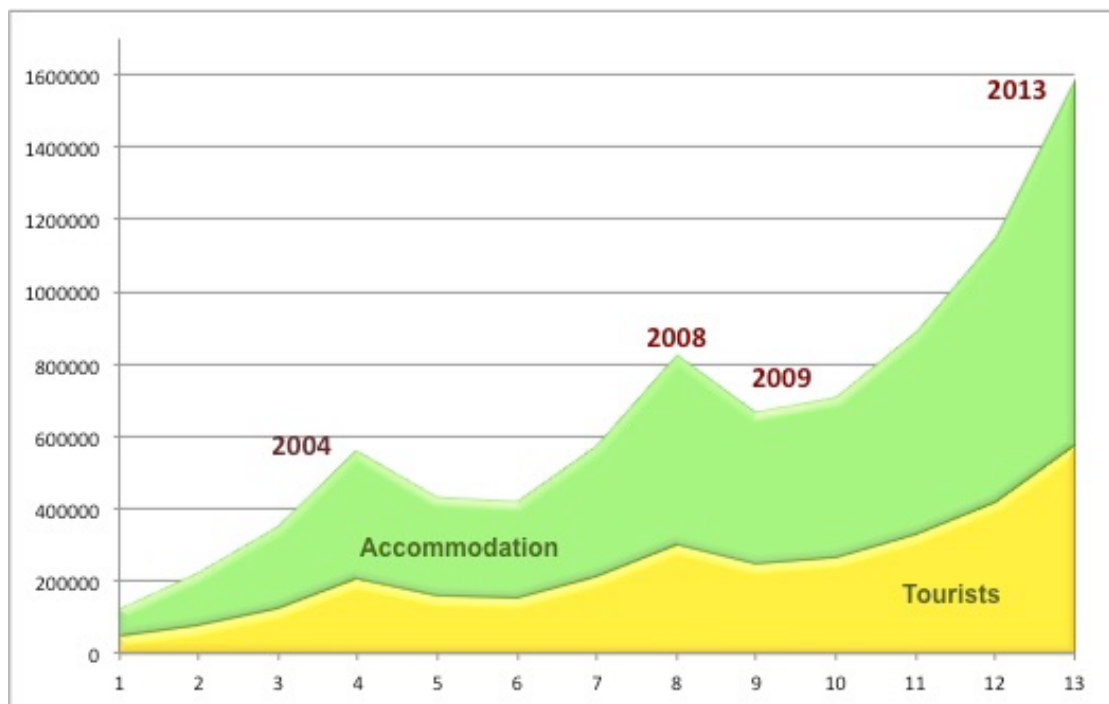
Figure 11 - Number of tourists arriving in Bran and Moieciu (yellow) in parallel with the evolution of the accommodation offer (green), measured in number of beds (INS Tempo).

In spite of the picture given by the official data, in 2012 and 2013 most of my respondents complained about the drop in tourists' numbers.

> *We can't say that it was bad – 2007, 2008, until 2009 and even 2010. But starting with 2010 we went on the other side. I mean we reached the peak sometime around 2009 and from 2009 or 2010 we started to go down on the other side. And we've been going down from 2010, 2011, 2012… I don't know how much longer we are going to go down. Prices went down, occupancy rate went down…. tourists' quality went down* (Virgil Popescu, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

> *Bad, very, very bad. Every day it's getting worse. The prices that were three years ago, six years, I can say that there are the same prices that were six years ago, but you realise how much the prices grew for everything else: the detergent, electricity, you need fridges and stuff. Detergent and electricity and our work, I would rather sit and do nothing than rent for 40 or 50 lei, can you realise?* (Alina Radu, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

Some *pensiuni* had to close down, while others remained unfinished as construction works came to a halt.

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Figure 12 – A closed guesthouse and unfinished villas for sale in Moieciu in the summer of 2013.

In spite of this bleak scene, the crisis did not affect all guesthouses in the same way. While some businesses went bankrupt, others survived and few of them even seemed to thrive. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at what made some *pensiuni* more resilient than others in the face of economic adversity.

2.7. The conundrum of commodification

I turn now to examining the ways in which guesthouses have built into their tourist offer some of the ideas that are central to the various discourses about rural tourism that I discussed in the previous chapter. I ask here what is the material underpinning of notions such as nature, traditions, or the authentic and how are they translated into practices? What is being commodified and how? As I will show in more detail in Chapter 3, tourist experiences available in Bran and Moieciu are generally inspired by modern contemporary and suburban styles and make little attempt to incorporate elements of rural heritage or 'tradition'. Although less prominent, such innovative businesses exist and the picture would not be complete without examining them. A closer look will also reveal why these cases are the exception, rather than the norm.

2.7.1. Marketing tradition: material culture and entertainment

In spite of the discourse on which rural tourism is built, tourism entrepreneurs have done little to integrate elements of local material culture in the architecture of their *pensiuni* or in their interior decorations. As I have already shown, in Bran and Moieciu most guesthouses make a radical break with older building styles. There are, however, a few cases when people tried to preserve old houses or to build new ones in the vernacular style of the past. Quite tellingly, all of them are outsiders, either foreigners, or Romanians with a long experience of living abroad. Such characters include an actress who is married to a German and has lived for over two decades in Germany, a Frenchman who moved to the village a few years ago after marrying a local, a famous Romanian actor, a former ex-pat with a doctorate in Geophysics, or the honorary Romanian consul in Boston.

Figure 13 - *Pensiune* built in the vernacular architecture of the region typical for the 19th century.

The guesthouse pictured above is the most faithful reproduction of a *casa cu curte* – the U-shaped house with a courtyard that was the most popular form of vernacular architecture until the beginning of the 20th century. It belongs to a Romanian born and raised abroad who currently resides in Boston. He descends from one of the elite families of Rucăr region[32], with generations traced back 450 years ago. His parents had

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[32] Rucăr is located around 70 km south of Bran.

been exiled during the communist regime and his first visit to Romania was in 1968, when he took part in a National Geographic expedition. Liking one of the old houses in Moieciu, he sketched it in his notebook, and after 1989, he returned with the hope of purchasing it. When he found that the building had been relocated to an Ethnographic museum he took, instead, the plans, and built a new house, reproducing the original. The construction was faithful to the vernacular building methods: wooden pegs were used instead of iron ones and the logs were cut by axe instead of mechanic saws. The guesthouse is furnished with restored antique furniture and decorated with old peasant rugs, pots and tools. The accommodation complex also features a century old house from Moieciu, which was moved from another part of the village and is now available to rent as 'The Peasant House'. Room prices – including breakfast, start from 150 euro, which is eight time more than the average accommodation rates in Bran and Moieciu. Ironically, the most 'peasant' guesthouse is only accessible to a luxury clientele.

A more affordable experience of staying in a *casa cu curte* is offered by a guesthouse that belongs to a large and well-known Romanian touring agency. The building is also a reproduction, but its design is only inspired from the peasants' life, being described by the online adverts as having a 'rustic' style. Interior and exterior walls feature colourful paintings in a modern reinterpretation of pastoral symbols and the room furnishings are new.

Figure 14 - Reinterpretation of pastoral material culture.

The only example of an original old *casa cu curte* being used as a guesthouse is a small house belonging to a Frenchman who settled in Moieciu after marrying a local woman. A photography enthusiast, he transformed an old shed into a small exhibition room and he refurbished the old house in the vicinity, renting it out to foreign visitors.

Figure 15 – *Casa cu curte* – possibly the oldest building in Moieciu to serve as a guesthouse.

Similar cases to those presented here are found in other destinations across Romania. Whenever there is a strong interest for preserving and restoring traditional architecture and for creating touristic products that are intended to be coherent, faithful reproductions of past material and immaterial culture, the actors involved belong to an educated elite, often foreign or with experience of living abroad. Perhaps the best-known example in the British world is the Prince of Wales, who owns two guesthouses in Romania and has given constant support to a Romanian charity working towards the preservation of the country's rural heritage.

The only local initiative that I can include in this category comes from a couple in Albac, a teacher married to a former mayor, who collaborated with OVR in the early 90s and went to Belgium for a training. The family was among the first to receive tourists in Albac in their home, located near the centre of the village. Later, at the request of tourists in search for a more isolated location, they decided to rent out the wife's parents' home, located in one of Albac's remote villages, high on the mountain slopes. They kept the original architecture[33], furniture, and even made mattresses filled with leafs, as their parents used to have.

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[33] Apart from the roof that had been already altered and covered with metal tiles. Reverting to a roof made of straw or shingles is costly, as specialised workers are harder to come by.

Figure 16 – Old house in the remote village of Costeşti (1100m), transformed into a *pensiune*.

With the exception of this last case, it seems that the more people are removed from the rural past, the stronger their concern with an accurate reproduction of it and with the authenticity of the elements they use. Most of the guesthouse owners who show attachment to symbols and material elements of the past, have, in fact, never experienced that version of the past. They are driven by what Appadurai has described as 'nostalgia without memory' (Appadurai 1996:30), by displaying and consuming symbols of a past that is not theirs. The more faithful their representation of this past, the more distant their actual lifestyle has been to a similar lived experience.

Moving away from architecture and turning to smaller elements of the material universe of *pensiuni,* the traces of the past are once again not very noticeable. Along with hand-made clothes, many tools and other hand-crafted objects became obsolete even before the onset of tourism. Flooded with a growing variety of affordable consumer items, villagers all over Romania lost interest in their old household and clothing items. Wooden tools, embroidered clothing and hand-woven carpets were easily discarded[34] or sold to antique dealers and foreign tourists, for small amounts of money[35]. Guesthouses where such objects are displayed are rare, and they usually have an eclectic style, with interiors mixing modern industrial elements with local hand-made items.

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[34] Back in 2004 when I was an undergraduate, I returned home from fieldwork in a Romanian village with two blouses and a skirt, all hand-made and with intricate embroidery that had required weeks of work. Some of my colleagues had visited a household where they found such old clothing items used as cleaning cloths. When they showed interest for these outfits, the owner was happy to give them whatever blouses and skirts she still had, so they came back with a big pile and divided it among all of the girls in our team.

[35] In Albac someone told me how her grandmother had given away her sculpted spindle, a very old tool which was inherited from her forebears, in exchange of a pair of sox and a box of pepper.

Figure 19- Bedroom with old carpets on the wall and on the armchair, a sheep's skin on the floor, laminated parquet and furniture, and contemporary bedding with a red hearts print.

Figure 20 - Exhibition room in a *pensiune* owned by a local family in Moieciu displaying weaving tools and hand-made clothing and carpets.

In Bran and Moieciu I found just one *pensiune* where the host had set up an entire room as a small museum, showing weaving machines, carpets and clothes. Most of the objects were inherited from her parents, who used to be well-known weavers in the region. Even if wood and wool are still available resources in the area, there was no interest in reviving old crafts and producing more hand-made objects. There is a thriving souvenir market in the vicinity of the Castle, where one can easily find fridge magnets, colourful party wigs, and a large variety of plastic toys. Dairy, meat and sheepskins are the only locally produced goods that can be purchased in this bazaar. Most other objects available are industrial items, usually made in China, even if some of them are wooden objects, or embroided shirts, or tablecloths reminding of the local production. One of the sellers from the fair explained that some time ago people came from China, took samples of the artisan products that they were selling, and then they started mass-producing them. The few cases of artisans who actually produce the merchandise themselves are not making any area-specific objects and they are non-locals. The embroidery they use for tablecloths or clothing is described as 'national', and is inspired by a delocalised pool of symbols.

Turning now to the more fluid elements of culture that have been integrated in the tourist offer, 'tradition' often refers to practices and objects that were linked to local ways of securing a livelihood. Since people no longer needed to make their own clothing or tools, practices that were connected to this domestic production have disappeared. A good example is the 'sitting' or *şezătoare,* a gathering of women who were knitting, sawing clothes and weaving carpets. One of the largest businesses in Moieciu has recreated this practice as part of an entertainment program for organised

groups of foreigners. The tourists come by bus but they are dropped a few kilometers away from the guesthouse, where they are picked up in horse-drawn carts. The ride finishes with their arrival at the *pensiune*. Next, they are invited to the restaurant, where a couple of girls dressed in folk-inspired outfits await by the door with small cups of plum brandy (*ţuica*) and little pieces of smoked pork fat (*slănină*). At the end of their meal in the restaurant, they find themselves surrounded by women who spin wool or embroider shirts, in an attempt to recreate the now abandoned custom of *şezătoare*. In this way, tourists experiment fragments of village life: a cart ride, a shot of *ţuica*, a glimpse of a *şezătoare*. However, all these things are taken out of context: the carts are customised for group sitting, they are decorated with colourful rugs, which is not typical, the *ţuica,* normally part of a meal, is served when entering the building and the women only re-enact the sitting in an unusual context. Villagers themselves may be included in displays of tradition and authenticity, when they dress up in their folk garbs and entertain their guests. On a different occasion I could observe a host who one minute was sitting behind a desk, answering one of his two mobile phones, surrounded by computers, printers, faxes and other gadgets, while the next minute he would jump into a century old embroided shirt to serve plum brandy to his guests and spin in front of them a sheep on a spit - which, for that matter, had been already cooked in a very large professional oven in the kitchen. The main stake of those who adopt this style is to attract tourists and to provide entertainment, not to preserve local heritage and display a faithful image of the different elements of culture.

Figure 17 – Foreign tourists arriving in a horse-drawn cart and lining up to enter the restaurant where they receive a shot of plum brandy (*ţuică*).

Religious and pastoral celebrations offer some of the best opportunities for inviting tourists to experience 'authentic' local practices. Even the local authorities in collaboration with ANTREC became involved in organising one such event called *răvăşitul oilor* – translated as 'scattering the sheep'. According to the locals, *răvăşitul*

oilor used to be a period during the autumn months when flocks of sheep would be brought back from the mountains and 'scattered' through the village as they went back to their different owners. Today the event features a big fair where various food products are sold and folkloric bands come to perform. This custom never involved the kind of 'carnival' or *bâlci*, as people call it, that one sees today. Nowadays it is tourists, rather than sheep, that come flocking.

> *Sheep don't come all of them at the same time [...] this is something like the Dracula myth. The same goes with* răvăşitul oilor. *Everything is commercial, everything is a façade, everything is for the money* (Alina Faur, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

Christmas and Easter are the best times for invoking tradition when advertising holiday packages. Most of the offers revolve around gastronomy and the rich variety of dishes specific for these celebrations. At Christmas, when pork is the staple dish, some *pensiuni* take the opportunity to show tourists the very first stages of food preparation, setting up pig-slaughtering demonstrations. These are enacting the pre-Christian pig-sacrificing custom called *Ignat,* which is still widespread in rural Romania. The pig killing is an event that gathers the entire household as well as the neighbours. The killing is followed by portioning and processing parts of the animal while the participants have occasional shots of hot plum brandy for warming up. In larger establishments that cater for big groups of tourists this event has become more 'sanitiesed' and staged. However, for the average guesthouses, this is still a family event that is not openly advertised to tourists and where only regular guests who specifically ask to take part are invited.

Figure 18 – Pig slaughtering demonstration, organised by one of the largest hotels in Moieciu, owned by an urbanite (left) and Cheese making demonstration, organised by the guesthouse presented in Figure 33 that belongs to a big touring agency from Bucharest (right).

Linking the episodes discussed above with MacCannell's (1973) approach to authenticity, it seems that we are witnessing a classic case of 'staged authenticty'. As he argued, tourists' belief that 'authentic' culture can be found 'backstage' prompts the tourism industry to create displays that resemble a 'backstage'. The intention is usually to have visitors believe that they are witnessing aspects of 'real life' that have not been packaged for tourists. Such efforts are however largely missing in Bran or Moieciu, where the staged nature of activities becomes immediately apparent. Guests are not really taken 'backstage' to the quarters where locals live and carry out their farm-related work. Instead, activites are selected, extracted from their regular flow and brought in front of large groups of tourists standing – as images above illustrate – outside in the garden, or in a restaurant. The result is a pseudo-'staged-authenticity', where tourists are happy to have glimpses of 'traditional life' brought in front of them and they almost never venture in an active pursuit of 'backstages'.

2.7.2. Farming in the backstages and at the outskirts

While it can be understandable why pig slaughtering remains a niche-event attracting a limited number of tourists, there are more benign farming activities that could be showcased to visitors. Although Bran and Moieciu are most famous for their cheeses, the only cheese-making demonstration that I heard of was organised by the tour operator that owns one of the few *pensiuni* built in the vernacular style. Local hosts are receptive whenever tourists ask to see these things, but they never formalize this activity as a constant part of their offer. Villagers see tourism and animal husbandry as separate spheres of activity and with very few exceptions, they never attempted to commodify farming as a process. Quite contrary, people made increasing efforts to keep animals away from the sight of tourists. Animals were relegated to the 'backstages' as people did their best to move barns and stables out of tourists' sight.

> *When you start a* pensiune *you must move your animals* (Doina Cojocaru, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

Odăi, the wooden barns that dot the higher grounds of the hilly slopes, are a conspicuous part of the landscape, but yet they remain inaccessible to tourists. I only met a couple of accommodation owners who were offering to take their guests to their *odaie* for observing or taking part in hay making, enjoying the view and having a picnic.

Figure 19 – *Odăi* **– wooden sheds where villagers store their hay and keep animals during winter.**

During my last stay in Moieciu I did meet some locals who were trying to set up tourist visits to a cattle-pen located in a forest clearing at the outskirts of the village. The initiative belonged to the owner of a hotel who had received requests from his guests to visit such a place. Two groups had already been taken to the cattle-pen and, following the positive feedback, the villagers were thinking to develop this into a regular service. They were curious to try out their new 'service' on more visitors, so they invited my students and me for a visit and a meal at the pen. On our arrival there, we received skewers with smoked pork fat that we fried over a fire and ate with polenta, and they prepared for us *bulz* – polenta balls filled with cheese, wrapped in foil and roasted in the open fire, all washed down with *palincă* (palinka) and wine. Even if we were at this cattle-pen, the main focus was once again the food. We were sat in a clean area, by a table, while the cows and the actual herdsmen were further away. After eating, we went to see the animals, without being guided or invited by our hosts. I am not sure if this cattle-pen turned into a popular tourist attraction over the next year. I could not find any reference to it on the website of the hotel that had provided the initial idea, or on the webpage of the guesthouse owned by one of our guides. If these tours are still organised, it looks like the advertising is only local, probably limited to the recommendations given by accommodation owners to tourists who look potentially interested in such activities.

2.7.3. Gastronomy: descovering and reinventing local culture through food

The only place where farming and tourism do constantly meet is on the plate. Apart from accommodation, many hosts offer meals, and food is an important part of the demand. If in the past only foreigners had a particular interest in local products, hosts are now noticing demand from Romanians has increased[36]. Mountain villages in Romania are known for a variety of dairy products prepared from sheep's or cow's milk. Cheeses such as *telemea, caş, urdă, burduf* or *caş afumat*, smoked pork fat, cold cuts and sheep pastrami are typical products offered by locals and served in most *pensiuni*. Apart from these, the menus include a rich variety of soups and cooked dishes that have little to do with the culinary traditions of the place. In the past, in the area of Bran and Moieciu, typical meals consisted of polenta and a wide range of dairy products. For special occasions, a dish considered superior was rice with milk (Moşoiu 1930: 42). Pork and mutton were rarely on the menu and most often people ate vegetables. Given that villagers observed all the fast days, their diet was actually often vegan, as the orthodox religion dictates that people restrain from any kind of animal products during these periods (*idem*). Dough boiled in water, a stew of onion and garlic, green beans or cabbage, or polenta with boiled fruit were all common dishes at the beginning of the last century, but nowadays they cannot be found in any restaurant that claims to serve 'traditional' food. The only cooked dish that seems to have carried on from the past, becoming a staple of local food, is the *bulz,* a polenta ball filled with cheese and grilled, ideally on an open fire. The situation is similar in Apuseni where many gastronomic practices are fairly recent and partly prompted by tourist demand. Reading accounts about Albac's past, one finds stories of poverty, scarcity and poor diet (Berindei and Todea 2010:48-49, Vasile 2009a).

> *We do our best to make it agrotourism, not to [use] these bought products. Whenever I can, I mean. And they are happy for this, some good milk, an egg from underneath a hen […] they are tasty. Or many tell me that the pork is very tasty. They ask what I do to them* [i.e. the pigs]. *What I do? I raise them at home. I don't get that rubbish that was fattened with all sorts of chemicals* (Doina Dumitru, *pensiune* owner, Gârda de Sus).

Gastronomy remains the area in which villagers make the best use out of their local

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[36] This parallels the general growing interest among Romanians for consuming organic food and for products labelled as 'traditional', 'peasant', or 'authentic' (Iancu and Mihăilescu 2009).

resources. In contrast to this comes their recourse to another element that is often highlighted by the advertising discourse: nature.

2.7.4. Nature

The natural environment perceived by both tourists and locals as the central asset of the region is surprisingly little integrated in the tourist offer. Tourism services gravitate around the *pensiune* and the offer has a strong indoor element while the typical outdoor activities remain confined to the garden and gravitate around the gazebos, children's playgrounds and the barbeque. For the vast majority of the owners, what tourists do when they leave the house is not their concern. Even if many of the locals have land up the mountain slopes, it is very rare to find that they use this resource for entertaining their guests. This offer is very seldom advertised and made visible on the Internet or at the location. The two or three people who mentioned this kind of activity gave me the impression that it was meant only for some guests – either the regulars with whom a closer relationship is established, the foreigners, or the tourists who specifically enquire and ask about this option.

To some extent, locals' reluctance to encourage tourists to engage with their surroundings stems from a conflict between farming and tourism economy. Tourists who explore too much might endanger an important economic resource: the hay. Haymaking is a crucial part of animal husbandry. Every summer, locals cut and collect the grass from the steep meadows surrounding the villages. After drying, the hay is gathered into stacks or stored in barns and serves as the main food source for sheep and cattle during the winter. Scything is possible because during the warm season the animals are kept from grazing on these pastures and they are taken to sheepfolds and cattle-pen in the mountains. Hay meadows are a valuable resource and locals do not want tourists walking through them. Even though there are no fences, most of the hills around the village have owners who would not be very happy to find people strolling through their prospective hay, flattening the grass and making it difficult or impossible to scythe. This prohibition was mostly noticed and pointed out to me by non-local guesthouse owners and by tourists.

> *There is a taboo: now in the summer, when the scything begins, you are not allowed to step on the grass on people's land because the grass will get flattened and it's not possible to scythe anymore. You can walk in a line [but*

still] it's a real problem (Luminiţa Sima, *pensiune* owner originally from Bucharest).

Moreover, a local host explained that she or any other villager would be reluctant to allow tourists on their property, since they tend to leave a lot of trash behind. There are also safety issues to consider, as tourists wandering about may come in the proximity of sheepfolds that are guarded by large dogs known to be aggressive.

Another reason why locals did not build their tourist offer in relation to the natural environment is because they are not aesthetically connected to their surroundings in the same way that non-local urbanites or foreigners might be. Some of the migrants who opened a *pensiune* in Bran or Moieciu describe, sometimes in a passionate tone, the aesthetic qualities of the area, pointing at the numerous landmarks that can be visited and stressing outdoor activities.

I moved here for good in 2005. Well, I am in love with nature, I liked this area a lot. I have been coming here since '91, I had a holiday house here and I used to come, while I was in the coutry I would only stay here. Afterwards, when I decided to stay home [retire], *I decided to do what I am doin now* (Virgil Lazăr, former ship captain, currently guesthouse owner in Bran).

We just fell in love with this place. We used to come for many years in January. In the winter it is like a fairytale. For children it is extraordinary, there is no traffic, no madness, nothing can happen to them (Dana Iancu, *pensiune* owner living part in Bucharest, part in the village).

Well accustomed with their surroundings, locals rarely express a similar outlook. To them, 'nature' is a resource to be exploited in farming, not a place of leisurely pastimes. I was sometimes disconcerted to hear villagers arguing that:

Here there really isn't anything to visit. Just the village and that's it. We have no historical monuments, nothing else except the Bran castle that is closer, or the National Park. [Tourists] *search but they don't find much here because nobody takes care to modernise…* (Viorica Vlaicu, local from Moieciu).

I know many cases of locals who never even climbed the nearby mountains. Apart from shepherds who need to travel long distances herding their flocks, most of the locals only visit their plots at the outskirts of the village and on the lower mountain slopes. Instead of a space to be contemplated, for them nature is the setting of hard work. Quietness and greenery – staples of the discourse about rural tourism – are elusive resources that to many seem to be falling outside of their control. Quite telling, one of the few exceptions I came across came from a guesthouse owner who also worked as a ranger for the Bucegi Natural Park and who advertised accommodation packages that included trekking routes. By contrast, a foreign tour agency that brings tourists from abroad was able to organise outdoor activities spanning the entire area, covering several villages and local attractions. The program is quite elaborate and it involves groups of tourists travelling through the mountain paths, on foot or by horse drawn carts, from village to village, spending every night at a different *pensiune*, where they also receive their meals cooked with local products. To make trekking more enjoyable, the guesthouse owners transfer their luggage by car to their next destination. This type of tourism reflects a different gaze, an alternative understanding of the area, with a stronger emphasis on outdoor activities. However, such options have little or no visibility for domestic tourists. I only learned about these tours by talking with local hosts, but I never came across any reference to them in all my online explorations.

Perhaps the best example of an activity that encourages people to discover the hilly village surroundings is the Ecomarathon, a popular running competition started by an environmental NGO owned by a group of mountain running enthusiasts. Organising the race meant identifying and marking a route of 42 km through the surrounding mountain slopes and advertising this event to networks of runners. Interest for the event grew over the years, and at its 5th edition in 2014, it attracted around 1200 participants[37]. The founder of this event is a non-local who studied and worked abroad and who brought in a different outlook than the one shared by most locals. His view of the environment is more inclusive, driven rather by aesthetic and conservation values, and not by the need of converting it into resources. Apart from organising the Ecomarathon, his NGO is trying to find solutions for a more sustainable development of Moieciu, organising meetings with the locals and putting pressure on the authorities. One of their actions resulted in stopping an investor from building an adventure park next to a waterfall, one of the natural landmarks of Moieciu. Villagers offered their support by

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[37] Considering that the fees collected amounted to over 126,000 RON (21,000 GBP), this one-day event generated income that exceeds by far what most tourism businesses make in an entire year.

signing the petition, but they agreed to do so more because they wanted to stop a non-local from developing the business. Speaking to them, I could see that they had no problem with the impact of an amusement park over the environment, but they felt that if the waterfall is going to be exploited, someone local should be doing it.

As protective as they are of their hay meadows, as little concerned people in Bran and Moieciu seem to be about the rest of the environment. Instead of seeing it as collective good that should be safeguarded, some of them treat it as no man's land. I heard numerous complaints about *pensiuni* – often the larger ones, emptying their septic tanks into the river. As evidence, people invoke the foul smell that can be sensed in some nights if one walks close to the river and they also speak about the declining numbers of fish. I actually know someone who had to give up his trout farm because the polluted water had killed his fish on several occasions. A couple of other incidents come to depict a similar attitude of disregard for the ecology of the area. On an online forum about Moieciu, there was a cry of outrage when someone posted photos of adult diapers and syringes that had been found dumped in a mountain stream. The source was not hard to identify, as in the village there was only one guesthouse that hosted groups of elderly people from nursing homes. Another time, according to the mayor, a truck full of trash was unloaded on top of a hill and later everything was scattered by the wind into the valley and village below. Driving all terrain vehicles (ATVs) through the forest is one other negative example of 'using' nature. A few of the guesthouses offer rental services for ATVs, although this practice seems to be the subject of much critique given the noise and the safety hazards involved.

Admittedly, these stories might only relate to a minority who, wanting to save the costs of waste disposal, act in complete disregard for the ideas of 'environment' or 'pristine nature'. However, the fact that such acts keep occurring and they are being tolerated by the community and by the local authorities, suggests that a clean river and trash-free scenery do not rank at the top of locals' environmental sensibilities. It is telling to contrast this apparent indifference with the care and concern that people show for their fields. On the one hand, we have features like the river and the 'scenery', that have aesthetic value in the economy of tourism, while on the other hand there are elements of the environment like the hay meadows that are safeguarded because they are crucial to the farming economy.

Overall villagers in Bran and Moieciu show a weak sense of community and by this I refer to a shared understanding of what are their common resources and the corresponding practice of caring for, defending and promoting these assets. The most

striking example is that of the poor infrastructure: Moieciu has no sewage system and the roads are very bad with potholes that make driving difficult and slow, and sometimes even damage vehicles. Obviously, tourists are not happy to find such roads and I even read online accounts of people claiming they will not be returning to Moieciu again because of this problem. Although I heard many locals decry the destruction or inaccessibility of collective goods such as the roads, the river, the mountain paths, or the *cămin cultural* – former community centre, now in ruin – as a group they are voiceless and they take no steps towards changing things. This attitude is not particular to Bran or Moieciu and the same lack of concern for 'collective goods' of the village has been noted and discussed in other parts of rural Romania (Mihăilescu 2000: 16) and, as I have shown earlier in this section, it is a transformation brought by the socialist period.

2.8. Challenges and opportunities in the changing economy

Throughout their more recent history, mountain villagers pursued a variety of cash-generating activities, from trade to employed work and now tourism, while farming gave them a constant subsistence base. Ironically, nowadays villagers have greater control than they ever had over the fruits of their labour, but at the same time they experience more constraints regarding the production processes and bigger challenges in finding a market for their products. While the traditional pastoral economy of mountain villages became increasingly disconnected from non-local markets, it was the economy of tourism that reconnected local economies with the outside through tourists purchasing accommodation services and consuming farm products. Today, *pensiuni* are becoming part of the local economy's base (Gudeman 2005), an almost indispensable element for linking to the wider economic sphere. Independent, individualist and self-reliant, villagers from these mountain regions embraced in the best way they could the opportunities brought in by tourism.

Apart from opportunities, the period following 1989 also came with notable challenges. In the centrally planned economies of socialism, neither workers nor farmers were faced with the task of imagining things like 'the demand' or 'the market' in order to make a living. During the communist period, people had fixed quotas and there was a predetermined amount of products that they had to deliver to the state. If they wanted to sell or trade their surplus via informal channels, it was fairly easy to find buyers, especially in the last decade of the regime, when meat, eggs and dairy became scarce goods. Tourism required a shift from producing tangible goods to providing services and selling things like 'tradition', authenticity', 'experiences', or 'leisure'. The

challenge was to define and materialise these notions and to understand the new layers of meaning promoted by the rural tourism discourse. As I have shown, most guesthouse owners have done little to integrate these ideas in their offer. It seems that their history of trading and working for wages did not prepare them for the degree of disembedding that market economies have, and for the potential or actual monetization of most aspects of life.

> *The mere presence of marketplaces does not necessarily signal a market (capitalist) economy, nor does the mere presence of money. Many pre- or non-capitalist economies had 'moneystuff', but it was special-purpose money, rather than the general-purpose money that serves as a uniform standard throughout market economies* (Isaac 2005:16).

Elements that were included in their tourist offer belong to a pre-set repertoire of fixed forms that are easier to commodities: old objects, recipes, scripted events. These are all disembedded from the practicalities of daily existence. In contrast to this, farm-related activities, which are still an important part of making a living, are not easily transformed into tourist displays. It is interesting to note that a similar case has been documented by Sharpley and Vass (2005) among farmers in north-eastern England. The authors used a questionnaire based survey to learn about tourism related experiences and attitudes of 79 farmers who ran accommodation businesses (2005:1045). The answers showed that the majority of respondents considered themselves foremost farmers and saw farming as their main business, expressing their wish to keep this activity separate from tourism (1047). Although most of the farmers agreed that tourists would enjoy farm-related experiences, only half of them showed themselves willing to actually integrate such elements into their offer (1048). Sharpley and Vasss explain their findings by pointing at the gendered division of labour within the families, whereby it is mostly women who deal with the tourism business, while men remain in charge with the farm (*idem*). The authors argue that for the women, the accommodation business is a means to achieve more independence and satisfaction with work (*idem*). I am not sure if a similar explanation applies to the Romanian case. Even if women seem to be more involved with running *pensiuni,* I know many guesthouses that are managed by men who are equally uninterested in turning their farms into tourist attractions.

As I will show in Chapter 5 the drive towards modernity and luxury in Bran and Moieciu can be partly explained by tourists' increasing demands for comfort and

amenities. However, it is equally true that owners were selective in their response to tourists' preferences and they were more receptive to those requests that resonated with their own aspirations and standards. Although theoretically imagined as separate, production and consumption may sometimes be overlapping spheres. Tourism entrepreneurship makes a particularly good case for exploring the blurred boundaries between these two notions. Researching lifestyle entrepreneurship, Ateljevic and Doorne concluded that 'consumption and production are inextricably interwoven to the point that separation seems meaningless' (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000:398). Indeed, some of the urbanites who opened guesthouses did so because they wanted to relocate to the countryside. Most of them were coming to Bran or Moieciu as tourists for a very long time before taking the decision to move there. Villagers are also at the same time the producers and consumers of their guesthouses. While for some non-locals, aesthetic and lifestyle values may be more important, for the locals it is the symbolic meaning of the house as a marker of diligence and self-realisation that is more dominant.

The political and economic changes that marked Romania's move away from the communist regime confronted villagers with both challenges and opportunities. In many ways, the pre-socialist and socialist economies were more visible, more predictable, more local and more structured, while the period following 1989 was marked by rapid changes, uncertainty and de-localisation. Villagers that took part in the socialist economy as factory workers were expected to be subordinate and to carry out standardised tasks leading to results identical with their co-workers'. By contrast, capitalism relies on individual initiative, competition, risk-taking and innovation. Grasping the new institutional and economic arrangements was a gradual process and villagers give accounts of their initial efforts as well as their current struggle.

> *From '93 [we started]. We started late because… We didn't know how it is with this democracy. We didn't understand it at all, born in communism.*
> - (Me) *Was it difficult?*
> - *We were apprehensive. Afterwards they started with the VAT with things… it wasn't like this back then, all these controls and all. Now they badger you.*
> (Radu Bologa, *pensiune* owner, Bran)

Tourism businesses depend on an invisible, non-local market of buyers, buyers who themselves are increasingly entangled in global economic transactions. The effects of this started to bear more weight with the onset of the crisis in 2009. Some questions

arise and will be dealt with in the following chapter: how did businesses cope with the economic crisis? Which of them were more resilient, and why? These questions also have a wider theoretical relevance. After reviewing the trends and challenges that mark the existing body of research on small firms in tourism, Thomas, Shaw and Page concluded that one of the least examined questions is why some businesses grow, while others fail (2011:973). They suggest that this topic, together with 'business strategies', are novel areas of inquiry worth pursuing in the future (972). I address these issues in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

The discursive fields of rural tourism

3.1. Academic discourses about (rural) tourism

3.1.1. The anthropology of tourism

It was in not until the 70s that researchers in the social sciences began to acknowledge tourism as a worthy topic of investigation. According to Tribe, the 'social science of tourism' emerged partly as a critique of the business-oriented approaches that, at that point, had been dominating tourism research (2006:336). Although initially the subject drew the attention of sociologists, the first volume[38] that reunited studies under the rubric of 'anthropology of tourism' was published in 1977 (see Smith 1977). Interest kept growing over the next decade and by the end of the 80s the anthropology of tourism was a recognised and established field of research (Burns 2004:9). Anthropological approaches to tourism can be divided in two broad categories, some being focused on the universe of symbols and meanings surrounding tourism and others concerned with the empirical effects of the phenomenon (Lett 1989:276). Two categories of people were the customary targets of anthropological research: the providers or 'enablers' of leisurely pastimes – generally referred to as 'hosts' and the corresponding consumers – the tourists, or the 'guests'. As Frohlick and Harrison point out, the two lines of inquiry remained largely disconnected from each other (2007:27). Research on discourse often stopped short from showing how the various representations were produced and employed (*idem*), while studies of the effects of tourism paid little attention to the construction and circulation of tourism imagery. As a counterpoint, there is an increasing number of voices that argue for following a more holistic framework (Burns 2004:6, Leite and Graburn 2009:54) and that stress how crucial it is to connect research on discourse with ethnographic data about the impacts of tourism, focusing on both hosts and guests (Stronza 2001), while also paying attention to an ever-growing range of intermediate institutions and actors (Adler 1989:1381). This is the path I followed in my research. As Leite and Graburn pointed out, a holistic analysis is meant to show 'how the phenomenon under study fits into broader systems of meaning and action' (2009:36). The authors even question the very

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[38] While the first study of tourism by an anthropologist had been published in 1963 by Theron Nuñez (Nash 1996:1).

notion of an 'anthropology of tourism' as a coherent discipline, suggesting that it may be more adequate to speak of 'anthropological interventions in tourism studies (idem). Since tourism is embedded in a wide array of social and cultural phenomena, it can be approached from an equally varied number of angles, reflecting current research interests in anthropology (35). My own research has brought me to the same realisation. Even if I started to work within the framework of an 'anthropology of tourism', I found that a holistic understanding of the phenomenon required me to go beyond the confines of this topic.

In what follows I discuss some of the central notions in the anthropology of tourism, exploring the theoretical debates around them, while highlighting my position and the emerging questions that guided the earlier stages of my research and that structure parts of this thesis.

3.1.2. Why and where to tour? Types of tourists and kinds of tourism

Perhaps one of the most persistent albeit broad questions that anthropologists tried to answer about tourism was 'why do people tour?' and 'why do they select particular destinations?' According to Urry, a widespread belief that underlies tourists' pursuits is that by 'getting away' from time to time they can restore their physical and mental health (Urry 2001:5). Boissevain also mentions that tourists try to escape from their routines guided by the idea that 'this change will recharge their mental and physical batteries so that they will be better able to cope with the pressures of their daily commitments' (Boissevain 1996:4). Alienation and discontent with one's own life have been frequently noted as drivers of tourism. This contention underlined MacCannell's (1973) famous thesis about the pursuit of authenticity. Nash too wrote of 'those alienated modern workers whose life revolves not around the job, but around the vacation and the weekend away from home' (Nash 1981:463), while more cautious, Boissevain noted that the only universal reason shared by tourists may be their pursuit of contrast (1996:3), a perspective also largely shared by Graburn (1981:470). Along similar lines, Jafari suggested that tourism could be understood as a form of play (1981: 472).

As the viewpoints briefly noted above demonstrate, writing about what drives tourists in general can only allow for oversimplifying and sweeping generalisations. Tourists are obviously a very heterogeneous social group and it might, in fact, be easier to write about who is not a tourist today. Nash's classic definition of a tourist as 'one who leaves home while free of primary obligations' (1981:462) is no longer befitting a

world governed by a multitude of mobilities in which touristic pursuits may overlap with work-related travel or migration. Different authors have tried instead to find typologies of tourists. Jansson (2007), for instance, divides them into four categories, according to the type of experience they seek. Two of these groups seem to fit the 'target' group of rural tourism promoters: the 'adventurous' and the 'immersive'. According to Jansson, the 'immersive' type shows 'curiosity about places, people and their historical and anthropological roots, openness toward and appreciation of cultural difference and an aspiration to understand the relative place of one's own society and culture in a broader global framework' (2007:17). Following Simmel, Jansson describes the 'adventurous tourist' as someone who 'searches for new experiences, in new environments, primarily for the sake of personal challenge and arousal' (2007:15). Smith also outlines a typology of tourists ranging from the 'explorer' to the 'charter', with very small numbers and full ability to adapt to local cultures defining the former end, and 'massive arrivals' and a 'demand for Western amenities' characterising the latter (Smith 1989:12-13). Devising these typologies often meant linking a category of tourists with specific types of tourism, taking place in particular destinations. For instance Graburn argued that tourists can pursue their interest for both nature and culture by visiting societies represented as 'peasant', 'primitive' or 'exotic' (Graburn 1977:30), where people are seen as living in harmony with the natural environment, themselves somehow closer to a 'natural' state (*idem*). Smith classifies tourism into five types: ethnic, cultural, historical, environmental and recreational (1989:4-5). Rural tourism would fall under the general label of 'cultural tourism' which, she argues, is built on an interest for past life-styles, old architecture, the lack of mechanisation, hand-made artifacts, horse-drawn carts, rustic inns, folklore performances. 'Peasant culture' is considered the main repository of such things. These analytic categories are however overlapping in real life and rural tourism may also have elements of environmental or nature tourism, when tourists are interested in exploring the surroundings of a village, it may also be recreational when they engage in sports, sunbathing, eating and socialising, and when the guests are foreign, then it can also be regarded as 'ethnic tourism'.

While I favour a 'typologies' approach, I believe that these perspectives are still too general. Things are further complicated if we add Burns and Novelli's insight that tourists 'may drift in and out of various touristic social identities (one time at play, another as serious sightseer, clubber, etc.) during the course of their vacation' (2006:3). It is also worth taking into account that tourism behaviour is an open process. What

people do at a destination is partly determined by pre-set strategies, partly improvised and done as a response to a particular environment (Smallman and Moore 2010:400).

The research I did in the Romanian countryside comes to suggest that even in a single destination, one can encounter different types of tourists, driven by a variety of interests. However, instead of creating my own typology and implying that this classification is in some way capturing the 'real' identity of tourists, I tried to find out what were the hosts' views. In Chapter 5 I discuss the categories of guests that were created and shared by guesthouse owners and I pay attention to the contexts in which these classifications become relevant.

Finally, there has been notable debate around the adequacy of models that divide people in the two clear-cut categories of hosts and tourists (Leite and Graburn 2009, Abram and Walden 1997, Kohn 1997, Walden 1997). There is a notable body of work showing that in practice, the two groups are not always easy to distinguish. Taking a diachronic perspective and examining tourism as a process, rather than as a social and economic structure, Kohn (1997) showed how visitors to a small Scottish island in the Inner Hebrides gradually became islanders. Some of the tourists who returned every year to the island eventually bought houses and settled there, sometimes turning into hosts themselves and accommodating visitors (1997:26). The rural tourism destination in France studied by Abram brings further evidence along the same lines. As Abram argues, residents and visitors to Auvergne are not 'clearly separate entities' (1997:33) since among the so-called tourists, there are also people with ancestral links with the place, migrants from the nearby localities, family or friends of the locals, and regular visitors who had partly settled there.

3.1.3. The tourist gaze and tourism imagery

Unlike other products people purchase, holidays cannot be subjected to 'hands-on' inspection, they cannot be tried on for size nor can they be returned the second day if they are found to be unsatisfactory. In the contemporary world, place-branding and cultural display are widespread processes (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 1996; Dicks 2003, Phillips 1995) that play important roles in creating and maintaining touristic destinations. The fact that the tourism market relies heavily on images – on visual and textual representations of 'other' places – has been widely acknowledged, researched and discussed. Emblematic in this area is the notion of 'tourist gaze' coined by Urry which refers to a socially organised and systematised way of looking at the world, one that usually implies a contrast with non-tourist practices and involves anticipation of

pleasure (Urry 2001:1-2). This perspective inspired research on destination images used in brochures (Dann 1996) or postcards (Edwards 1996). The idea was taken further by Jansson who stressed the role of new communication technologies, including the Internet, in creating representations of places and referential frameworks for future tourists, describing this as 'encapsulation' and arguing that they determine tourists to follow and enact certain scripts (Jansson 2007:10-11). Interest in the online advertising of tourist destinations is quite recent and still only few have touched on the subject (Dorsey *et al*. 2004, Holman 2011). The Internet fosters a new regime of knowledge and its implications in shaping cultural representations make a rich and yet understudied field of anthropological enquiry[39]. Later in this chapter, I present the findings from my Internet research, focusing on representations of rural destinations in online adverts authored by tour operators, NGOs or guesthouse owners.

The notion of gaze has been extended beyond the visual dimension to include embodied experiences, showing how tourists' interests may include music (Cohen 1997, Atkinson 1997) or expectations about the physical and social environment (Tucker 1997). Indeed, following Skinner et al., it may be more meaningful to focus on the concept of expectations as an all-ecompassing term, which can be a 'key to the study of tourism, whether semiotic, emobided, person-centered, or whether a psychoanalytical approach is taken' (2011:9). Using this framework gives rise to a set of interesting questions regarding the relation between the expectations of tourists and those of hosts. It also opens the way to exploring how, for instance, locals access knowledge needed for developing their businesses and for enchanting tourists, how their offer meets or sometimes contradicts the expectations of tourists, and how tourists ignore discrepancies between their expectations and local realities (Skinner et al 2011:2-3). What emerges from much of the research that tackles these issues is the negotiated nature of expectations, which are being made and unmade during the interactions between locals and visitors (idem 19). These are all issues I engage with in Chapter 5 where I take a closer look at the tourist-host encounters.

3.1.4. On authenticity

Skinner *et al.* draw a parallel between the notion of expectations and that of 'authenticity', arguing that they are both 'elusive and likely to be unfulfilled' (2011:4).

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[39] Looking at tourism promotion is just one way of approaching this issue and I believe that the questions raised by such research may have broader implications and the potential to stimulate further academic reflection. What is the role of the Internet in building and communicating knowledge about different cultures? How is this knowledge built and by whom? What makes some local realities more visible than others? What does this global scene of display 'know' and how does it acquire this knowledge?

'Authenticity' is one of the most used and debated concepts in tourism research (Xin *et al.* 2013:80-93) and it became prominent when MacCannell argued that what motivates tourists to travel is a quest for authenticity (1973). In this interpretation, authenticity is a quality that modern men miss in their lives and seek in the midst of 'ex-primitives' (1992:19). Selwyn partly took the same view, but he also endeavored to clarify the 'semantic confusion' created by the concept, by distinguishing between an intellectual dimension of authenticity and an emotional/subjective one (1996a:7). He coined the phrase 'cool authenticity' to describe the former, and 'hot authenticity' to describe the latter. According to him, 'hot authenticity' refers to ideas or 'myths' that drive tourists in a 'postmodern fragmented world in search for the authentic social order, the authentic self and the authentic other' – while the second is a 'term referring to the quality of knowledge' of the socio-political realities of a place' (Selwyn 1996:17) and it is the concern of more systematic forms of enquiry. The two notions parallel the distinction between etic and emic approaches, or folk and scientific ones (Cohen and Cohen 2012a:1297) and suggest a delineation between what tourists may consider to be 'authentic' and what ethnographers understand through this notion. Selwyn also drew a distinction between a search for the 'authentic Other' – something akin to what MacCannell described, and the quest for the 'authentic Self' which may take place even in staged or inauthentic sites, such as those offering only 'entertainment' and 'good time' (Selwyn 1996a:24). By this, Selwyn found a middle ground in MacCannell's famous dispute with Boorstin, who claimed that tourists are only interested in entertainment and they engage in pseudo-experiences, with little concern for authenticity (1961). Eventually, MacCannell's theory about a universal drive behind all tourist pursuits lost ground (Cohen and Cohen 2012b:2179) as increasing evidence demonstrated that in touristic destinations, issues concerning the meaning of cultural displays can be often obscured by people's desire to be entertained (Xie 2001:170; Boissevain 1996:12).

An alternative and more fertile way of regarding authenticity was put forward by Cohen who argued that the notion was the result of a negotiation process taking place between hosts and tourists, producers and consumers, buyers and the vendors (Cohen 1988: 371). The same line of thought is supported by many of the current critical approaches that stress the negotiated and constructed nature of 'authenticity' (Cole 2007, Reisinger and Steiner 2005, 2006). Along these lines Cohen and Cohen (2012b) proposed shifting from a discussion about 'authenticity' to one about 'authentication'. This is a process that often has political stakes (Selwyn 1996a:27) and what it comes

down to is one group or another trying to impose their version of the 'truth' or the 'real'. In the process of authenticating tourist sites, various state authorities are exerting power by imposing particular versions of tourism. One way of doing this is by reinforcing controls and regulations that define what a tourist experience should provide, setting accommodation standards and norms that are meant to protect consumers and safeguard the environment. This is particularly the case since notions like 'culture'/'heritage' and 'nature' play increasingly important roles in advertising tourist destinations. The spread of 'heritage tourism' was mirrored by a growing research interest in the topic, with studies looking at the ways in which various stakeholders build and negotiate the notion of 'heritage' and the ownership issues that are entangled in this process (Cohen and Cohen 2012b:2190-2192). One of the cautionary conclusions suggests that when tourism promotion is built on images of the past and invokes 'heritage preservation', communities may be denied the experience of modernity, being kept in a marginal and subordinate position (Selwyn 1996a:17). With the discourse of authorities or advertisers often obscuring local voices, it is important, as Bowman points out, that instead of employing their own notions of 'authenticity' or 'development', researchers pay closer attention to what members of local communities consider meaningful (1996:85). In light of this, I tried to gain a comparative perspective over the discourse and actions of various actors involved in building, promoting and consuming the tourist offer. I included here local entrepreneurs, tourists, NGOs and state institutions, trying to understand in what ways notions like 'nature' or 'culture' are meaningful to them and what are the consequences of promoting or imposing particular definitions of these notions.

Finally, tourists themselves play a role in the 'authentication' of a place as a destination worthy or not of visiting. Before travel for leisure became an institutionalised practice, images associated with tourism were generated and spread by the carriers of 'high culture', managed by elites, and for elites (Selwyn 1996a:19). The 'democratisation of travel' (Urry 2002:16) meant not only that a wider range of people started to tour, but also that the authorship of destination representations became more diverse. The 'democratisation of the gaze' reflected an epistemological shift in which relevant knowledge was no longer produced and owned by a small elite. Today, tourists themselves have a powerful voice when it comes to representing a travel destination. Månsson, for instance, showed how tourists are agents of mediatisation through the comments and reviews that they write on the Internet (Månsson 2011). Their testimonies are perceived as legitimate sources and they may even be invested with

more credibility than the various official advertising sources. A similar point is made by Adler who, looking at travel as a performance that relates to particular audiences, argued that the visual and textual testimonies brought by tourists from their trips contribute to an institutionalisation of specific travel styles (Adler 1989:1369-1371). In Chapter 5 of my thesis I look at tourists' online testimonies and I try to understand what is their notion of a 'good' touristic experience, what is their understanding of 'hospitality' and what are the elements they highlight as relevant in the rural destinations that I studied.

3.1.5. Debating the consequences of tourism: the commodification of culture and development vs. dependency theories

Turning to research that has a stronger focus on the empirical consequences of tourism, one of the classic debates or 'pairs of opposing myths' (McKercher and Prideaux 2014) in the anthropology of tourism is represented, on one hand, by the belief that tourism unavoidably triggers negative consequences – destroying local cultures, increasing inequality, or damaging the environment (20), and on the other, by the converse notion that tourism is a panacea offering communities a sure path to economic development and wellbeing (21). Anthropologists were initially inclined to note the negative impact of tourism (Burns 2004:10) with Nash famously arguing that it was a type of imperialism that increased inequalities between sending and receiving countries (1981:465). In particular, mass tourism in post-colonial settings was blamed for the detrimental impacts. Meanwhile, evidence from Europe gathered in a volume edited by Boissevain showed that communities were also able to cope successfully with tourism in creative and resilient ways (Boissevain 1996:21). More recently, ecotourism is being purported as the sustainable version that revitalises local cultures and economies, while safeguarding the environment (McKercher and Prideaux 2014:26). Ultimately, there is no consensus on this issue and different studies bring empirical evidence showing that local economies can be either strengthened, or made dependent by tourism (for a lengthier illustration, see Stronza 2001). A further critique of this classic polemic draws attention to the nuances and complexity of politics and inequality in a tourist destination, suggesting that not everyone has the same benefits or losses in tourism (Selwyn and Scott 2007:8).

A similar pair of 'academic myths of tourism' identified by McKercher and Prideaux, and in a way a subset of the couple noted above, is the classic debate regarding the 'commodification of culture'. Commodification of culture' has been used

to describe 'a process by which things come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods' (Cohen, 1977). On one side there is the belief that when an aspect of a group's culture is commodified for tourism it loses its cultural meaning, with the converse argument that the same process actually enhances parts of local culture. Emblematic for the first stance is Greenwood's study in the Spanish Basque country, where locals were described as having lost their interest for a public community ritual that had been turned into a tourist attraction (Greenwood 1977). The opposing perspective was most notably defended by Boissevain who showed how commodification of a group's rituals and celebrations might also bring new meanings, enhancing participants' sense of community and solidarity (Boissevain 1996:117). More evidence to support both sides has been later brought by various studies, showing that a consensus on these matters is unlikely to be reached (Stronza 2001:270-272). Moreover, I have reservations regarding the restrictive notion of culture employed in the 'commodification of culture' debate. I believe that often this was tributary to the selective way in which tourists and tourism practitioners understood the concept. Asking whether ritual paintings sold to tourists lose their religious meaning (Hart 1995) or trying to see what happens to a community festival that becomes a tourist attraction (Greenwood 1977) are, of course, worthy topics of enquiry, but an anthropological point of view could, and should, have a broader understanding of 'culture'[40]. Economic practices are a part of local culture that is difficult to commoditise and yet remains particularly sensitive to the advent of tourism economy. Rural destinations are represented as places where 'traditional farming' still carries on, but research has shown farmers can be reluctant to integrate farming 'displays' in their tourist offer (Sharpley and Vass 2005). At the same time, time constraints may force people to choose between catering for guests and taking care of their animals. Researchers concerned with how tourism impacts local communities need to take into account the articulation between new and old economic practices. Moreover, any discussion about the social and cultural transformations brought by tourism must be contextualised as there are often other factors that influence the changes. The first volume with an explicit anthropological approach to tourism edited by Valene Smith in 1977 saw a second revised edition a decade later, for which authors were asked to revisit their field sites and update their research (Smith 1989:x). Findings demonstrated that tourism was not the main source of change in most societies. Rather,

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[40] A similar argument is put forward by Black in her text about the negotiation of the tourist gaze in Malta (1996).

it helped indirectly by providing locals with a source of cash for pursuing their ideals of a more modern life (Smith 1989:xi).

Instead of attempting to side with one voice or another in these parallel debates, I tried to gain a more nuanced perspective over who benefits from tourism and who has something to lose. I also wanted to get a closer understanding of what kind of cultural change is taking place in villages that become tourist attractions, but I did so by linking my findings with a wider socio-historical context. In Chapters 3 and 4 I look in more detail at hosts' experience with tourism and at the ways in which they integrated it into their lives.

3.1.6. More recent theoretical trends

While some of the classic concepts and debates in the anthropology of tourism ran their course, others were incorporated in new theoretical frameworks. A good overview of recent research directions is given by the main call and panel themes of the 'Thinking through tourism' conference organised by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA) in 2007 (Selwyn and Scott 2007). Some of the general areas of interest highlighted by the conference include: the political economy of 'cultural ownership', 'tourism, politics and development', cultural change, commodification, authenticity (Selwyn and Scott 2007:8), enchantment (idem 10), hospitality (Lugosi 2007:31) and mobilities (Selwyn and Scott 2007:11). Interest in 'mobilities' has been developing prompted by the growing awareness that social life is more and more organised across distances (Büscher and Urry 2009:101). This, according to Büscher and Urry, involves movements of people and objects, but also communication, 'virtual travel' enabled by the Internet and 'imaginative travel' taking place through talk and through images circulating in the media (*idem*). Tourism fits particularly well under the 'mobilities' paradigm, as to some extent it involves all types of movement noted above. At the same time, it is difficult to entangle tourism from other types of movement when people travel increasingly because of work or family commitments, or in order to stay in their second homes. This generates blurred boundaries between work and leisure, hosts and guests, the everyday and the 'extraordinary ambience of touristic situations' (Cohen and Cohen 2012b:2182). Although domestic tourism provides a good opportunity for examining these blurred boundaries, few of the papers presented at ASA engaged with this topic. Indeed, domestic tourism is not a mainstream subject in the anthropology of tourism. Research in tourism mirrored the discipline's classic orientation towards former colonial

territories and towards those societies that can be classified as more marginal to capitalist development. This meant that most of the theoretical concepts developed in the anthropology of tourism were derived mainly from observing international tourism from countries with an advanced market-based economy to faraway 'exotic' places (Selwyn 1996a, Nash 1989, MacCannell 1971). As 'anthropology at home' is a comparatively young branch of the discipline, there is also a low prevalence of research on tourism carried out by anthropologists in their own cultures. In the case of domestic tourism, differences between hosts and guests are less marked and the encounter between the two groups may seem less worthy of inquiry. There are, however, other aspects that gain relevance, as I will argue throughout this thesis. Looking at domestic tourism in a postsocialist country requires rethinking some of the traditional concepts in tourism scholarship and shifting focus to issues that have more contextual relevance. Along these lines, Cousin and Legrand draw the attention that in places where the tourism sector is still developing it is important to understand how the institutional framework influences this process and the roles of various stakeholders (Selwyn and Scott 2007:38), an approach I tried to follow in my research. Finally, studying domestic tourism in my own society came with the twofold challenge of navigating the blurred boundaries between, on the one hand, me-the-anthropologist and me-the-tourist[41], and on the other hand, me as anthropologist and at the same time co-national with the people I studied, sharing with them a similar history and culture.

3.1.7. Varying ideas of tourism and their moral underpinning

The research that was built on Urry's notion of a tourist gaze tended to focus on the visual, some arguing that because images prescribe what people should do at a destination, 'understanding the people of tourism is […] above all else, an analysis of images' (Dann 1996:79). However, more recent developments of the concept came to include the other senses and lately such issues have been addressed under the general label of 'enchantment' (Selwyn and Scott 2007:10), referring not just to the sensory experience, but to ideas, values or symbols[42] that aim to attract visitors, 'shape imaginations' and 'tourist ways of seeing' (Theodossopulos 2007:19). This process of enchantment has a moral underpinning that must be taken into account. As Smith

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[41] Since I shared with tourists some of the reasons for coming to that particular destination and I sometimes behaved in similar ways to them: exploring, taking photos, enjoying the food etc.

[42] Of course, as experience blurs the various spheres of social life that are represented as bounded by human thought in general and by academic writing in particular, the values and aesthetics that inspire travel can also be found in the economic, politic, religious or artistic realms (Adler 1989:1377).

pointed out, in order for people to use their free time and financial resources to travel, this activity must be accepted and valued by their society (Smith 1981:475). Taking this idea further it can be argued that the choice of a particular destination becomes a legitimate practice because it rests on specific ethics. Indeed, Adler has pointed out that travel includes both prescriptive and proscriptive norms (1989:1378). People are likely to frown upon a situation when, say, a young married woman would decide to book a room in a hotel in a different neighbourhood of the same town where she lives in order to spend a few days of holiday alone, just walking on the streets and mingling with the 'locals'. On the other hand, if she were to travel with her husband and engage in a similar pastime in a faraway country in the East, her choice of holiday would leave people positively impressed. Ideas about the purpose and the appropriate forms of travel vary across history, as well as between and within different societies. Accounts that trace the history of tourism usually find the roots of contemporary mass tourism in the 18th century in the tradition of the Grand Tour – long trips undertaken by young English boys together with a tutor (Nash 1981:462) and they point at the educational mission of these journeys (Graburn 1989:29). Towards the end of the 18th century, travel started to be seen as a means for restoring health and recreation, particularly among the upper classes of Europe (Graburn 1998:30). Following WW1, elites lost some of their financial dominance and a new class of wealthy people emerged, bringing in new worldviews that began to inspire travel. During that time, Graburn points out, 'the themes of nature, recreation, and ethnic interest were securely added to the previous cultural, historical and educational motivations that underlie tourism today' (31). As Boissevain also observed and wrote in the mid 90s, the interest of many travellers started to move away from seaside resorts and towards culture, activities, heritage and places invested with nostalgia. Under the influence of tourism 'culture is also invented, modified, and revitalised' (Boissevain 1996:12). Frow shows how feelings of nostalgia emerge when societies are faced with the actual or potential loss of cultural elements perceived as part of their essence. The paradox is that in order for these feelings to arise, cultures must develop a style of self-reflexive reasoning that is inherently modern and different from the lived and 'organicist category of the premodern or traditional' (Frow 1991:129). Later in this chapter I return to this issue and I take a closer look at some of the ideological changes that created a favourable climate for tourism to the countryside.

3.1.8. Rural tourism research – examples from abroad

Research on rural tourism largely mirrors the main theoretical directions that have shaped the anthropology of tourism, which I outlined above. Without reiterating them, in the following section I take a closer look at specific findings revealed by studies of rural tourism, in Europe in general and in Romania in particular, and I also touch on what I see as avenues that leave room for further enquiry.

A substantial and more recent body of research on rural tourism in various European countries comes from a policy and planning perspective and consists mainly of quantitative studies, meant to give an overview of tourism development (Kukorelli 2011; Przezborska 2005; Kizos and Iosifides 2007; Gosiou *et al.* 2001) and to investigate how tourism articulates with traditional branches of rural economy like farming and agriculture (Kizos and Theodoros 2007). Some of these texts are rather theoretical and normative, discussing the management of tourism in line with notions of sustainability and highlighting its potential for favourable outcomes (Armaitiène *et al.* 2006; Butler and Hall 1998). The problem with these studies, apart from their predominant focus on quantitative data, is an unquestioned use of notions like 'culture', 'nature', 'heritage' or 'tradition', that are at the heart of rural tourism development.

Although not so rife, there is, however, notable ethnographic research trying to understand precisely how these notions are defined and commodified, and to what consequences. The most prominent contribution to the anthropological understanding of local responses to tourism in Western European destinations came with a volume edited by Boissevain in 1996, which gathered research that was mostly based in rural areas. More attuned to the everyday experiences of local hosts, these studies highlighted the contradictions that often arise when societies have to adapt to tourism and change, while keeping their culture and environment 'intact' in order to match the visitors' gaze and fuel future tourism. Abram eloquently captures this conundrum, when she describes the French villagers she studied as faced with the paradox of 'representing themselves as old-fashioned in a wholesome way, yet not appearing to be backwards and ignorant' (1996:191), and portraying the region as a modern destination able to host 'fashionable sports', but at the same time a place that was 'unspoilt' and unchanged (*idem*).

More pessimistic views rest on the idea that rural tourism might, in a way, contain the seeds of its own demise. As destinations develop and attract a growing number of people, the cultural elements and the quality of the environment, on which much of rural tourism is based, is threatened (Boissevain 1996:8; Hall 2004:165). There were even some attempts at creating theoretical models to capture the evolution of a

touristic destination. Higham wrote about 'recreational succession' summing up studies that show that, as destinations develop, they attract different types of visitors. Tourists who are fond of a destination in its early days when it is still off the beaten path, gradually abandon it as it becomes more popular and more facilities are built. Ultimately, these places reach phases of stagnation followed often by decline (Higham and Lück 2007:123). Apart from an overdevelopment of tourist infrastructure, locals' own wish to shed the negative stereotypes depicting them as backward, and to emulate the lifestyle of their 'modern' guests may also be responsible for the changes (Abram 1996:191).

A counterpoint to these concerns was brought by Black, who dubbed this process of imitation 'the demonstration effect' and argued that its scope was often overstated (1996). Drawing from fieldwork in a Maltese tourist resort, Black showed how locals were not readily emulating the lifestyle of their foreign guests, but instead they were rediscovering or inventing 'cultural' activities that could be displayed to tourists eager to experience local flavour (1996:117). Indeed, more evidence seems to suggest that tourism boosts local pride and self-confidence and that members of local communities develop a heightened awareness of their natural and cultural assets (Boissevain 1996:7), often reviving or inventing cultural displays – in the form of celebrations, dances, food, architecture, or crafts – in order to enchant and entertain tourists (12). Taking into account the processual nature of social phenomena, it seems that more often we are actually witnessing a gradual transition from an initial desire to modernise and to discard all the material signs of peasantry, to an appropriation of the nostalgic tourist gaze introduced by tourists and a reassessment of 'traditional' elements. A good illustration of this dynamic can be found in Zarkia's study of tourism in the Greek island of Skyros, where modern aesthetics, coupled with a rediscovery of local features, gave birth to hybrid developments most visible in the architecture and interior decorations (1996:159-162) which became part of the local atmosphere appreciated by both tourists and locals. Similar evidence was brought by Abram's research in rural France as she showed how villagers adjusted and customised local practices in order to make them more accessible to tourists: celebrations became more performative (187) and cheese production was brought in line with EU health regulations[43] (189). Her findings showed that by necessity, commodification did alter practices, but this did not make them less meaningful to the locals, nor did it make

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[43] Regulations specified that wooden containers used in processing and storing cheese, which were partly responsible for its flavour, had to be replaced with stainless steel ones.

tourists lose their interest. The changes helped the articulation between the 'traditional' economy and the new tourist economy, which, as Abram showed, was welcomed as it sustained part of the local production. Some of the theoretical concerns outlined above are also reflected in my research as I observed and tried to explain both 'modern' pursuits and displays of 'tradition' and 'authenticity'.

Finally, there are also changes brought by tourism that have no direct bearing on the tourist demand and that have been reported in a more hopeful tone. These are studies that show how tourism has the potential to alter gender norms and empower women (Pujik 1996:224, Sharpley and Vass 2005). Since women's work traditionally revolved around the house, they are often the ones who run the guesthouses, achieving more independence and gaining more satisfaction than they regularly had from farm work (Nilsson 2002:12-13).

Turning to the various uses and definitions of 'nature', we find similar dilemmas as in the case of 'culture'. According to Bender, the discourse about the 'conservation' of the landscape is as an 'attempt to "freeze" the past, an attempt to make it something that can be excavated, packaged, presented – something over and done with' denying 'the reality of an on-going historical process' (1992:736). Although fixity might be promoted on a discursive level, empirical realities show a different picture. The recreational value of landscapes is instrumental and even if theoretically it is distinguished from the aesthetic one – which is disinterested and centred on the object for its own sake, 'phenomenologically it is difficult to separate our aesthetic experiences from recreational ones' (Brady 2003:23). Tourists may be lured by images of picturesque landscapes and they may relish gazing at the scenery, but at the same time they enjoy using the environment for various leisurely pursuits. Indeed, evidence from the UK discussed by Butler *et al.* shows that over the past two decades there was a shift in the type of activities tourists pursue in rural areas. People started to move away from pastimes such as walking, picnicking, fishing, sightseeing, boating, visiting historical and cultural sites and festivals, horse-riding and farm based visits, that were 'relaxing, passive, traditional, low technological, and mostly non-competitive', to pursuits that are more 'active, competitive […] fashionable, highly technological, modern, individual, and fast', including trial biking, off-road motor vehicle riding, orienteering, survival games, hang gliding, parasailing, and jet boating (1998a:9-10). It seems, then, that the challenge that tourism entrepreneurs face is twofold. They must create cultural displays and enable tourist experiences that can reclaim a link with the past, while managing

their own aspirations for change and 'modernisation' and responding to the varying demands of tourists.

In spite of its centrality to the tourist experience, a somewhat neglected aspect in the study of tourism is the commodification of hospitality. A distinctive feature of rural tourism is that tourists are often accommodated in locals' homes. The frequency and variety of their visits and the commercial underpinning of the relations challenge customary notions of hospitality, as hosts start to adapt their norms and behavior to this new situation (Zarkia 1996:163). At the same time, much of the advertising discourse regarding homestays in a village is built on idealised images of warm and 'traditional' hospitality. Interesting questions emerge regarding the ways in which hosts and guests negotiate and work out new forms of hospitality. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 5.

There is also need of further enquiry into the local responses to the legal framework of tourism. Selwyn notes in his 'Postlude' to Boissevain's edited volume that most studies in the collection recognise the role of policies and EU regulations without going into many details (Selwyn 1996b:253). He suggests that future research should pay closer attention to the regional, national and international administrative frameworks (*idem*). Indeed, research that takes into account policies tends to belong to the quantitative type that I mentioned earlier and there is little ethnographic data on how people experience these normative frameworks. Particularly when state institutions are attached to idyllic myths about the countryside, the risk is that their conservative policies may hinder processes of modernization and development pursued by the locals (Harris 2005:425). Finally, most ethnographic research echoes Boissevain's volume, trying to find out how do locals cope with tourism, showing some concern for the 'damage' that too many tourists may bring. In my fieldwork I discovered that an equally pertinent question is how do locals cope *without* tourists? What happens when tourists are no longer plentiful and the accommodation offer exceeds the demand?

3.1.9. Rural tourism research in Romania

There is comparatively little research on rural tourism coming from the postsocialist region. Hall (2004) made a brief overview of tourism in former socialist countries, but his discussion remained at a very macro level and was mostly concerned with the possibilities of developing rural tourism in the area according to a normative, ideal image, couched in the label of 'sustainability'. Romanian rural tourism drew the attention of a number of foreign scholars who carried out country-level surveys of its

development, highlighting opportunities for further growth (Turnock 1999; Benedek and Dezsi 2004). An earlier picture of tourism development is captured by a survey of 195 guesthouses conducted in 2000 and 2001 by Benedek and Dezsi (2004). Their study looked at some of the basic features of rural households that offered accommodation and it revealed a pronounced selectivity in terms of the areas where tourism developed and the people it engaged, with 78% of accommodation owners having higher levels of education, including doctors, priests, teachers, people with secondary studies, and retired workers. Their households' endowment with utilities was also above the national average for rural areas (Benedek and Dezsi 2004:2-5). Ten years later, Iorio and Corsale (2010) report similar findings and comment on the pronounced unevenness in the development of rural tourism, in a paper that draws from seven weeks of fieldwork involving stays in six different touristic villages. The authors also show that agri-businesses are a complementary livelihood strategy, meant to bring families an extra income (160), that guesthouse owners tend to be dissatisfied with ANTREC, the main accommodation network involved in promoting rural tourism in Romania, and that they are over dependent on '*word of mouth*' marketing through informal networks. Iorio and Corsale conclude by arguing that the government and local administrations need to offer stronger support with marketing and with the integration and coordination of local efforts (161).

Although Talabă *et al.* (2011) have recently gathered twenty papers in a volume of conference proceedings titled '*Romanian rural tourism in the context of sustainable development. Current realities and perspectives*', this publication brings almost no empirical evidence from actual tourist destinations. Instead, the authors - most of whom have a background in economics or tourism management – present a lists of best practices for the sustainable development of tourism and comment on the rich potential offered by the Romanian countryside. Turtureanu and Tureac address the topic of rural tourism in a similar manner, generally praising its benefits, without discussing any ethnographic data and resorting instead to arguments that resemble excerpts from tourism promotion brochures, commenting on 'the absolute originality of Romanian folklore, its great variety and its exceptional preservation up to our times' and on the 'genius of the anonymous artist, whose love for beauty and practical insight materialized in special buildings and production means', concluding that 'the rural village is a self-sufficient whole, defined by its dwellers' creativity' (2007:3).

Empirically grounded studies that offer a more critical and nuanced perspective are not numerous and most of them concentrate on villages located in Maramureș.

Maramureș is a region in the north of Romania that is emblematic for cultural tourism and it is commonly represented by media and by advertising as the most 'traditional' place in Romania. Compared to other parts of the country, in Maramureș vernacular wooden architecture, farming practices and crafts like woodwork and weaving remained fairly unchanged throughout the communist period and until the 1990s. This was mostly due to its isolation - the area is surrounded by mountains and was located near a closed international border during communism, with limited transport routes connecting it with the rest of Romania. Maramureș was never close to one of the big industrial centres of the country, so alongside mining and forestry, the main occupation in the region has always been farming (Muica and Turnock 2000:182). Apart from becoming one of the major tourist destinations in rural Romania, in the past two decades Maramureș turned into a fertile ground for research. It attracted the attention of more academics than any other part of the country and it was also the subject of lengthier ethnographic fieldwork. Most of this research focused on the classic themes of heritage production (Catrina 2009), social change induced by tourism (Hristescu 2005, 2007), or the commodification of culture and staged authenticity (Cippolari 2002, 2003a, 2003b), but it also explored less common themes like the articulation between tourism and migration (Nagy 2008).

The idea of tradition is central to all tourism promotion for the area and travel to Maramureș is commonly presented as a trip to the past (Cippolari 2010:24-25). The same imagery becomes part of the tourists' gaze. Foreigners interviewed by Cippolari explained their destination choice by making references to the past, saying they wanted to see how their European ancestors used to live or to remember their childhood days (26). They also tended to represent villagers and the landscape as closely intertwined and they idealised the hospitality they received as being one of the distinctive features of the locals (Cippolari 2003:4). Hristescu too argues that tourists coming to Maramureș - both foreign and domestic[44], are pursuing authenticity and 'tradition' (Hristescu 2005:94). Faced with tourists' interest in the cultural and natural features of their village, locals in Botiza began reassessing their resources (Cippolari 2003a:4). Encouraged by a local NGO, they started producing and selling to tourists various hand-made objects such as woven carpets, baskets, or painted icons. These objects were generally similar to those that people used in their households, although some variations in style and techniques also developed. For instance, responding to tourists' preferences,

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[44] Between 2000 and 2002, 65% of the tourists were Romanian, while later in 2006 the ratio between foreign visitors and domestic ones was 50% - 50% (Bădulescu 2006:12).

locals returned to using vegetal dyes for colouring their woollen carpets, instead of the chemical ones that had taken over since the 70s (Cippolari 2003b:5). Catrina also described extensively how villagers in Maramureş showcase their local knowledge and culture by decorating home interiors with woollen bed covers, hanging embroidered mats and glass painted icons on the wall, displaying ancient petrol lamps, or dowry boxes (Catrina 2009:11) and even old wooden weaving machines that they use to make demonstrations and offer short initiations to interested tourists (14). Visits to the sheepfold are another tourist attraction, including tasting of fresh dairy products (Catrina 2009:19). Folk violin performers called *ceteraşi* are sometimes invited by hosts to perform in front of their guests. Traditional wear is owned by most of the locals and used for religious holidays but also for entertaining tourists when serving meals or enacting farm work demonstrations (Catrina 2009:26)

Hristescu (2005) and Cippolari (2010) also show how guesthouse owners organised so-called 'exhibition rooms' where they display various hand-made objects such as carpets, ceramics, icons painted on wood, clothing or bed covers. What the authors leave out is that these 'exhibition rooms' are not an entirely new development brought by tourism. They are, in fact, an extension of a very old practice that at some point was widespread across rural Romania and remained popular in Maramureş until today, as many households have a 'good room' (*camera bună*), a space for storing and displaying the family's most prised possessions, most notably a daughter's dowry (Iuga 2006:40). This room is also the place where guests are usually welcomed for important family events such as weddings or funerals (*idem*). Faced with tourists' interest for these spaces, locals modified or 'enhanced' them, adding objects that in the past might have not been kept there – as for instance the weaving machine, which is now used to stage demonstrations for visitors (Cippolari 2010:28). Tourism in Maramureş also contributed to changes in the local gastronomy. Some of the older recipes have been brought back into use (Mihăilescu 2007:254) but also new dishes developed, more varied and complex than what locals used to eat in the past, but which nonetheless are presented as 'authentic' and 'traditional' (Hristescu 2005:101-103).

Modernising trends in Maramureş were also documented, although none of the authors quoted above insists on them. In 1999 and 2000, at the time of her fieldwork in Maramureş, Cippolari found that most tourists were lodged in the same house with the hosts, but she also met families who decided to build separate buildings for accommodation (Cippolari 2003b:4). She also notes that local authorities improved the infrastructure, paved roads and introduced street lighting, while villagers started

building indoor bathrooms and refurbishing their houses (Cipollari 2003a:9). Later, in 2009, Catrina comments on the presence of new modern houses made out of bricks, PVC and cement, along the older wooden ones, that give the built landscape a composite look (Catrina 2009:7). Trying to point at the impact of tourism on villagers' worldviews and practices, Hristescu labels the owners of guesthouses as 'new peasants' and argues that their actions are guided more and more by financial motives and by a desire for conspicuous consumption (2007:1) and that the values of mutuality and cooperation are not as widespread as they were in the past. Unfortunately the evidence she brings is not very organised and it is not helping her illustrate this claim. She presents a long list of interview excerpts that refer to situations when people do help each other and in the end she shows how cooperation still takes place, but seems to go more along kinship networks and between neighbours (127). Hristescu essentialises the role of tourism in shaping the new worldviews and she also overplays the differences between the villagers who host tourists and those who do not.

The signs of change in Maramureș are indeed visible, but widespread labour migration abroad, something entirely left out by Hristescu and hardly mentioned by Catrina (2003) or Cippolari (2009), may play a stronger role. Offering an empirically grounded critique of the stereotypes that describe Maramureș as a 'traditional' and unchanged place where people maintained the same cultural identity across the centuries, Șișeștean argues that even if there was a peasant society that survived until recently, from the 70s onwards it started to disintegrate (2011:1). The main source of change was the 'opening' of the area through its locals' labour migration, first to other parts of Romania, and after 1989, abroad (Șișeștean 2011:2). Indeed, in 2008, 27% of the population of Maramureș had worked in a foreign country for at least three months and every household had at least one person who had been or still was abroad, making the area one of the places with the highest incidence of external labour migration. Migrants, more than tourists, bring new models of consumption, new architecture styles, and new values (*idem*). Given the seasonal nature of tourism, overall, they are also likely to be bringing more money.

Closer attention to the articulation between tourism and migration in Maramureș has been given by Nagy who showed how, through migration, villagers secured money for investing in guesthouses[45] (9), they learned how to be 'cultural brokers' and how to communicate with their foreign guests (10) and they understood what are their foreign

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[45] Guesthouses are often transformed homes that migrants had built for themselves – important status markers and signs of achievement. As their return is sometimes postponed indefinitely, they use their houses to accommodate tourists (Nagy 2006:13).

guests' expectations of comfort, endowing their houses accordingly (13). Nagy also points out that Spain and Italy, the two main destinations for villagers' migration, also turned into a source of tourists (15). With a more careful eye to details, Nagy shows how not all villagers in Maramureş respond in the same way to the touristic image of the region and she argues that they have three options available. They can either stage authenticity and tradition, playing a role for tourists, they might also appropriate the discourse, making it part of their identity, or finally, they can abandon or contest it in a pursuit of 'modernity' (Nagy 2006:4-5).

Apart from Maramureş, there are a few other countryside destinations that attracted research interest, mostly from sociologists. Although their studies relied on qualitative interviews, they covered shorter periods of time, remaining largely descriptive or keeping a narrow focus. In Albac, for instance, Văetişi and a team of students carried out a 'detailed description of the practices, strategies and effects involved by tourism' (Văetişi 2006:1). Their research identified a number of factors that stimulated tourism development: pre-existing tourist demand in the area coupled with earlier practices of accommodating guests, locals' inclination towards imitating each other's strategies, the natural and cultural resources and the availability of large houses with extra rooms, emphasising as well the role of power networks, prestige and favourable legislation (5-8). Touristic activities and attractions observed by Văetişi in Albac included local gastronomy, folkloric shows or fairs, hiking, skiing, horse riding and more dynamic pastimes like kayaking, mountain biking or jeep touring (7). Hosts interviewed in this study argued that they preferred foreign guests over domestic ones, saying that the latter were less demanding and more interested in nature, while Romanian guests showed more concern for the accommodation standard, for the material culture and for the local gastronomy (8). Trying to cater for both 'tastes', hosts in Albac began to advertise two types of guesthouses – one 'traditional' and the other 'modern'.

Iancău's research in Bucovina, a region in the North of Romania renowned for its painted monasteries, shows that locals have acknowledged and incorporated into their offer some of the tourists' pursuit of 'tradition' (2011:90), but also brings evidence of extensive change in the architecture of the region that is becoming more urban, losing its vernacular features. Iancău's conclusion insightfully captures the dilemmas with which rural tourism is riddled: both locals and tourists appreciate a blend of modernity and 'tradition', but they differ in that urbanites emphasise the old, requiring only modern amenities for a better degree of comfort, while villagers embrace a

predominantly modern aesthetics, with some traditional elements included as decorations (2011:91).

Finally, the only study that I am aware of, that pays close attention to the institutional element, is Zamfir's research that examines the construction of heritage in a Transylvanian Saxon village under the influence of an NGO that had substantial foreign support and inspiration[46] (2011). As most part of the Saxon community left after 1989, many of the old houses were uninhabited and it was easier for the NGO members to materialise their vision, creating a unitary touristic product, following to a large extent the 'ideal type' of heritage tourism. However, as Zamfir found, this development left out many of the more marginal Roma members of the community (*idem*).

3.2. Lay discourses about the countryside

'Worldviews' or lay representations of the countryside cannot be left out in a discussion about the discursive fields of rural tourism. However, in asking such general questions like: 'how did the image of the countryside evolve over time and what is the current universe of meanings linked to the rural?' I am not able to rely on first-hand ethnographic data, so by resorting to what others have written on this matter, I am once again reproducing an academic discourse[47]. I start with a brief account of the wider historic context followed by a look at the current representations fostered by tourism promotion in some of the Western countries. I then narrow down the discussion to the case of Romania, showing how representations of peasants and the rural changed over time. This prepares the scene for a lengthier analysis of rural tourism advertising that will follow in a separate section below.

3.2.1. Changing representations of the countryside – the bigger picture

Against the backdrop of increased industrialisation and urbanisation, images of the countryside began to change in most Western societies. Environments and livelihoods previously seen as dull and uninteresting started to be valued as the antithesis of the 'evils' of city life (Butler and Hall 1998:116). Although commonly thought of as an entirely independent reality, 'nature' is a cultural construct (Brady 2003:54) that was endowed with different meanings and employed in various ways by different societies across history. In the more distant past, 'nature' had either been regarded as an economic resource, or as a wild and dangerous place. It was only in the late 18th century

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[46] The organisation is under the patronage of HR Prince of Wales who is a frequent visitor to Viscri and has his own guesthouse there that is rented out to tourists in his absence.
[47] And of course, even if I did have such ethnographic data, my own discourse ultimately remains an academic one.

that people started to appreciate the natural environment for its aesthetic qualities, turning it into a subject of poetry, literature and paintings (*idem* 44). In England, for instance, Thomas Hardy's novels, Constable's paintings and Wordsworth's poems have been noted for their role in making these new images part of the popular urban culture (*idem*; de Botton 2002:196). Rural areas represented the transition between cities and the rough untamed environment, a place where nature had been domesticated and used as a resource through farming and agriculture. With the aesthetisation of nature came a newfound appreciation of peasants, not just as producers of food and hardworking folk, but also as people who lived in perceived communion with nature and shared a distinctively quaint culture. The value of rural areas was increasingly linked with the idea that they are home to a vanishing way of life, mediums for a culture that is becoming rare and that is worth preserving. What makes this culture particularly important is its link to a perceived pre-industrial 'real' society that reminds visitors of their national identity (Fees 1996: 128). Rural tourism has been linked with visitors' desire to rediscover their national roots and there is substantial research pointing at the role of heritage sites in reaffirming or even rediscovering one's national identity (yu Park 2010; Armaitiène *et al.* 2006; Bender 1992; Hopkins 1998). This is by no means only a Western process. Empirical evidence from other parts of the world illustrates how processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and internationalisation were accompanied by a re-assessment of the countryside. Creighton shows how in Japan these changes have triggered fears about the 'Westernisation' of the country and the consequent loss of Japanese traditions and identity. These anxieties were met by a discourse that linked rural households with an archetypal image of 'home' (Creighton 1997:242) and stimulated a growth in domestic tourism to the countryside. The urban demand for holidays in the countryside was often welcomed in a changing rural economy where traditional activities such as agriculture or forestry were no longer profitable or viable (Butler *et al* 1998:9).

If in the 18th and 19th century rural imagery spread through literature and paintings, the vehicles for communicating these notions are now more varied and ubiquitous. Apart from the mass media, Butler and Hall also mention a growing market of 'village-style' furniture or decorative objects (1998:116) that play a role in making the countryside desirable. Added to this is a rising demand for organic food produced through traditional farming (Iancu and Mihăilescu 2009), which is also reinforcing the

positive aura of rural regions[48]. However, as Butler and Hall point out, tourism itself is 'perhaps most significantly of all in terms of reinforcement or maintenance of rurality' (1998:116). Indeed, even TV spectators are envisioned as 'televisual tourists' and Fish shows how the producers of three TV dramas with actions set in the British countryside customised the scenes to correspond to specific 'tourist gazes' about rurality (Fish 2005). A closer look at these representations is due.

One of the distinctive features of advertising images is the fact that they are selective, they leave out negative details and focus only on the positive (Yarwood 2005:19). Although an anti-idyllic myth of the countryside also exists, portraying villages as 'backward, unsophisticated, unfriendly, environmentally damaged, dull, and poorly provided with services' (24), these kind of representations are never employed in tourism promotion. Looking at images that are prevalent in adverts of the British countryside, Yarwood shows that they feature landscapes, heritage sites and cartoons highlighting the picturesque, relaxed, fun (2005:24). In Canada, Hopkins found that the 'myths' used in commodifying the countryside revolved around four dominant themes: the environment, in the form of domesticated and 'docile' nature, making the rural 'unique', 'magical', 'memorable' and a place of discovery; the ideal community, emphasising family, friendship, trust and togetherness; 'locational advantage', presenting the rural as a space outside everyday existence; and heritage, emphasising the opportunities offered by the countryside for getting in touch with one's history and identity (1998:145-150).

3.2.2. Representations of rurality in Romania[49]

As the historian Boia argues, there is a long relation between the image of peasants and the notion of Romanian identity, which rests on symbols drawn from rural settings, especially the itinerant mountain landscape of shepherds (1998). Drace-Francis traces this relation through a thorough literature review, revealing that the praising of the peasants' virtues was, in fact, first formulated by foreigners in early European writings about Romanians. These texts portrayed the peasant as a repository of simplicity and purity, an eloquent speaker with a sort of natural genius, often in contrast with the oppressing classes. Drace-Francis argues that it is through the dialogue between

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[48] Although there are some voices suggesting that the role of 'rural idyll' representations has been overplayed by academic literature, drawing attention to the contradicting discourse of the anti-idyllic (Fish 2005:121). A thorough analysis of all discursive threads about the countryside is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis. As tourism is built on the positive imagery, I insist here on this aspect.
[49] I have previously discussed these matters briefly in a subchapter of my MPhil dissertation (Rădan 2008).

Romanian intellectuals and foreign writers that these images of admiration towards the peasant later spread more widely in Romania[50] (2013:25-34). Although foreign writers had been linking the region with an agrarian tradition for hundreds of years, domestic literary works took a long time before they explicitly acknowledged this reality (50). However, it is debatable to what extent this peasant identity was interiorised and appropriated and not something to be projected in relation with the foreign others, as a response to their 'gaze'. As Drace-Francis remarks,

> *'while at home, Romanian writers described the peasant as a creature with certain essential traits but as fundamentally different from themselves; abroad, they assumed his posture, and saw the peasant as somehow representative of the position of the Romanians in Europe'* (53).

This imagery was not only reflected in literature. In 1867, when Romania participated for the first time as an independent state in the Universal Exhibition in Paris, it was depicted in the catalogue as 'an essentially agrarian country' and there was a debate over displaying a peasant smallholding or an Orthodox church. Although the church was eventually selected, the plans of a peasant farm were also displayed together with a variety of peasant clothing (Drace-Francis 2014:57). Quite revealingly for the persistence of this symbolism[51], in 2015 the peasant farm is once again on display in the Universal Exhibition in Milano. Surrounded by a vegetables garden, the construction uses elements of vernacular architecture with wooden walls and reed roof being the visual dominant. The building is also equipped with modern technologies such as photovoltaic panels and an audio system that broadcasts presentations about Romania, accessible to visitors through Bluetooth headphones. The architects who designed the winning project describe their work as a 'contemporary reinterpretation of a traditional household' and they said in an interview that they were 'strongly influenced by Prince

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[50] An interesting detail unraveled by Drace-Francis is that while in the West 'the peasant was conceptualized a clear social category by the middle of the 12th century', in Romania 'the lexicographers of 1825 did not even assign the word *țăran* (Romanian for peasant) a particular signification of rurality or agrarian activity' (2013:34). Clear references to the peasant appear late, in the beginning of the 19th century, in a context in which the ruling boyar classes were criticized for their praying upon the work of the people (45). At that time, the word peasant was used alternately with other notions such as 'people' or 'ploughmen' (46).

[51] Although anecdotic, my personal experience seems to confirm that in their contacts with foreigners, if they have to display their national identity, Romanians often employ folk-related symbols. The first time when I dressed up in a *costum popular* – clothing identified as 'traditional' and 'folk', was for a photo shooting at the Romanian Embassy in Greece, and the second time was for at a student gathering in Norway.

Charles's approach to the traditions and biodiversity of Transylvania' (Teacă and Năstase 2014).

Figure 24 – Computer generated model of the Romanian pavilion at the 2015 Universal Exhibition in Milan.

Returning to the historical roots of this discourse, during the 20th century, part of the political[52] and intellectual elite of Romania bolstered the notion that the peasantry was the essence of the nation (Mungiu-Pipidi and Althabe 2002:3). This romantic and idyllic vision portraying the village as perfect in itself was opposed by another group of thinkers and politicians who saw it as a place in need of reforms (*idem*). In the period prior to WW2, there was in fact a strong debate between cultural and political elites over the nature and future of this Romanian identity. One group, labelled the 'Traditionalists', was insisting on the agrarian heritage and essentially peasant identity of Romanians, while the other faction, the 'Modernists', were stressing Romania's similarities with the modern West (Hitchins 1992).

The onset of the socialist regime was marked by the Soviet ideas of internationalism, which muted to some extent the discourse about the national distinctiveness. However, by the beginning of the 60s, Romania started to move away from Soviet politics embarking at the same time on a nationalistic ideological project.

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[52] This included the newly appointed royal family, of foreign origin. Queen Mary had a lifelong admiration of peasant embroided clothing and she was not just wearing such garments and posing in them, but also making them (Drace-Francis 2013:58).

As I have already shown, elements described by ethnologic studies as central features of the traditional Romanian culture were used in a nationalist discourse aimed at praising the indigenous peasant as the 'authentic Romanian (Mihăilescu 2007:253-254). Leaving ideology aside, social practices were also largely connected to the rural space. The way Hopkins described the Canadian countryside, as 'some other place, a place spatially, temporally and psychologically distanced from the everyday urban life of most people' (Hopkins 1998:139) was far from the Romanian realities. In Romania, 'going to the countryside' was an institutionalised practice generated by the economic and political context of the communist period. Intense rural to urban migration started in the 50s (Sandu 1984) and by 1992 the percent of rural population decreased from 76.5 to 45.7 (Populationa and Housing Census 2002)[53]. However, the countryside continued to play an important role for those who moved to the city. Mihăilescu speaks about the 'diffused household' to describe the strong links between the younger generation who went to live in towns and the older one that remained in the village. In spite of losing their territorial unity, these households still functioned as a whole (Mihăilescu 2006:45). Parents were regularly sending farm products to their children and members of the young generation were returning during the summer holidays to help their parents with agricultural works. When distance permitted, frequent trips were made during the week-ends throughout the year (*idem*).

Returning to the discourse, after 1989, with the demise and demystification of Ceauşescu's nationalist regime, the positive image of the Romanian peasant also lost some of its strength. As Boia shows, in communist countries 'the myth of the putrid West had its counterpart in a myth of the idealised West' (1998:201). Freed from an oppressive regime, people were able to pursue the counter-myth. The fall of communism came with the 'mirage of the West'. The rural started to be seen as a space of backwardness[54] while everyone, including villagers themselves, was busy chasing 'modernity'. However, this did not last very long. Following Romania's accession to the EU in 2007, the trend seems to be changing again as the image of an idealised West has been slowly giving way to a concern for preserving the country's cultural distinctiveness, through its material and immaterial patrimony. There is a noticeable increase in mass-media promotion for national heritage sites, for craft fairs and folkloric

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[53] Romania is still a 'very rural' country with 43.5% of its 22 million inhabitants currently living in villages (INS Tempo) and with rural areas covering 87.1% of the territory (Population and Housing Census 2002).

[54] Yarwood, taking after Short (1989) writes about the 'rural anti-idyll': negative representations of the countryside as a backward, unsophisticated, unfriendly, environmentally damaged, boring place (Yarwood 2005:24).

festivals. One of the main TV stations in Romania recently aired a show called 'Houses with a soul' (*Case cu suflet)* which, under the slogan 'save beautiful Romania', showcases successful stories of rural architecture being restored and preserved. Quite tellingly, some of these stories feature foreigners[55] who, as the presenter concludes, 'come and teach us to cherish our heritage' (Houses with a soul 2013). Once again, Romanian's self-assessments are partly a reflection of the gaze of the other[56]. Food is also becoming more 'local' and there's been interesting research by Iancu and Mihăilescu on the rapid growth of a food industry making reference to autochthonism and using labels as 'traditional', 'authentic' or 'peasant' (Iancu and Mihăilescu 2009). In fact, a multitude of businesses based on the reinterpretation of tradition have flourished in the recent years, relying on a strong presence on the Internet and widespread support on social media platforms. Recently, *Business Magazine* dedicated a special issue to these enterprises, which range from clothing, furniture and food production to architecture companies reviving the vernacular style (Business Magazin 2015).

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[55] This particular story was about Duncan and Penny, a British couple who bought and restored old wooden houses in Breb, Maramureş, discovering at some point that they are neighbours with the Prince of Wales.
[56] As Hall observed, Romania could be seen as an 'exotic non-Eu "other"' (Hall 2004:166).

Chapter 4

Institutional and entrepreneurial fields of tourism

Institutions and entrepreneurs have their own discourse about tourism. These are partly generated by the more diffused lay theories I described in the previous section and they may also be intersecting with what are often already dated anthropological theories. However, more importantly, such discourses are intertwined with actions and interventions meant to achieve particular aims, like bringing visibility to a destination or creating a specific type of tourism inflow. This chapter pays attention to the interplay between representations and actions targeted by the government, by the NGO sector and by various tourism businesses at turning the Romanian countryside into an appealing travel destination.

4.1. The governmental country 'branding'

Over the first two decades after the demise of state socialism, the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism made several attempts at creating a country brand. Relying on slogans such as '*Romania the land of choice*' and later '*Romania simply surprising*', it failed to assert any clear and distinctive identity of the country. As Light argues, official tourism promotion in Romania was driven for a long time by a wish to stress the country's similarities with the West (Light 2006:259). The emphasis was on urban destinations and on sea-side and mountain resorts (189). Failing to bring about a visible increase in tourism, this strategy was a target of criticism in the mass media and it also stimulated some debate[57] over the lack of public consensus regarding the country's image, and ultimately, the national identity. This is the backdrop against which in 2009 the Ministry released the National Strategy for Ecotourism Development in Romania (National Institute of Tourism Research and Development 2009) followed by a new brand and slogan inviting everyone to '*Explore the Carpathian Garden'*.

The Government invested 900,000 euros (roughly £ 620,000) in creating the country's new brand. It commissioned two foreign companies specialised in market research and tourism consultancy that carried out a study based on 100 in-depth interviews and 2 focus groups with tourism stakeholders, as well as 1,2000 phone interviews with potential tourists from Romania and nine other countries (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism 2011). 109,000 euros were allocated just for

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[57] For instance, a website titled 'Branding Romania' was launched in 2005 as an arena where the intellectual elite could debate issues concerning Romania's brand crisis (Branding Romania n.d.).

creating the visual identity of the new brand, which became the target of serious criticism when journalists uncovered that very similar logos and fonts could be bought online for less than 250 euros (Stan 2013).

Figure 220 – Logo and slogan for Romania's country brand.

Adding all the money invested by the Government in promoting this new image through tourism fairs, TV promos, various mass media appearances and adverts printed in foreign catalogues, an estimate of 20 million euro was spent over the first three years since the brand's launching in 2010 (*idem*). The impact of this campaign is, until now, not particularly remarkable. Data from the National Institute of Statistics shows that between 2010 and 2014, the number of foreigners registered in accommodation units in Romania increased from around 1,5 million to almost 2 million (INS Tempo).

Apart from drawing attention to Romania, the new brand is also contributing to a better visibility for rural tourism. Ecotourism is closely interlinked with home-stays in rural areas and, according to a brochure published by the Ministry, central notions for the new brand are 'green and rural', 'authentic, pure and innocent', 'kindness and generosity' (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism 2011). The same brochure explains that what differentiates Romania from other countries is its 'pristine nature, unique cultural heritage and authentic lifestyle of rural areas' (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism 2011:5). The discourse skilfully masks the potential dangers of an untouched nature – which may be wild and untamed – by packaging it as benign 'garden' of the Carpathians. One of the things underlining the promotion of such

concepts is the notion that the rural space is somehow connected to the national identity, that it is home for the distinctively Romanian or the authentically Romanian. The following passage is very illustrative:

> *Starting with the fresh, healthy nourishment, the natural wines, the original local festivals, and ending with the experience of being lodged in villagers' households or in modest but warm and welcoming* pensiuni, *everything is an authentic detail, given from the heart and entirely Romanian. In rural areas it is particularly the traditions that are visible to the visitor, and the values on which they rest are passed down through generations.* (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism 2011:9)

Ambiguous as it may be for theoreticians, the notion of 'authenticity' is employed by the official tourism promotion of Romania not just as an attribute, but also as a noun, as if it was something tangible and real.

> *Even in the 21st century, authenticity is still at home in Romania, which represents one of the countries with the best kept traditions in Europe and one of the last refuges for traditional lifestyles* (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism 2011:11).

The country's rural heritage is promoted even in urban spaces and currently The Village Museum and the Peasant Museum are on the top of the list of Bucharest attractions highlighted by the National Authority for Tourism[58] (Romania Travel 2015).

Apart from this discourse, which is meant to enchant and attract visitors, the Government has another, subtler but potentially more consequential way of representing rural areas through its policies and regulations. Without going into an extensive policy discussion - which may be a good topic for an entire dissertation, in Chapter 6 I look at some of the laws and regulations that are relevant to tourism development in the countryside.

So far, however, I am inclined to say that the efforts of the government concentrated on building an appealing discourse while paying less attention to the

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[58] The institution assigned with the country's tourism development has been restructured and reformed by the Government several times, taking forms that ranged from a ministry in its own right, to being incorporated into a Ministry of Regional Development, to its current form as a National Authority for Tourism (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Turism*).

empirical grounding of the imagery that has been communicated. The research for creating the new brand looked at potential tourists' desires and at tourism stakeholders' opinions, but failed to take into account the reality of the actual elements that were being promoted. In 2012 I had a chance to speak to an official from the Ministry of Tourism who explained to me that they were planning to do a national 'charting' of heritage for promoting rural tourism. I naively became excited, imagining endless opportunities for research, only to be told that there will be no actual research and that members of the local administrations are expected to report about local cultural heritage by filling in some questionnaires with information they have on hand. Such information is generally collected from dated monographs, sometimes a few decades old, from the time when state-ethnographers were at the height of their careers. In 2007 when I visited the Bran city hall and asked for information about the region, I received such a document describing practices and making references to objects that were hardly still part of the locals' lives.

4.1.2. A multivocal NGO sector

Governmental interest in rural tourism is fairly recent. Only a few years before the current brand was launched, a 490 page *Masterplan for the Development of National Tourism 2007-2026* outlining the country's strategy for the next two decades ranked 'supporting the development of ecotourism in rural destinations' in the 21st place out of a list of 24 objectives (Ministry of Regional Development and Toursim 2007:164). The non-governmental sector compensated for the Ministry of Tourism's lack of support for rural tourism. It helped both by enabling locals to access non-local knowledge and resources, and by making destinations visible on a wider scale. Two NGOs, ANTREC and OVR, have been particularly influential and their contribution needs to be noted. In brief, the mission of these organisations was twofold. Apart from spreading information about destinations to potential tourists located abroad or in Romania's towns, they had to select suitable homes for accommodation, persuade locals to host tourists and teach them some of the principles of commercial hospitality.

The National Association for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism in Romania (*Asociaţia Naţională de Turism Rural, Ecologic şi Cultural*), in short ANTREC, is the largest accommodation network in the country with 2,500 affiliated guesthouses in 800 villages (ANTREC 2015). The network is registered as an NGO and was established in 1994 in the Bran-Moieciu area by a retired teacher from Bucharest[59],

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[59] More about the NGOs presence in Bran and Moeiciu in Chapter 3.

but now has branches all over Romania. Apart from helping locals with the bureaucratic procedures of setting up a guesthouse and promoting their *pensiuni,* over the years this NGO has been prolific in hosting or co-hosting a variety of events, including regional or thematic fairs and folkloric shows. It has also enabled specialised training for tourism practitioners in the area of hospitality management or catering. Funding for these events has been provided through partnerships with local town halls and by various EU grants. In 2011 I participated in such an event in Albac where ANTREC, in association with the local administration, organised the *Rural Tourism Fair.* This gave me a good opportunity to observe displays and performances that were selected as being representative of the Romanian countryside. Some of the stalls at the fair were dedicated to a single *pensiune* or organisation, while others were showcasing an entire village, with representatives from several *pensiuni* offering leaflets and details about their services. Food and drink played a central role in the fair and many exhibitors invited visitors to taste their displays. Also, various hand-made objects, usually wooden miniatures of tools or musical instruments were exhibited. The guesthouse owners were usually dressed in traditional garb. The tourism fair also featured a cooking competition for *pensiuni* owners, all ladies, a folkloric concert and a parade where the musicians and dancers arrived on horses and in horse-drawn carts.

Figure 221 – Folkloric concert at the Albac Rural Tourism Fair. The musicians are wearing traditional garb with an added belt in the colours of the Romanian flag.

Figure 222 - Girls wearing traditional embroidered clothing inviting visitors to taste the food displays.

Figure 223 – Miniature wooden objects displayed at the Rural Tourism Fair in Albac,

Figure 29 – Food displayed at the Rural Tourism Fair in Albac.

One of the main outlets for ANTREC's publicity is a glossy magazine called *Vacanțe la țară* (Holidays in the Countryside) published on a monthly basis since 2004. Its entire archive is available online so I had a chance to browse most of the issues. The journal showcases rural tourism businesses all over Romania and apart from attracting visitors, it is meant as a source of inspiration for other guesthouse owners. Readers of *Vacanțe la Țară* can also find information about local gastronomy from various parts of Romania, learn about best practices in tourism from other European countries and stay informed about all of ANTREC's projects and activities. The publication is not very strict regarding the type of guesthouses that it advertises and some of the *pensiuni* presented – or even hotels – seem far from the ideal representation of rural accommodation, at least visually. Large villas built in 'Tirol style', equipped with state-of-the-art amenities including Jacuzzis and saunas or 'Halloween celebrations in Bran' may be featured along images of locals dressed in traditional garb taking part in pastoral celebrations. Overall ANTREC seems open to promoting most tourism services and manifestations based in rural areas. Even if they are officially focused on 'agrotourism' or 'ecotourism', their criteria for defining these forms of tourism are quite lax and they show, once again, how gaps arise between discourse and practices[60].

The official model for ANTREC is The European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism (EuroGites). Founded over forty years ago in France, EuroGites is now an international network that brings together 35 rural tourism associations from 28 countries of Europe. Romania is affiliated with EuroGites through ANTREC and the Romanian NGO prides itself with having received guidance from their foreign counterpart. However, a quick look at EuroGites' website reveals a more restrictive and precise discourse about rural tourism than the one promoted by ANTREC. EuroGites publishes a guide to be used by quality inspectors and also offers an online 'Virtual Training' where accommodation owners can learn about 'good' and 'bad' practices regarding, among other things, building style, interior decoration, 'traditional/authentic equipment', cleanliness, bathroom aspect, the

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[60] Other, younger and smaller NGOs are trying to implement alternative definitions, but they are yet to achieve the same scale of visibility that ANTREC has. From an informal discussion with the president of the Romanian Ecotourism Association I learned about their efforts to implement a national certification system for ecotourism products. Looking up for more details online, I found, among other things, that their application form and self-assessment sheet has 26 pages. By contrast, the form for joining ANTREC is only 2 pages long.

'rural surroundings of accommodation' and the use of various resources such as: 'nature', 'landscape', 'scenery', 'culture', 'tradition' (EuroGites 2011). Negative examples include building in 'modern style' and the use of plastic, but also the use of old tools and garden equipment as a decoration. A set of images is presented to illustrate the negative examples.

Figure 24 – Images used as negative examples. Captions read: 'not beautiful. Unsuitable use of components of cultural heritage and natural materials for interiors furniture on the tourist farm' (A), 'not beautiful' (B), 'unsuitable and untypical decoration of woodpile' (C), 'unsuitable planter. We ask ourselves who is here an ass.' (D), 'overelaborate' (E), 'too simple' (F).

Although the photos above are from other European countries, as I will show in the next section of this chapter, very similar images are used in the advertising of *pensiuni* in Romania. I mentioned Eurogites' 'best practices' guide to illustrate how local aesthetics can conflict with non-local, international and urban-based ideologies. Organisations that try to promote rural destinations often find themselves in a position where they need to

mediate between such different worldviews. They must inspire locals to become entrepreneurs, packaging their rural life-styles in ways meant to enchant tourists, but at the same time, they try to persuade them to follow particular models. The rigour with which they reinforce these models varies from organisation to organisation, and, as I will show in the following chapters of this thesis, so do the various local responses.

Apart from ANTREC, there is a second organisation that had a significant impact on rural tourism in Romania since its early days. In contrast with ANTREC, this NGO was founded abroad and had a more pronounced educational mission, opposing modernising projects and insisting on heritage preservation. It was also different in its focus on foreign guests, whereas ANTREC mostly worked to attract domestic visitors. Opération Villages Roumains (OVR) was established in Belgium in 1988 as a protest movement against Ceauşescu's *sistematizare* project which involved the gradual destruction of villages and their transformation into urban settlements. The NGO grew into OVR International, a network of organizations with offices in Belgium, France, Switzerland, the UK and Romania. One of the first measures initiated by OVR was the 'adoption' of Romanian villages by Belgian, French or UK villages. More similar partnerships were created soon after the fall of communism and in 1992 a Romanian Villages Touristic Network (*Reţea Turistică*) was set up (Turnock, 1991:259) including fourteen villages from Maramureş that were chosen for a pilot project. In each village a number of locals were selected as potential hosts – usually from households that were above average in terms of space and utilities and that belonged to the more educated elite. Those selected underwent training - some of them in Belgium – a number of tourist information offices were set up and the first guests were brought from the sister Belgian villages. The networks extended and a guide published in 2002 listed 27 villages included in the Reţea Turistică, which spread beyond Maramureş, to eleven other counties (Association Grand-Jidvei n.d.). In OVR's discourse the emphasis was on direct contact between guests and hosts and on the tourists' participation to village life. OVR had an integrated approach, focused on 'teaching the practice of democracy' by empowering rural communities, stimulating locals to cooperate and to participate in development projects as well as encouraging them to establish associations (OVR Historique n.d.). Most of their actions had an underlining mission of sustainable development and heritage preservation with particular care given to local architecture. In this context, tourism was seen as a means for locals to gain extra income and improve their living conditions and their village infrastructure. For this purpose part of the profits made from tourism went to a common fund for collective expenses. OVR also

stimulated local crafts and provided outlets where locals could sell their products, as well as old folk costumes that they were no longer using (Cippolari 2003b:4). It is important to point out that OVR had very little visibility in the Romanian media[61]. Its advertising efforts were all directed towards countries such as France, Belgium and Switzerland and as a consequence it played an important role in stimulating foreign tourist demand and making Romanian rural destinations visible abroad. It is likely that OVR and the inflow of foreign guests that it attracted are partly responsible for the current emphasis on 'heritage' that defines the touristic offer in Maramureș.

4.1.3. A wide-ranging business discourse

Alongside government officials and various NGOs, there are a multitude of tour operators and private entrepreneurs that try to make parts of the Romanian countryside visible and visitable. Their discourse relies on representations that draw from the imagery of nature – scenery, wildlife; from the symbolism of the Romanian identity - traditions, authenticity, customs, local food, vernacular architecture; and it also includes references to modernity - comfort, 'modern' houses with modern facilities, barbeques and gazebos. A significant part of this discourse resides online, and the Internet is becoming one area where visibility is of growing importance[62]. There are many websites that host adverts for accommodation in Romania, but only a few of them are well-known and widely used. In this section I take a closer look at the advertising discourse promoted by some of these Internet pages.

I started my online explorations by running searches with key words such as '*pensiune', 'turism rural'* (rural tourism), or *'ecotourism'* and I gathered a database with almost 200 websites promoting tourism to Romanian villages. Before looking at the content of these websites, I was curious to learn whether there were any connections between them which could reveal cooperation between the people and organisations that were running them, as well as any dominant stakeholders. This question was inspired by a large-scale study of the tourism organisational environment of Elba and Fiji islands that involved building hyperlink network diagrams between the tourism promotion

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[61] In spite of the NGO's absence from Romanian media, its activity was well known by a number of Romanian institutions. In 2011, a three day event was organised by the Romanian Cultural Institute, the Romanian Academy, the Romanian Peasant Museum and the Romanian Embassies in Paris and Brussels in order to mark OVR's twenty years of activity. With this occasion the NGO received a honorary distinction from the Romanian President (OVR 2011).

[62] According to survey data from England, Scotland and Wales, the most popular type of information people access online is related to travel plans, with 87% of the web users doing so in 2009 (an increase of 10 per cent from 2007) (Dutton et al 2009:20).

websites of each destination (Baggio *et al.* 2007). Comparing the diagrams, Baggio *et al.* found that the network identified for Elba had a higher degree of connectivity than the network between the Fiji websites. This was explained by the fact that Elba had a longer history of tourism and was a more established destination, while Fiji was still at an early stage of development (Baggio et el 2007:8). With the help of the *Webometric Analyst* software I attempted to draw a similar diagram between a collection of 78 websites focused on promoting tourism to Romanian villages. What emerged is a very dispersed network, with extremely low connectivity.
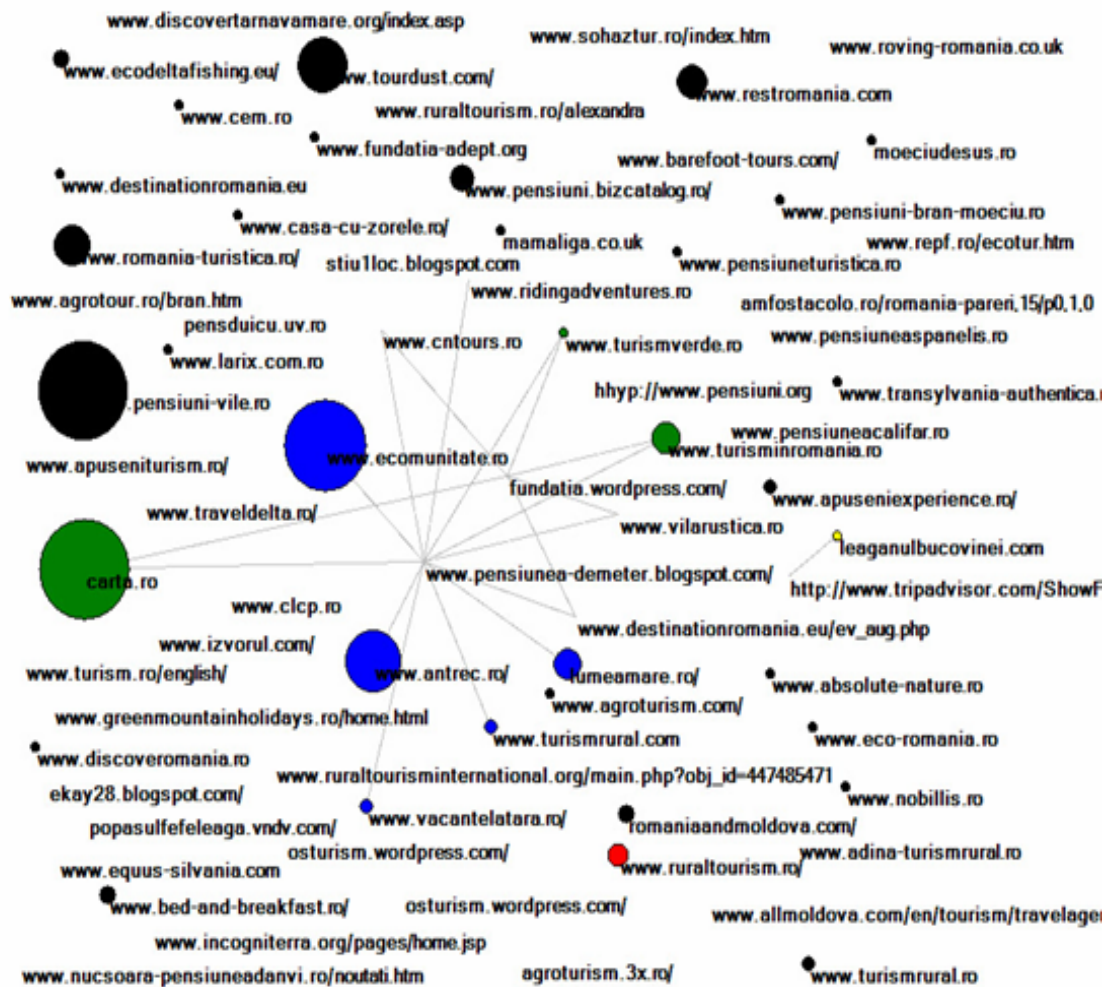
Figure 25 - Network diagram of websites promoting rural tourism in Romania

The absence of interlinks illustrates the weak degree of integration within this business sector and the reduced cooperation between the various stakeholders. This would also suggest that the destination is at a very early stage of development. Indeed, Romania as a whole cannot be seen as a 'rural tourism destination' and we are rather dealing with small-scale regional and local destinations. What is also visible from this graph is the

size of the websites, the larger dots being mostly online portals comprising a large number of pages and advertising hundreds of accommodation units.

Very little if no research has been done on the online advertising of Romanian rural destinations. Catrina claims to have taken into account in her research Internet imagery for promoting rural tourism in Maramureş. According to her, she has 'identified elements of material culture loaded with meaning and transformed into symbols to be interpreted by potential tourists' (Catrina 2009:2) She then lists the following: the house, organic farming, food, folk music, traditional garb and natural scenery. Unfortunately, she draws from one single website - www.ruralturism.ro - and she never questions the source of the discourse, apparently taking for granted the fact that the *pensiune* owners themselves are the ones promoting the destination. I came across the same portal during research for my MPhil thesis and I found that behind it there is, in fact, a tour operator. The website provides information on some two hundred and fifty *pensiuni*, most of them located in Transylvania, Maramureş or Bucovina. As I explained elsewhere (Rădan 2008), the format of the guesthouse descriptions is standardised and this makes it clear that it was not the hosts who authored the ads. The adverts start by mentioning the 'traditional' style of the house, continue by commenting on the location and the beauty of the landscape and soundscape and then introduce the hosts who are often a 'young' and 'smiling' couple. Healthy and organic food from the family's farm is also mentioned and the 'lady of the house' is praised for her cooking. The facilities and services offered by the guesthouse are then listed, including more 'rural' elements such as: picturesque scenery, courtyard, terracotta stoves, gazebo, farm activities and rides in horse-drawn carts. More modern additions such as parking, central heating, TV, barbeque, and the 'modern bathrooms' are never left out (Rădan 2008). I selected this website because it is one of the oldest and among the first portals to centralise a large number of guesthouses. It was launched in 2001, at a time when most of the other sites that are popular today did not exist yet. It is interesting to compare these blurbs, written over a decade ago, with more recent listings on www.carta.ro[63], which is currently one of the most popular accommodation portals in Romania. Many adverts[64] on carta.ro start with a poetic depiction of the setting, noting

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[63] This service renews adverts at least once a year, when they renew contracts with *pensiune* owners. In contrast, the www.ruralturism.ro site looks unchanged and dormant at least since 2006, when I first accessed it.
[64] For keeping a better basis of comparison, I selected from both websites only adverts for accommodation in Bran and Moieciu.

the 'superb view of the mountains', the 'fairy-tale landscape'[65] and the 'quietness', presenting it as 'the most beautiful location in the area', 'far from the noise of the cities' and 'the ideal place to spend the week-end or even a holiday'. Sometimes more specific natural elements are mentioned: the 'ozone and clean mountain air', 'the "aroma" of the fir-trees', the forest, the birds, the 'sound of the wind through the leaves'. Potential guests are told that they will arrive in the perfect place for relaxation and recovery and that their stay will be unforgettable. Descriptions quickly move to the qualities of the *pensiune* and, compared to the first website presented, here there is more concern for the material elements of the accommodation experience. When they are not described as 'rustic', guesthouses are often said to be 'new' or 'modern' and the construction year may be listed as proof. The rooms are always said to be 'spacious' and with a 'generous living and dining area' and the bathrooms are 'en-suite'. Sometimes it is specified that the furniture is new and that the 'utilities have been chosen to provide all the comfort one might search for'. Technology is also listed and it may include the standard dotation of a TV and a wireless Internet connection, or more sophisticated options like large LCD screens and Home Cinema Systems. Other new elements of the tourist experience that were not advertised back in 2001 include saunas, Jacuzzis, all terrain vehicles or pool tables. Meanwhile, pastimes that are typically associated with rural areas, such as riding in horse-drawn carts or participating in farm activities are not mentioned as often. Finally, for guesthouses that offer meals it is always specified that the food is local and the recipes are 'traditional', but the lady of the house is seldom described as being the cook[66]. The tone of the adverts signals a bigger distance between hosts and their guests. Indeed, guesthouse owners have limited input when it comes to writing these presentations, a point I will illustrate further on when I describe the work of a sales agent hired by one of the leading accommodation portals.

Sketching a comparison between the promotional discourse about Bran and Moieciu, and the advertising of Albac, a few differences can be noted. While in the first case, farm activities are rarely depicted, guesthouse owners from Apuseni seem more inclined to make them a visible part of their offer. I found several guesthouses that list participation in farming activities among the activities available for tourists' entertainment. Some of these adverts invite children to help with feeding the animals, to collect hay and build haystacks, and they encourage guests to become initiated in

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[65] The 'fairy-tale landscape' became such a mantra that a satire website published a fake news about a newly opened guesthouse that went immediately bankrupt because the owners forgot to mention in their adverts that it is located in a 'fairy-tale landscape' (Times New Roman 2013).
[66] Less than half of the guesthouses provide catering services and those that do are often larger establishments where more than one person is involved in preparing the meals.

cooking regional dishes. In contrast to Bran and Moieciu's advertising imagery, online depictions of *pensiuni* in Apuseni also seem to stress more of the natural elements and the areas' attractions. The house and the various sitting areas in the garden are presented as linked with the natural surroundings – offering unique access to the scenery or to the soundscape – and these elements are often described in more detail than the accommodation facilities.

The websites discussed so far are popular among Romanian tourists who are accustomed to local culture and do not need actual guidance during their holiday. For foreigners, however, there are some tour operators that offer packaged tours, including guided trips and stays at *pensiuni* that have a more 'traditional' feel. The discourse used in promoting their offer places a stronger emphasis on notions like 'authenticity', 'folklore', or 'untouched nature' and echoes the official country brand promoted by the Ministry of Tourism.

Transylvania is a region rich in traditions and folklore, mystery and romanticism, hospitable and friendly. The villages come straight out of a fairy tale, oasis of peace and tranquility and witnesses of centuries gone by (Riding Adventures Transylvania n.d.).

We lead you to very authentic places in the region between Sibiu, Sighisoara and Brasov, off the beaten tracks [...] for many fellow-Europeans this country is still a blank spot on the map. So as a travel destination Romania is a secret worth discovering (Carpathian Tours n.d.).

You can see folk festivals in Transylvania that are genuine expressions of local culture, not merely staged for visitors' (TurismRo n.d.).

'See the Real Romania. Discover real people, real places and have incredible real life experiences along the way with Intrepid Travel' (Intrepid n.d).

Our spirit is to promote through adapted and personalized tourist products the values of the natural and cultural patrimony of Romania. Romania is the country where the environment and the life in the countryside are still closer to the traditional image! (Pan Travel n.d.)

Many of the established accommodation businesses also create their own web page where they usually add lengthier texts and more images. There is great variation in the style and content of these websites, but the elements they build on are the same that I already described. One interesting detail that could be noted is that hosts learned to adapt their discourse according to the audience. For instance, I came across a *pensiune* that in Romanian was advertising a rich collection of video games, while in the English version of the advert there was no mention of it. Another example is of a website where, in its English version, the guesthouse is presented as having heating with terracotta stoves, while the Romanian description highlights the central heating mentioning that there are *also* stoves, but explaining in brackets that this is 'rustic, romantic' – in case they would seem backward and unappealing to some domestic tourists (Rădan 2008). For *pensiuni* that are in the Bran area, adverts that target foreigners sometimes use Dracula's image, including it alongside elements of local culture and natural scenery. One can stumble across tour agencies like 'Rustic Tour' who claims to be specialised in agro-tourism, but nonetheless sells a package titled 'On Dracula's Trail' (Rustic Tour n.d) or upon a *pensiune* with a Greek inspired name that invites tourists to come and 'rewrite Dracula's legend in the cradle of Romanian rural tourism' (You Deal n.d).

Apart from textual depictions, *pensiuni* promotion makes extensive use of photographs. Looking at these images we can observe some of the aesthetic choices owners make in the architecture of their guesthouses and in their interior and garden decorations. Selective as they unavoidably are, these images also reveal what tourism entrepreneurs consider to be the more pleasing areas of their *pensiuni*[67]. In analysing advertising images I was particularly interested in the elements that were used in order to create a 'traditional' or 'village-style' atmosphere. However, apart from this discourse that is somehow typical of rural tourism, I found that there is also a salient imagery linked to ideas of modernity, luxury, and comfort.

The architecture of guesthouses could be divided into three main categories: the old, the new, and the rustic. Of course, many overlapping elements can be found and these categories should be taken as analytic devices. The old houses are generally built before 1989, they have one floor and they are covered in white lime or have visible wood beams painted with dark oil. The new, 'modern' *pensiuni*, reflect the more recent architectural style that emerged in Romanian villages after 1989. They look oversized compared to the rest of the built environment and they are sometimes painted in striking

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[67] The observations are based on looking at information available on the following websites managed by tour operators: www.Carta.ro, www.Turistinfo.ro, www.pensiuni-vile.ro, www.agroturism.com, www.satul.ro.

colours. The materials used in their construction are concrete, polystyrene for insulation and metal tiles for the roofing, which can also be painted in various colours[68]. The third building style is the 'rustic'. This notion stands, originally, for an urban appropriation of rurality and it was the townsmen's representation of things recalling the peasant world. What is interesting is that this imagery has been re-appropriated in the villages, paradoxically, as an attribute of modernity. The phenomenon is not directly related to tourism and has been noted and discussed recently by Mihăilescu (2009, 2010). The rustic is not a revival of the traditional style, but a hybrid, a pastiche, a reinterpretation. Rustic houses make extensive use of wood, as did vernacular architecture in the past, but they abandoned the rich carved symbolism. Before, vegetal, animal, cosmologic, and anthropomorphic motifs could be found on every house and they usually had a magic or religious function (Jacob 2009:123). The wood of the new 'rustic' houses has no such details and it is only covered with transparent varnish, while in the past oil was used, giving houses a darker appearance.
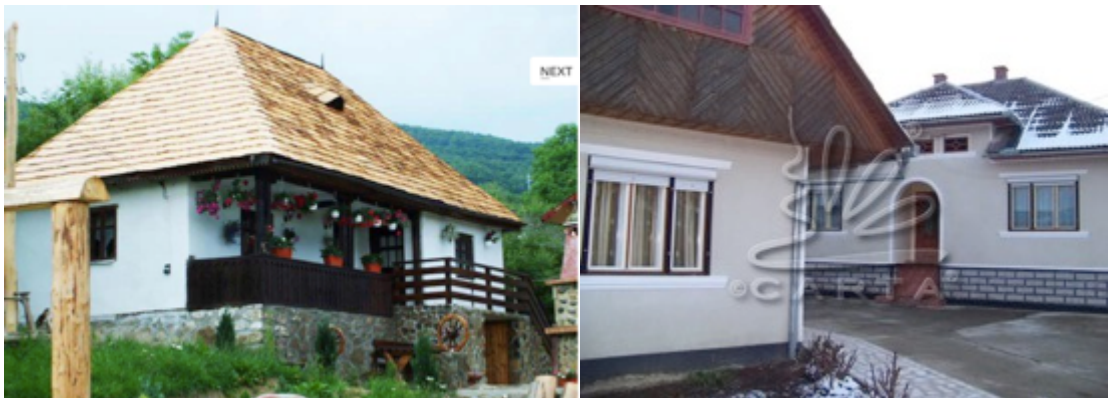
Figure 26 – *Pensiuni* **that preserved the older architectural style.**

Figure 27 – *Pensiuni* **with modern architecture.**

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[68] I come back in more detail to these changes in architecture in the following chapters.

Figure 28 – Rustic *pensiuni.*

Figure 29 – Gazebos and a barbeque.

One element featured in almost all descriptions of a *pensiune* is the *foişor,* the gazebo, a recent addition in the rural landscape which has been appropriated as something essential for a 'rustic' appearance. Traditional bread ovens have disappeared and their place was taken by the barbeque. Barbeques are the standard dotation of any garden, while the presence of a wooden swing is usually highlighted as an asset. Many guesthouses also advertise playgrounds for children including colourful plastic slides, swings or small swimming pools, which are a strikingly 'modern' addition to a 'peasant' yard. Only a few decades ago, swings and barbeques were virtually absent from rural households, while today they are common even in villages that are not touristic. Mihăilescu has insightfully noted how these elements mark the transition from the old peasant household which was centred on agricultural work and farm animals, to a new one inspired by an urban model where there is room for leisure and idleness (Mihăilescu 2009).

Figure 30 – A cart and a barrel displayed in the garden and a decorative water well.

Tools that once served to work the field and to carry goods have now been turned into home or garden decorations. This is once again suggestive for the shift of rural areas from a production function to an aesthetic one – at least at the level of discourse. The cart is probably the most ubiquitous element – it is usually varnished or painted, and often used as a flower stand. Wooden cart wheels are also popular decorative elements that can be found hanging on the walls on the exterior of the house, or in the interior, where they are used in creative new ways, having been transformed into chandeliers or incorporated into the furniture. If 'authentic' old wheels are not available anymore, new ones are made. Since their purpose is purely decorative, they often miss some of their original elements, such as the iron 'belt' that was fixed on the outer side in order to make it more solid and protect the wood.

The dining area can be one of the most decorated spaces of a *pensiune*, its role somewhere between a reception place and an exhibition space. Many of these rooms display things such as ceramic pottery – not necessarily regional – dried corn on the cob or various household tools evoking a past where agriculture was central to the rural household. Hunting trophies or sheep skins can be found hanging on the walls as well as various embroidered carpets. If, however, the *pensiune* has a more modern style, the dining room has a minimalist look. Bedrooms in general tend to be neutral and interior decorations are rare.

Figure 31 – Rustic interior decorations in the restaurant and a bar, a modern addition, designed to look like a wooden fence.

Figure 32 - A more modern and minimalist design

Figure 33 – Bedrooms.

After touching on images that are salient in promotional materials, a couple of things can be noted about elements that are left out, in spite of the fact that they are present in the textual depictions. I believe that a meaningful absence is that of the farming and work-related imagery. Hosts and those working for advertising websites are aware that some tourists, especially foreign ones, are curious to see and perhaps participate in various farm activities. However, photographs showing actual work or work-sites are virtually absent. Milking the cows, making cheese, ploughing the field, picking fruit, gathering hay, are almost never featured, and neither are spaces such as the barn, the

chicken yard, or the kitchen. The tourists are told they can observe or participate in such activities, but they are not presented with any images.

I only came across one example of a *pensiune* that features pictures of farm animals in their online photo gallery, on the personal website of a guesthouse in Albac.

Figure 34 - Farm animals presented on the website of a *pensiune* in Albac. The pig (on the right, behind the fence) is less visible than the calf – perhaps a sign that it is consider less 'aesthetic'.

I take this as a sign that for the villagers themselves and for the people who run the accommodation portals, there is no aesthetic experience involved in this kind of activity. The next chapters of this thesis will bring further evidence along these lines, trying, at the same time, to offer an interpretation. Also, somewhat surprising, images of the 'picturesque scenery' that is always referred to when introducing the location, are not showed very often. In this case, spatial constraints may be partly accountable for the omission. Even if the village is surrounded by forests and mountains, many of the *pensiuni* are located in the valleys and lack a direct view of this scenery. Moreover, given the overcrowding of the built landscape, one may often find that the 'picturesque landscape' is the concrete wall of a neighbouring guesthouse.

An encounter with someone who worked for one of the most popular advertising websites gave me a chance to look into the 'backstage' of the marketing process. During my fieldwork in Bran and Moieciu I had a chance to shadow a sales agent – I will call him Andrei – and I could observe how the content of adverts displayed online was created and negotiated with local hosts. All of the meetings I assisted were contract renewals, so Andrei already had some data about the accommodation units we were visiting. A typical encounter between him and a *pensiune* owner lasted around 30-45 minutes. During this time, the host was accompanying Andrei around the house and he would take photos of the rooms, bathrooms and dining areas. Objects that 'didn't look good' were sometimes quickly removed from the frame, such as pillows not matching

the rest of the bedding, a trash bin or some extra blankets. When hosts complained that advertising on the portal he was working for did not bring them many clients, he was trying to dismiss their worries with a joke, saying that 'this summer everybody went to the seaside' or, on a more serious note, reassuring them that they are working on improving the features of the website and this will lead to an increase in visitors. The touristic offer of a *pensiune* was a joint creation of the owner together with the sales agent. Andrei read a list of facilities and ticked those that the host would say are available in his/her guesthouse. Sometimes he would encourage owners to provide a new service, such as, for instance, transport to and from the train station. He would also advise them to start thinking about promoting their Christmas and New Year offers. As he ticked the facilities and services offered by the unit on his list, he would tell the owners to have no worries, that the depictions will be 'boosted' and 'embellished' before being publishing online.

4.2. Discursive consensus and empirical disunity

As I have shown so far, the various institutional discourses related to rural tourism are not entirely similar and their messages do not always overlap. This is due to different agendas, but also because of the different levels of abstraction of these discourses and the varying spheres in which their advocates activate. The governmental discourse tries to be all encompassing and works with very general and abstract/ideal notions. The NGO sector comes on an intermediate position, trying to relate to regional interests and to respond to some of the needs of local hosts, while also maintaining particular 'visions' about rural tourism. Its discourse is more nuanced than the governmental one, but can also have a strong normative component. Finally, the world of tour operators and private entrepreneurs reveals the wide-ranging complexity of rural tourism and is indicative of a rich empirical variety that I will try to capture in the following chapters of this thesis.

In spite of their different emphasis, on a discursive level at least, all these actors manage to communicate and converge towards a few general directions. In October 2012 I attended the 4th European Congress on Rural Tourism organised in the town of Piatra Neamţ, Romania, over a period of four days. This international event gathered a few hundred practitioners belonging to institutions ranging from smaller local NGOs to big international organisations, government officials, tour operators and academics from Hospitality and Tourism departments. The main messages conveyed through the conference's panels were that rural tourism is an important means of generating

opportunities for local communities while also preserving rural heritage and culture. In brief, the conclusion of the Congress was that rural tourism businesses must be innovative and find new ways of using local assets and resources, and, at the same time, be aware of the growing advertising possibilities offered by the Internet and the new social media.

Oddly, the only groups that did not have a say in the Congress were social scientists and local hosts. Some villagers were invited, but their role was to run exhibition stalls[69] that were set in the lobby of the conference venue. Dressed in folk garb, they appeared more like part of the displays than active participants in the knowledge exchange and debates.

The deconstruction of the colonialist discourse representing the 'other' as 'premodern, static, and dead' (Phillips 1995:105) is well established in anthropology, and so is the notion that there are certain immutable qualities that give a culture 'authenticity'. Although such notions have lost their ground in academic discourse, they survive as packaging devices for tourist promotion. Some of the classic concepts are now to be found in a folk-scientific model with appeal outside academia. These assumptions are incorporated in advertising messages and are guiding institutional actions. Presenting destinations as either vestiges of times long gone or glimpses into the future is one of the oldest and most established tropes of the tourism 'industry' (Adler 1989:1375) and, as I have shown, many of the 'myths' that are meant to inspire tourists to travel are built on images of unspoilt nature, close-knit communities and authentic lifestyles of the 'other' (Selwyn 1996a). This aesthetisation of rural areas creates the image of a homogenous countryside. However, the uneven development of tourist destinations across countries and tourists' particular choices of destinations reveal that people's choices depend on specific configurations of landscape, singling out particular places and excluding others. This is most visible in Romania, where there are marked geographical differences between different parts of the country and where villages in the plain are rarely destinations for tourism. Moreover, within the same destination, tourism engages people in a variety of ways. Meanwhile, most institutional discourses portray tourism as a general answer to the socio-economic problems of rural areas without differentiating between regions and between villagers. Their repertoire of representations is not always rooted in local realities and most often it is difficult to translate it into the corresponding practices. As Stronza argues, in the case of mediating

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[69] Displays were very similar to those that I observed in the *Rural Tourism Fair* in Albac.

institutions, '*the emphasis remains, however, on what is external to a site, rather than on what the existing conditions might reveal about whether tourism will have a positive or negative impact on local residents'* (Stronza 2001:275). She concludes that it is most important to look at how local conditions influence tourism development – such as skills, economic commitments, or gender stereotypes (2001:276).

It the following two chapters I look at the complex reality that lies behind these discourses that have an aesthetic and normative appeal as I try to understand how did tourism turn villagers into entrepreneurs.

Chapter 5

Pensiune owners between socialist peasant-workers

and established entrepreneurs

5.1. The wider context

The politico-economic system that emerged in the post-industrial West and that is gradually transcending borders, becoming dominant in one form or another in most parts of the world has been labeled by some analists as 'neoliberalism' and described as '*a hegemony that exerts specific pressures and sets certain limits on the possible paths of personal becoming*' (2014:198). If resorting to such generic notions, some of the changes experienced by the Romanian society could be understood as a shift from state socialism to a form of neoliberalism and an encounter between these two models of organising social life. Without going into an extensive discussion of this notion – which in itself represents a wide area of ongoing debate and research, just pointing out a few of the characteristics with which neoliberalism has been linked can help sketch the wider socio-economic context in which Romanian rural tourism emerged and exists today. Neoliberalism has been linked with de-regulation of markets and a *laissez-faire* approach, a system encouraging private enterprise and portraying competition as the best method for maximising utility, setting prices and allocating resources (Makovicky 2014:4). Its accompanying discourse and policies privilege surplus over use values (Kalb 2014:195), insist on individuals' enterprising nature (10), their possessive individualism (11), as well as on their role as consumers who have a right, if not even a duty, to choose (Makovicky 2014:9). The elusive mechanism of neoliberalism is 'the [free] market', which, as Carrier points out, should be seen as a model and idea central to the Western culture (Carrier 1997:ix). A central principle of the market model is that competition is a stimulant for innovation (Carrier 1997:ix). Being enterprising means being flexible and inventive and finding new ways of using resources in order to make a living (Hernandez 2014:112).

In the 25 years since Romania moved away from a centrally planned economy, many of the principles outlined above became embedded in its socio-political life, confronting people in various ways through their economic transactions, state institutions and policies, mass-media, or non-governmental organsations. An essential question is how did people apprehend, experience and enact these changes? As much as

historical reconstruction allows, some interesting answers may come from looking at tourism development in Bran and Moieciu. At the beginning of the 90s, Romanian peasants could not be described as capitalists and they were hardly playing an active role in the market economy. In this respect, their marginality was twofold: as inhabitants of a former socialist country and as members of a rural society. Similar to the 'socialist legacy', 'peasant morality' has been invoked when social relations, values or pre-capitalist economic practices were found to hold sway in contexts formally aligned to a market-based economy. In such cases, anthropologists were inclined to write about the problematic articulation between two distinct economic spheres: market capitalism and the peasant economy (Tucker 2010; Taussig 1983; Luetchford, 2005). However, according to some voices, this stance tended to overemphasise the role of morality while downplaying individuals' agency and their calculating nature (Hernandez 2014:112). Rather than showing blind commitment to a set of values, peasants have often demonstrated that they are flexible and dynamic in responding to external pressures (Harris 2005:424) as well as prone to risk-taking and maximising behaviour (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2014). In fact, as Bernal found in his fieldwork in rural Sudan, villagers' 'commitments to subsistence production sometimes may have more to do with markets than with their substantive values' (Bernal 1994:805). Farming is interlinked with market processes, offering a safety net for people unable to find employment or to run their own businesses. At the same time, given their subsistence base, peasants represent a cheap pool of labour for the market (Harris 2005:436). As the model of closed peasant communities (Foster 1965) had gradually lost strength, research on rural people has turned to examining the relation between villages and 'the outside' (Harris 2005:423). Being food producers, rural people can be more independent from the wider economic system, but at the same time, if they direct their surplus to the market, they can become more integrated 'maybe less peasant, more capitalist farmer' (425). For this reason, peasants have been described as 'both in and out of the wider society and commodity markets' (424) and it was precisely this ability to move between different spheres of economic life that has been at the centre of recent anthropological research (425). Therefore, in asking how did rural people in Bran and Moieciu experience the shift from a centrally planned economy to the entrepreneurial pursuits of tourism, I am mindful of the various connections between the local and the non-local.

While some authors used their research on rural people to build a critique of capitalism (Tucker 2010; Taussig 1983; Luetchford, 2005), others have brought to light evidence suggesting that villagers are in fact embracing the economic opportunities

brought by the market-based economic system (Umbreş 2014; Shipley 2009). In what follows my aim is to build a nuanced account of different business typologies that bring into question the usefulness of reading things in terms of either a critique, or a successful emulation of capitalism.

5.2. Tourism entrepreneurship in a post-socialist rural setting

In the previous chapter I have examined tourism at an aggregated level while placing it in the wider historic and economic context of the region. I take now a closer look into the different strategies of guesthouse owners. From this standpoint, my respondents are tourism entrepreneurs in a post-socialist rural setting, a category that so far has not been the subject of substantial research.

Very broadly speaking, economy represents the production, circulation and consumption of goods and services (Carrier 1997:viii). In contemporary capitalist economies, people who, given their innovative vision, were able to produce and circulate a new type of commodity or service, have been called entrepreneurs. Attempts at defining entrepreneurship have been made by many scholars, they have a long history and span several disciplines[70]. Common to many definitions is the emphasis on the element of novelty and innovation in entrepreneurship, which is rooted in Schumpeter's classic contention that

> *the function of entrepreneurs is to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility for producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, by opening up a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on* (Schumpeter 2003[1943]:132).

Along these lines, some authors argue for a distinction between entrepreneurship research and the study of small firms (Thomas *et al.* 2011:965). Here, however, I will follow Landstrom who sees the two areas as overlapping and argues for approaching them together (Landstrom 2009:21). Taking then a more inclusive view, imitation does not exclude entrepreneurship, while innovation can be judged relative to different levels of the market – local, regional, national, or global (Smallbone and Welter 2009:136). Since all private ventures in tourism are a rather new development in the Romanian

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[70] A comprehensive overview of this debate is presented by Landstrom (2009:3-35).

countryside, I use terms such as 'guesthouses', 'businesses' or 'enterprise' interchangeably to refer to any form of tourism accommodation, regardless of its scale or degree of novelty. I do however distinguish between imitation and innovation when examining and explaining the different entrepreneurial ventures that I observed.

Moving away from these very general standpoints, it is useful to consider that business characteristics depend on their specific line of activity and they also vary across particular geographic and historic contexts. My focus here is on tourism entrepreneurship in a post-socialist rural setting, narrowed down to two locations in Romania: the villages of Bran and Moieciu and those in Albac and its vicinity. Although a significant part of tourism research is concerned with its business side (Tribe 2010:30), there is surprisingly little research with an explicit focus on tourism entrepreneurship. Li reviewed papers published in seven of the leading journals in hospitality and management between 1986 and 2006 identifying all the articles on this topic. He found that out of 4917 papers, only 97 addressed entrepreneurship, representing around 2% of the total (Li 2008:1016). Most of these articles relied on quantitative research methods. Just 19 papers were based on interviews and only 3 involved field observation (1017). The majority of texts examined by Li were empirical and just 25 of them could be classified as theoretical (*idem*). Concluding, Li suggests that there is no specific theoretical framework for studying tourism entrepreneurship and that research is carried out guided by existing theories of other disciplines like economics, psychology, sociology or management (1018). However, most such concepts and theories were built on observations drawn from established market economies. Based on their extensive research of post-socialist economies, Welter and Smallbone warn that in such contexts, this framework must be used with caution (2009:230). Entrepreneurs cannot exist if the patterns of production are under state control, as it happened for decades in many socialist and Soviet countries with centrally planned economies. One of crucial and undisputed characteristics of postsocialism is the shift from this centrally planned economy to one based on the so-called 'free' market. This new context might have provided a legal and political frame that allowed and even encouraged entrepreneurship, but people faced significant challenges in their business endeavours, particularly given the previous lack of entrepreneurial models in their society and because of the high degree of uncertainty and frequent changes in legislation (Smallbone and Welter 2009:40). These challenges were particularly strong in rural areas. The fact that these regions are not very supportive of business development is reflected in the comparatively little research interest that they generate,

even in countries with more established market economies. As Pato and Teixeira's bibliometric survey[71] revealed, only 30% of the studies on entrepreneurship published over the past two decades were set in rural areas (2014:12). The same authors also signal that about 75% of this research focuses on high-income and developed countries (17). Understanding of entrepreneurship among rural people in a post-socialist context remains under studied and little understood.

Returning to the equally limited body of research on small firms in tourism, Thomas *et al*. have pointed out that many of the existing studies fail to take into account the wider social and economic context of businesses, offering thus a narrow outlook on the issue (2011: 964). At the same time, they note that some of the most important contributions come from sociology and anthropology (Thomas *et al.* 2011:963). Anthropology is particularly suited for investigating the articulation of human activity – in this case entrepreneurship, with the wider socio-economic context. Granovetter used the notion of 'embeddedness' to conceptualise these links, building a critique of both the 'undersocialised' and 'oversocialised' notions of economic action. According to him, individuals are neither actors in pursuit of their self-interest, nor expressions of internalised cultural patterns (1985:485). This perspective draws attention to the role of on-going social relations and to the immediate social context (485) and it overlaps to some extent with the more recent and popular notion of social capital (Smallbone and Welter 2009:51). Interested in the embedding of economic actions, but owing more to what Granovetter called the 'oversocialised' perspective, others have stressed the role of the historical and institutional contexts (Smallbone and Welter 2009) and the importance of values and morality (Tucker 2010, Luetchford 2005). Drawing from the Weberian tradition, many authors have linked a society's dominant values with its' members' entrepreneurial inclinations and achievements (Blim 2005). At the same time, according to a more recent theoretical strand, it is the everyday realities that are 'more powerful in determining patterns of thought than those patterns are in determining everyday realities of people's lives' (Durrenberger 2005:137). Reconciling both sides, I will follow Blim in arguing that there is a dialectic relation between people's worldviews and their economic actions (Blim 2005). Consequently, one of the central aims of this chapter is to understand both the ethics guiding people's economic actions and the new values that these entrepreneurial pursuits might be instilling among

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[71] Based on the Scopus SciVerse bibliographic databases, up to 31 March 2013 (Pato and Teixeira 2014:9).

villagers, while remaining aware of the important role played by networks and by people's on-going social relations.

In spite of its seeming sameness, the tourist offer in Bran and Moieciu is the result of household decisions[72] crystallised in varied entrepreneurial practices. In what follows I suggest a number of typologies that illustrate better this diversity and that will allow me to explore several issues. First, I ask what kinds of skills were required for one to become an entrepreneur, a successful participant in the tourism economy. I am interested in the ways in which people have built their businesses by recognising and combining both material and immaterial resources. In answering this, I also examine how imitation and innovation work in spreading and generating knowledge. Second, I want to discover to what degree these businesses are embedded or not in the economy and the history of the area, and how does this influence their success or failure. Conversely, I also examine their connections to the non-local and the ways in which they link to categories of buyers that are inevitably located elsewhere.

5.3. A typology of guesthouses and the different guises of entrepreneurship

Businesses emerge from various combinations between 'physical resources, financial capital, and intangible resources' (Smallbone and Welter 2009). The most important material resources in the economy of rural tourism are land, buildings with their amenities, and natural farm products. Knowledge, skills, social relations and labour are examples of immaterial resources. More specific intangible resources refer to what is labelled as tradition and heritage and may include celebrations, customs, or farming practices. Finally, in an increasingly competitive market, one of the most important assets is visibility, an elusive resource that mixes financial, material and intangible elements. If the overarching question is how did tourism entrepreneurs in Bran, Moieciu and Apuseni combine these resources to result in successful businesses, answering it must start from a descriptive account meant to distinguish between the different types of guesthouses. I begin this section by outlining a typology of *pensiuni,* while at the same time examining the blurred boundaries between categories.

5.3.1. Minimal *pensiuni*: between self-sufficiency and failure

I consider to be *minimal* those guesthouses focused mainly on the provision of accommodation and self-catering facilities that are not growth-oriented and add little or

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[72] This is not to deny that within household there are complex processes of decision-making (see Chibnik 2011). Not all members of a household may share the same goals and economic resources are not equally distributed among them, but unravelling this dynamic was largely beyond the scope of my research.

no innovative elements. As in this category there are marked differences between *pensiuni* owned by villagers and those owned by non-locals, these two groups will be discussed separately, starting with the former.

According to the mayor of Moieciu, around the holidays, 80% of houses turn into *pensiuni*. It might be argued that a local family that only rents rooms at the peak of the holiday season, when tourists come knocking at its door, is not really a case of entrepreneurship. In fact, instances of what I call *minimal* entrepreneurship are sometimes not even recognised by villagers as *pensiuni* and they are referred to as *particulari*, a word used in Romanian to describe the opposite of a formal business, roughly translated as 'private individual'.

> -   *Do you have tourists?* (me)
> -   *We do. Well, this is a private home. But when they come, they come* (Ecaterina Voinea, *particular,* Bran).

Such owners usually argued that they were not 'doing tourism' and they were rarely willing to be interviewed, encouraging me to visit larger establishments instead.

> *We don't live just from this, tourism is [laughing] like a hobby, so to say, we cannot count on it for a constant income because we might as well starve to death if we relied only on this* (Ramona Bacu, *particular,* Bran).

However, this kind of accommodation is part of a continuum and for some it may be only the first stage in a longer process of business development. Most locals started their career in tourism by occasionally renting one or two rooms in their own house.

The *minimal* guesthouses that I visited or stayed in range from very small units with only 2 rooms and 4 beds, to larger ones with over 10 rooms and 25 beds. Room prices per night can go as low as 40 or 50 lei[73]. A closer look inside these *pensiuni,* particularly at the finishing, the furniture and the occasional interior decorations, reveals a rather modest financial investment. The furnishing style tends to vary from room to room or even within the same room, reflecting either a piecemeal and gradual development, or an effort to find the best deals. Furniture pieces are sometimes custom made from plain wood covered with a transparent lacquer, a money-saving option that also confers a 'rustic' feel to these interiors. A distinctive feature of their minimalism

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[73] £ 6,60 – £ 8,30.

relates to the fact that owners of such *pensiuni* make little effort to advertise online and to increase the visibility of their business. A few of these guesthouses seem to have no Internet advertising at all, while those that do only show up on one or two websites, with very short descriptions and a small selection of photos. An important detail about *minimal* guesthouses is that they are all unregistered and thus constrained to keep a low profile. Being part of the informal sector is both a cause and an effect of their *minimal* nature. Tourists find these *pensiuni* at the recommendation of friends or family who previously stayed there, or they are guided by owners of a neighbouring guesthouse that had no more vacancies. There are also cases, less frequent, when people who just happen to pass by stop and ask whether they could rent a room. Owners of unregistered businesses might actually turn down tourists who approach them in this way, suspecting they are undercover agents of the Financial Guard. People refused to speak to me on numerous occasions for the same reason. There are some owners of unregistered guesthouses who take the risk of listing their *pensiune* online, but this practice seems to be decreasing since controls intensified and authorities avail themselves of the information published online.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the few *pensiuni* that try to offer 'traditional' elements resort to staged and scripted events and they are big, busy and successful enough for the tourist-host encounter to be quite limited. In contrast to this, an experience resembling the early days of rural tourism may still be found among the smaller and less fancier *pensiuni* that I labeled here as *minimal*. In such places, backstages might still be 'authentic' – in the sense that they are not displays purposely set up for tourists. Inadvertently, some of these places retained elements of material culture that are less modern and fashionable, and may be offering tourists an experience closer to the ideal model of agrotourism and to the rural life of the past.

> *On the other side, where the grandmother lives, she has her little room just like it used to be in the past, with carpets on the wall, with* laviță[74]*, and I feel very good in that room, the bed is hard, it's sturdy wood* (Elena, tourist in Moieciu).

Some of these guesthouses survive not only because tourists are happy with their lower prices, but also because of people who are looking for a less commercial form of tourism.

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[74] Long wooden bench along the wall, which in the past was typical for the interior of village houses.

In spite of the features they share, the *minimal pensiuni* hide different histories and household strategies. Some of these owners are latecomers to the tourism scene of Bran and Moieciu and they are still testing the grounds. Starting late in a competitive environment poses significant challenges, particularly for guesthouses that are not focused on online advertising and that are waiting for their clientele to be built through word-of-mouth. This process is usually slow but it has been even slower in the years following the financial crisis, when tourist numbers declined. Without a strong demand from tourists, many owners did not see the point of going through all the bureaucratic hassles and for exposing themselves to various inspections from the authorities. Eventually, the 'testing' period stretched indefinitely, years passed and these guesthouses remained unregistered. These *pensiuni* were not the result of owners taking loans, so the pressure for recovering the investment was lower than for other entrepreneurs. Locals inclined to hold on to their villas and they rarely tried to sell. Even when it is not a very profitable business, a *pensiune* is a household asset, making a potential home for the younger generation.

On the other hand, the in-migrants that are found in the *minimal* category were the entrepreneurs who felt the strongest impact of the financial crisis. Their current minimalism is in fact a sort of limbo state, in which they are waiting either for a miraculous revival of tourism in the area, or for someone willing to buy their guesthouse. The guesthouse owners I refer to here are all based in Bran and Moieicu, as there were no *pensiuni* owned by urbanites in the Apuseni villages that I studied. Although I only met a few owners of such struggling businesses, villagers' accounts and the numerous online listings of guesthouses on sale in Bran and Moieciu are an indication that their numbers are much higher. Just a quick search on one of the most popular online platforms for real estate transactions revealed about fifty guesthouses for sale from Bran or Moieciu, all listed during the first three weeks of this month[75]. Most numerous in this subgroup are non-locals who invested large sums of money in a business that proved to be unsustainable.

From the onset, villagers had an advantage over the in-migrants because they already had land and some housing available for renting. Those who started to accommodate tourists in the early 90s hardly made any financial investment. Later, as their businesses developed, they reinvested money earned from tourism, or they used cash from land sales, employed work, other businesses, and, less often, loans. Particularly in the eary 90s, an important source of income came from logging

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[75] The website is olx.ro and the month is February 2015.

businesses that were frequently based on illegal forest exploitation. Meanwhile, for urbanites, starting up their business depended on large amounts of capital, as they had to invest between 50.000 € to 300.000 €, only to develop the material base for tourism, depending on the size of their planned guesthouse and the timing of their land purchase. Most of them took loans or relied on other businesses to fund their projects. Even if some secured EU subsidies[76], the grants usually covered only 50% of their investment.

5.3.2. Established and innovative *pensiuni*: between average and growth-oriented

Guesthouses that I describe as established are generally registered, their owners are more innovative and actively involved in advertising and in maintaining their premises. Most of these villas have between 8 and 25 rooms, with the mean values being around 10-12. These *pensiuni* offer more choice in terms of the actual lodging, including triple bedrooms or apartments with several rooms. Prices range according to the size and quality of rooms and vary between 70 and 250 lei[77]. Established guesthouses have a wider variety of amenities. Apart from the by now standard gazebo, barbeque and a children's playground, guests can find a number of extra services including any of the following: catering, a pool or a tennis table, a conference room, Internet connection. Many of these guesthouses also invite organised groups and are able to host parties and events. Moving towards the higher end of this category, the array of extra services can include: a restaurant; a large area designated for indoor games where guests can entertain themselves playing pool, table football, table tennis, darts and a variety of board-games; paintball; a gym; a trout pond; jacuzzi, sauna and swimming pool; ATV, bicycle or rollerblades rental. Their furnishings and interior design reflect a larger financial investment and they tend to be more consistent across the entire *pensiune*, especially in the case of urbanites who had built everything in one go. Apart from accommodation, some of the established *pensiuni* also offer activities and events such as rides on a horse drawn cart in the summer or sleigh during the winter, camp fires, a festive welcoming, sheep roasted on a spit, folkloric shows with musicians and dancers. Owners of established *pensiuni* rely on many websites for building visibility for their business. I could find most of these guesthouses listed on at least 10 different portals, but many of them use more than 20 different sites and they also collaborate with touring agencies.

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[76] Apart from the costs, the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures made these grants inaccessible to the average villagers.
[77] Equivalent to a price ranging from £12 – £43.

Although there is a thin and permeable line between the two groups, I differentiate growth-oriented *pensiuni* from the average ones based on two criteria: first, the intensity of their advertising and innovative efforts, and second, the presence of at least one household member fully dedicated to running the business. While members of households with average *pensiuni* may still combine different sources of income, including employed work and farming, in all of the growth-oriented guesthouses tourism is the family's main – if not only – source of livelihood. Farms may exist along these *pensiuni*, but their products are destined for tourists' and household consumption, not for trade. These *pensiuni* also tend to be larger than the rest, sometimes including several villas. The first three largest businesses in Bran and Moieciu have together 580 rooms in 35 villas and 5 hotels. It almost feels unfitting to call these ventures *pensiuni* when they resemble small resorts in their own right. One of these ventures is actually advertised as a 'resort', while another as a 'club'. Excluding these outliers, the average number of rooms a guesthouse in this category has is 25. As they are able to accommodate large groups, many of the growth-oriented guesthouses host school camps or company events.

In the average guesthouse, owners are mainly concerned with maintaining the premises and they are not planning any significant refurbishing or extension. Although some of them complained about a drop in tourist numbers following the crisis, they were not taking any steps to become more competitive. On the other hand, growth-oriented entrepreneurs are constantly seeking to improve their amenities, to extend and to add more services. They also focus more intensively on promotion and advertising and they can be found listed on 40 to 50 websites. Perhaps the single best indicator that they are growth-oriented is the fact that they try to attract more tourists by advertising on so many online portals. The adverts for these *pensiuni* are also more complex than the rest, featuring lengthy and detailed depictions. Apart from the numerous listings on various accommodation portals, both Romanian and foreign, they have their own websites with detailed information and images, presenting not just the guesthouse, but also the entire area and its attractions.

The classification I presented is not built along neat delineations and *pensiuni* assigned to one category may have elements typical of another. Moreover, these typologies offer a static image of what I encountered at the time of my fieldwork. A diachronic perspective can show how some businesses transformed in time, passing from one category to another. Authors like Welter and Smallbone have drawn attention to the processual nature of entrepreneurship (2009:229). An enterprise evolves as the

context changes and as individuals learn. As I have pointed out, a minimal guesthouse was often just the first step towards a more established business. Furthermore, all established guesthouses went through a period when they were growth-oriented and innovative, but some owners felt that they had reached their limit and stopped extending. Perhaps the best example here comes from a particular group of *pensiuni* that blur the boundaries between the innovative, the failed, and the average endeavours. These are currently unregistered guesthouses owned mostly by locals who were among the first to host tourists. Their innovative nature comes not just from their role as pioneers, but also from the fact that they were among the first to introduce certain extra services. Examples include an owner who had set up a trout pond, giving his guests a chance to fish, one who used to take tourists for a meal at a sheepfold, or a family that used to organise trips on horseback. These *pensiuni* had a time when they focused more intensively on promotion, collaborating with touring agencies, with ANTREC or with OVR. Even if their current informal status prevents them from advertising too much, based on their previous promotion and their longer history, they have a more numerous clientele than the other minimal guesthouses. Some of these owners speak with a note of regret about their current situation. They express resentment and they are critical of the turn taken by tourism in Bran and Moieciu.

> *Mistakes [were made]. [When] people come to your garden, they want to see an animal, to eat some cheese. Everything that you [should] do: [should be] a blend between new and old, this [would be] a real agroturistic pensiune. […] If we want to do traditional tourism… when my grandmother was young, she had no bathroom: she had a trough where she washed herself. I think rural tourism is out of control in this respect. This is not agrotourism, this is industry* (Elena Florea, guesthouse owner, Bran).

Some blame their failure to keep up with the requirements of the evolving business sector on the changes in legislation, while others stress the declining quality of tourists and their inappropriate demands[78]. Both of these issues are important and they will be explored in more detail in the next two chapters.

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[78] Tourists' demands and state regulations exert major influences over the ways in which owners of *pensiuni* build and manage their businesses. I discuss these two factors at length in Chapters 5 and 6.

Although the same typology of *pensiuni* also applies to Apuseni, it is important to stress again that the scale of development for guesthouses in that area is more moderate and the description presented reflects better my findings in Bran and Moieciu. The established pensiuni in Apuseni have fewer rooms and less extra amenities than those in Bran and Moieciu. References to events, groups, team buildings or parties are also not as frequent. Growth-oriented businesses in Apuseni are more restrained and the largest accommodation business in Albac has only three villas with a total of 30 rooms, making it ten times smaller than the biggest development in Moieciu. Finally, in terms of what I labelled 'minimal' *pensiuni*, the main difference comes from the absence of larger, formerly registered accommodation units that moved to the informal sector. This is largely due to the absence of non-local entrepreneurs. Minimal guesthouses in Apuseni tend to be small-scale locally-owned businesses with 3 to 5 rooms. Hosts in this group are not considering any serious investment in amenities or expading their accommodation capacity and they engage in tourism only as a means for supplementing their household income.

5.4. Mastering the trade: business owners by inclination or by imitation?

Both in the Apuseni region and in Bran and Moieciu, the educational and professional background of villagers played an indirect role in OVR and ANTREC's initial selection of hosts. In the early days of tourism, *pensiuni* emerged in households that had previous experience with making a living from activities other than animal husbandry and factory work. Local shop and pub keepers, teachers, members of the local administrations or waiters in the state-owned restaurants of Bran, were all among the pioneers of tourism. These people generally had higher levels of education, better paid jobs and homes that offered above the average living conditions. As they were among the few to have indoor bathrooms at the beginning of the 90s, their houses were found more suitable for accommodating guests. Given their education and work experience, such people were more open and more likely to understand the potential benefits of tourism. This social selectivity is still very visible in Albac where tourism has not seen such an intense development like in Bran and Moieciu. Among the seventeen guesthouse owners I interviewed, there were seven teachers, two owners of logging businesses, two members of the local administration, an economist, a former driver, and two unemployed people who had university degrees. In Bran and Moieciu, almost all of the established and successful entrepreneurs belong to a more educated group, with previous work experience that differentiates them from the majority. These owners recognise and

stress the formative role played by their previous jobs. A couple of my respondents were waitresses during socialism in one of the very few restaurants in Bran. According to them, this has helped them to understand what it meant to work in the services sector and it has also offered occasional contact with foreigners. Sometimes these foreigners returned or sent friends for longer stays in the village and they were seeking lodging with them. I received similar explanations from people who worked as shop keeper, phone operator, ship captain or member of the local administration, roles that required interacting with people and that, as they argue, have prepared them for relating with their tourists.

Because the tourism pioneers and the established entrepreneurs come from such varied backgrounds, it is hard to pinpoint specific skills that might have helped them in their pursuits. It is however safe to assume that having worked in a position that involved interaction with people, or having a higher level of education, can enable people to understand a broader and more abstract range of meanings connected to rural tourism. More importantly, it probably equipped them with an ability to learn and adapt which was crucial for the long-term survival of their businesses.

In a rapidly shifting socio-economic context, the capacity to change and adapt is a necessary skill and it rests on people's willingness to learn. Kirzner argues that entrepreneurial discovery actually depends on a state of 'continuing alertness' and not necessarily on systematic research (1997:72). This awareness also refers to people's ability to examine their earlier errors and correct them (73). My interactions with most guesthouse owners in Brand and Moieciu led me into thinking that for them, these are not dominant inclinations. The overwhelming majority of owners showed no interest in my offer to help. At the same time, I find it telling that the few *pensiuni* where I was accepted as a volunteer all belong to the growth-oriented and established category. When I approached guesthouse owners I always said that I would be more than happy to share with them the results of my research and to offer my advice. I also mentioned that I have a lot of literature about tourism that I could make available to them. With two or three exceptions, nobody was interested in my proposal. I could possibly explain this by the fact that most people were not familiar with academia and with the potential of putting research results into practice. However, I did propose other more straightforward forms of support. As I have a semi-professional photo camera and some experience with photography, I offered to produce good quality images of their *pensiune* for promotion purposes. Again, I found the same lack of interest. I met many other non-locals who tried to provide advice on local affairs and who were faced with

similar attitudes. A couple of Peace Corps volunteers who worked for a bear reservation in the vicinity of Bran had a similar experience. Although the organisation hosting them was on a tight budget, all of their fund-raising ideas were rejected, as was any other development proposal that they made. This attitude may appear a form of conservatism and reluctance to change, but I believe it has more to do with people's independent, individualist and self-reliant nature. This is coupled with their distrust in strangers. For a long time in local history, outsiders who wanted to influence village affairs were connected with not very benevolent authorities. Their recent experience with Antrec partly confirmed their expectations. As a consequence, most villagers today prefer to be independent, make their own choices and avoid collaborations that would make them accountable to anyone else. The same outlook is partly responsible for so many unregistered businesses and for the widespread tolerance of the informal tourism economy. Although running a *pensiune* without a licence is an essential hindrance to business growth, over half of the accommodation owners have taken this path. I return to this issue and explore it in more depth in Chapter 6.

Practice demonstrates that most businesses did transform over time, so the question is how were people persuaded to make changes, what was their source of knowledge and how did they learn the trade of accommodating guests? One important influence came from tourists and in the following chapter I focus at length on this aspect. Here I will focus on the more local sources of learning and on the role of imitation in the process of knowledge transfer. Owners of *pensiuni* were willing to adapt to tourists' ever-growing suggestions and demands because this brought them palpable benefits. The results were initially visible among a minority of locals, but others soon followed in their footsteps. According to some of the villagers that first started to accommodate tourists in the early 90s, at that time, most locals were still reluctant to receive 'strangers' in their homes.

> *People in the village, the neighbours, used to condemn me: 'Look what a fool Ionica is, look, she allows strangers in her house, to kill her, to rob her, to bla bla bla', and whatnot they used to say, you know? And I would receive them [the guests] and people would condemn me. But after they saw that nothing happens, and some people [strangers] would randomly show up, and the same, people [from the village] would talk, and in the end, they would change [their minds] the other way: 'darn it, look at her, she gets some money, they would say, the*

house is not just staying there for nothing because she knows how to earn some money' (Ionica, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

I must be realistic, it was ANTREC that instilled here this idea of accommodating guests. To be honest, it was her, Miss. M. that co-opted us. I saw that she co-opted then people of a higher level, professors, teachers… she started with them… and seeing that money comes, money teaches you (Viorica Stan, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

Most of the information shared by members of NGOs or tour operators was of a different nature than the practical knowledge easily available to villagers on the ground. To them, the power of example was more valuable and accessible than most advice: what was visible was more convincing and easier to imitate. Throughout their history, villagers relied largely on a regime of knowledge that was not conceptualised and abstracted, but enacted. Learning happened by observing others' actions. Before tourism, the skills required for taking part in the village economy were openly shared and learned through practice. Apart from making the workload easier to manage, mutual help gave villagers the chance to learn and to share their experience. Local accounts of village life in the past often focus on the communal activities and the events and celebrations that gathered the community: neighbours were helping each other with agricultural and farm work, men were cooperating if they had to cut wood from the forest, women were taking part in collective work parties called *şezători* where they were making clothes and carpets. Even later, when villagers started work in factories, their training was hands-on. In general, what others did was a valuable source of information and it was openly available. Tourism economy gradually dissolved some of the favourable contexts for shared activities or socialising that survived the communist period. Time became a scarce resource for tourism entrepreneurs and they lost many of their idle moments that were usually spent socialising with their neighbours.

Before we used to visit each other… sit… as it was when I was a child and younger, neighbours would visit each other, sit on a blanket, talk, now they don't do it anymore… (Camelia Roşu, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu)

This happens even with celebrations, events that are out of 'regular' time and that are meant to put everyday activities on hold:

Life was different [in the past], it was more peaceful, not like now. Now it's no more. If you go to a wedding, you see only old people. The others, they have pensiune, *they need to give food to the tourists. They have no break [...] if it's on a Saturday or Sunday evening, they only come from 10 or 11, after they give the food* (Maria Plop, Moieciu).

The economy of tourism turned villagers into competing entrepreneurs, limiting their opportunities for mutual help and for observing each other's work strategies. However, the relative sameness[79] of the tourist offer in places like Bran, Moieciu, or Albac proves that people still rely considerably on reproducing the observed actions of their fellow villagers.

Since owning some sort of tourist accommodation became part of the local economic base (Gudeman 2005), developing a *pensiune* came to be seen, in a way, as the norm. When asked to explain how did tourism spread and why did they build their guesthouse and their offer the way they did, some owners were open in saying that they followed others.

We went like in a wave. What everyone did, we did [...] What the neighbour does, we do. If the neighbour saw that I did something, he did it too, or if I see, I do... (Luminița Barbu, guesthouse owner, Moieciu)

If one started to dig by the road to make a certain type of fence, now everybody [does] the same. I don't know, [they] are like the sheep, or even worse (Ilinca Fluture, guesthouse owner, Bran).

[We wanted] to try something different than [raising] animals. Until now we were with the animals – cows, sheep, we have farm (gospodărie) *we keep pigs, we keep everything, but we said that a time may come when we might fail with the animals. We won't be able to keep so many, there are no conditions for selling your products. They demand all sorts of laws and norms and if you produce but you are unable to exploit... And we followed others. We saw 'hey, they are doing something with this [tourism]' – let's do the same. Slowly and*

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[79] Starting with the fact that almost everyone was focused on accommodation provision and alternative tourist services such as guided trips, workshops and educational activities, participation in farm activities are vey rare.

with little, and if it works, maybe we extend, if it's something that will have a future... (Viorica Ispas, guesthouse owner, Bran).

While some speak of imitation as something normal and understandable, others explain it as stemming from a sense of competition and they describe it as a sign of envy.

Very aggressive tourism here. People in Bran are evil, they want to have more and more. Business tourism. Agroturism will be lost. They want luxury tourism. The small ones to die, the big ones to rise. All the grandomaniacs (Elena Florea, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

The village that was in the past is gone... there was a different harmony among people... at that time, maybe it was communism and we were more or less equal, we didn't hate each other, but now, with tourism, because of competition: if that one made [himself] a house with I don't know how many rooms and I don't know how many bahtrooms, I will make double, and...umm, if I could [laughing] I would even make two bathrooms for one room, so that tourists will come only to me. You know? Already there is a selfishness, an evilness, a pointless animosity. Yes, it makes no sense, we have one life anyway... and instead of being united, we should at least leave [each other] alone, do no harm (Elena Florea, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

There is a contradiction between – on the one hand, the moral imperative that people are supposed to mind their own business and not care what their neighbours are doing, and, on the other hand, their desire to keep up with their fellow villagers. In spite of the obvious similarities between the architecture of guesthouses and the services provided by their owners, people argued that they were not interested in what their neighbors were doing. With few exceptions, most of them were not ready to admit that they imitated what other villagers did. At the same time, various stories that came up in our conversations showed how practices diverted from this claim. For people who declare that they have no concern and no knowledge of what the other villages are doing, my respondents often came up with surprising information about their neighbours. In Albac, for instance, I interviewed someone who, when I presented a list with all the *pensiuni* in the village*,* was able and willing to tell me which of them were registered, and which not. In-migrants, more open on this matter as they have little concern for projecting an ideal image of the local community, say that they often noticed villagers observing them. During the construction phase of one guesthouse, the owner showed his

inquisitive neighbours some of the materials and equipment he bought, only to discover later that they had used exactly the same in their own construction sites. A safe and anonymous method of 'spying' on each other is provided by the Internet and I heard people comment about things that they saw advertised online by other *pensiuni*. Influences are also passed through kinship networks and some of my respondents explained that they knew what to do because they have relatives who started renting rooms before them. Kinship networks span across all the villages in the Bran and Moieciu area and enable locals to visit different households and observe how others construct the tourist offer. Owners who hire casual staff or resort to occasional support from their extended kin can also be a good source of inspiration if their workers are running a *pensiune* of their own. The latter's businesses are almost always in the minimal subgroup, so they are not in direct competition with the more established guesthouses.

Apart from their desire to keep up with fellow villagers, people resorted to imitation because it reduced uncertainty. This can explain why they tended to replicate the same model and seldom tried to innovate. Following strategies that were previously tested reduced the risks, but generated what Welter and Smallbone have called '*low-level entrepreneurship*' (2009:53), keeping a large part of businesses *minimal*. As time passed, the notion of basic accommodation amenities has evolved to include a variety of things, from on-suite bathrooms, gazebos, recreation areas in the garden and barbeques, to plasma TVs and Internet. This meant that there was a lot to imitate before getting to the point where one could have to scope to innovate. Guesthouse owners were focused on reproducing the trend set by what they perceived as more established *pensiuni*. Asked about their ideas for business development, people only spoke of building an extension or adding amenities and they rarely presented alternative plans. Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly, many non-local urbanites have relied on similar imitative strategies as the villagers, although with a stronger emphasis on luxury.

A consequence of this type of applied knowledge regime was that people mostly developed short-term individual or family level goals and it was more difficult for them to imagine a common long-term aim. They could see how building an extension to their *pensiune* may increase their income, but they were far from imagining that by overcrowding the built landscape they will have a negative impact on the aesthetics of the destination, something that might ultimately make it less appealing to tourists. In the same way, those who disposed of their sewage waste in the river cared about the short-

term goal of saving some money, but were unable to understand the wider implications of their actions.

5.5. Entrepreneurial gazes and businesses' backstages

The academic literature on tourism has focused at length on the ways in which images build destinations and incite people to travel. However, the majority of studies focus on the *tourists* as the receivers and consumers of destination images and little has been written about the kinds of representations that drive business owners. Hosts have their own 'gaze' guiding them and they too can suffer from disillusionment when they find that what they followed was a mirage. Their investment is however of a different scale than that of a tourist going on a short holiday and the disappointment experienced can be more severe. In my interviews I tried to uncover this 'entrepreneurial gaze' by asking people what were their expectations and plans when they started their business. Given that they relied so much on imitation and on tourists' feedback, it is not surprising that few people could say they had a coherent plan. In fact, it was interesting to see how most villagers described themselves as accidental entrepreneurs. In narratives about the early days of their businesses they often placed the trigger and the responsibility for their actions somewhere 'outside'. They either explained that they got involved because 'tourism started in the area' and because 'everybody was doing it', or that initially they just had to do some repair work or refurbish the house, and only later, somehow accidentally, they ended up building an extension and using it for tourist accommodation. In both cases, what seemed to be missing was a plan, a vision of the whole, clear objectives or some sort of initial research. For villagers, running a *pensiune* appeared, in a way, as a structural constraint: something unintended and unplanned.

> *I started to refurbish it and I thought, if I am refurbishing, I might as well add three or four rooms. Some friends came over, they sent more friends…* (Gheorghe Ispas, guesthouse owner, Moieciu)

> *The children reinforced the walls, extended it... the roof was damadged, and first of all, the roof was damadged and I said 'oh no, we must cover the house again'. 'Let's make one more floor', they said, 'if we are at it, let's extend it'... finally, I agreed, I signed... and we've built there, including a dining room* (Viorica Zanea, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

And this is how we got the idea, by refurbishing, and since tourism had started in the area, we made a few rooms for renting. (Maria Ion, guesthouse owner, Moieciu)

Even in the story that people circulate about the owner of the largest and most successful business in the area, the trigger of the initial house extension is presented as accidental: a fire destroyed part of his home and while repairing it, he decided to add a few extra rooms for hosting tourists. To some extent, this discourse reflects the realities of an early period when demand seemed to outgrow the offer and many locals were drawn into the business without making much effort. Tourists would simply show up at their door without the need of any advertising. Owners who had no more vacancies were usually sending tourists to their neighbours or to their relatives. When they could find no rooms in the existing *pensiuni*, tourists were looking for a place to rent in their vicinity. In time, as the accommodation standards changed and the choice diversified, it became virtually impossible for less resourceful households to enter the touristic circuit. Someone starting an accommodation business in 2005 could not rely on the same strategy and resources that people used in the 90s, when for hosting tourists it was enough to have an indoor bathroom and a couple of extra rooms and to be affiliated with ANTREC or OVR. As tourists became more concerned with the comfort and utilities of the accommodation, setting up a guesthouse became increasingly costly and it required a more orchestrated effort. Regardless of the time when they opened their *pensiune,* owners rarely described themselves as guided by a plan or a particular 'vision' and they were more likely to speak about a process of trial and error. The discourse of the few people I interviewed who were at the beginning of their entrepreneurial pursuits was similar to these accounts about the past. For instance, I had a chat with the new owners of a guesthouse who were refurbishing their recently acquired property and I asked whether they have a strategy for building their offer or they target a particular group of tourists. Their answer was that they have no plan yet, that they do not know, and that they will see how it goes. I found the same lack of planning in the case of guesthouses under construction. On several occasions I was surprised by the apparent optimism of those who were embarking on a rather large-scale building process. In spite of the visible decline in tourism, some people were still building or extending guesthouses. One of them, an economist from Bucharest, admitted to taking a big risk when she and her husband decided to build an extension, but said that they could commit to taking a loan only because they had a steady source

of income from their jobs. Unlike locals, urbanites lacked the experience of living in the village and observing tourism dynamics over the years, so they had to rely more heavily on their 'gazes' in their business decisions. Some of the investors who came to Bran and Moieciu to build guesthouses had other businesses and sought to diversify their activity during a time when their firm was thriving. Few had even been involved in tourism, as they came from the Black Sea coastal area where they were owners or workers in the accommodation industry. A *pensiune* in the mountains, they hoped, would bring them income during the winter months when they cannot rely on seaside tourism. In spite of this, accounts about their decision to invest in a guesthouse do not resemble coherent entrepreneurial strategies and they often seem to reflect hasty assessments and a superficial understanding of rural tourism. The following passage is an account of a nocturnal land buying deal made by a couple that owned a bar in Bucharest.

> *One night, we came with an agent, he showed us the spot, we didn't see very well because there was a hole and we took it [the land] and that was it. That's all* (Valeria Toma, non-local guesthouse owner, Moieciu de Sus).

As to why they decided to buy land in Moieciu, the explanation was that:

> *...because we came to visit once and we couldn't find accommodation, we went all the way to the end [of the village] and we didn't find accommodation, but then it was still working, not like now. And we chose [this place] because there were a lot of tourists* (Valeria Toma, non-local guesthouse owner, Moieciu de Sus).

Now, more than two years after having this discussion with the owner, the information I found online suggests that their business never really took off. The *pensiune* is not registered and it only appears listed on a few advertising websites. Another non-local owner who worked in the accommodation business in a seaside resort explained that:

> *This is something simple, making a* pensiune *or building a restaurant or a hotel, you don't need help from may people. Considering that you are a professional*

and you know what you want, who should come to help, Băsescu[80], who? (Sorin Pop, non-local *pensiune* owner, Moieciu de Sus).

However, the same owner could not say much about the particularities of 'ecotourism':

Agro-tourism I know what it means, but ecotourism… what is it about, the environment? Agro tourism, rural, urban, this… Ecotourism… Fits here in Moieciu, the air is clean, it's something that many people from abroad would like to have (Sorin Pop, non-local *pensiune* owner, Moieciu de Sus).

Trying to replicate the accommodation model of a coastal resort in a mountain village might not be the most successful strategy. In spite of its owner's confident discourse, this guesthouse was on the verge of bankruptcy, something I learned from other villagers and I could confirm later when I found it listed for sale on the Internet. The large number of *guesthouses* that are currently on sale confirms that a substantial investment was not enough for turning *pensiuni* owned by non-locals into successful businesses. Taking a closer look at the online listings, I found that quite a few of the properties on sale are on the higher end of the accommodation range, featuring many rooms and extra amenities and good quality furnishings and decorations.

The underlining expectation of those who opened *pensiuni* by following in the footsteps of other guesthouses was that if they replicate the same model, they are going to experience similar effects. However, entrepreneurial strategies were never fully visible from the outside and all businesses had their backstages. As I have shown, successful entrepreneurs were drawing on intangible assets such as education or previous work experience. Apart from this, kinship relations as well as one's connections to local and non-local networks were also very important.

5.5.1. *Din ăsta vechi în turism, cu pile, cu relații*[81] (A well-connected tourism 'veteran')

In retrospect, people express their suspicion regarding the success of some of the growth-oriented entrepreneurs. Villagers suggest that others succeeded because they had some connection or access to something that others did not. The wealthiest entrepreneur in Moieciu got off to a good start because his coach job enabled him to

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[80] Romania's President at that time.
[81] Passage from an interview with a *minimal* guesthouse owner in Moieciu, where he was referring to one of the established *pensiune* owners.

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travel abroad during Ceaușescu's regime and he is suspected of having saved some dollars. He is also said to have made money in the informal logging economy. The second largest business in Moieciu developed because the owner had a brother in Brașov who connected him to a touring agency. Another growth-oriented entrepreneur owes its fame to a previous pastries business, and so on.

There is plenty of research on early post-socialist transformations that brings similar insights. People who managed to get a head start in the new market-based economies were often among those who already had a privileged position and a rich network of connections (Verdery 2004:155, Lampland 2002, Solomon 2010). Often it was the same elite who had important roles during the socialist regime that managed the 'transition[82]' process after 1989 and had control over the redistribution of resources (Mungiu-Pippidi and Althabe 2002:84) either tangible, such as land in the plains or forests in the mountain regions (86), or intangible, like the power to issue various authorisations required by the dense bureaucratic apparatus inherited from the communist administration (93). The most successful entrepreneur in Moieciu seems to be a case in point[83]. As a physical education teacher and a ski trainer he had the chance to travel abroad before 1989 for various competitions. This experience, as other villagers describe it, gave him the advantage that he '*knew what was going on after the regime changed*' and he understood how business development works. He initially started with a logging business, but soon after turned to accommodation. Apart from cash for investment, the logging business also provided very cheap building material and fire wood from the remaining leftovers. Such resources gave him a competitive advantage over most of the locals who could only draw on modest earnings from farming, renting rooms or employed work. Since logging businesses relied partly on illegal forest exploitation, having good connections with the rangers[84] was important at that stage. However, in the economy of tourism, what a guesthouse owner needed, above all, was access to a non-local pool of clients. Not all the connections that people fostered during socialism and in the early 90s remained relevant in the economy of tourism. At a time when there was no Internet and villagers were not even connected to home phone lines, organisations such as ANTREC or OVR were pivotal in connecting

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[82] Like Welter and Smallbone, by using the notion of 'transition', I do not mean to imply that the economy of Romania is on its way of reaching some final stage where it will be considered a 'real market economy' (2009:235). It is only meant to define the time period that passed since 1989, as Romania moved away from a centrally planned socialist economy.

[83] Another example is the former mayor who secured ownership of a large property in the centre of Bran, close to the castle. He runs a very lucrative business with minimal effort, charging parking fees for the thousands of visitors who come to the castle every year, without even investing in asphalting the parking.

[84] I was told that these were the entrepreneur's cousins, but I could not verify this information.

hosts with their guests. All of the successful entrepreneurs were affiliated with these NGOs in their early days. As advertising channels diversified and multiplied, apart from initial connections, what proved to be more valuable was people's ability to network and to constantly seek new relevant links. Returning to the case of the largest business in the area, its owner used his previous background as a sports' teacher for networking with coaches and sponsors of teams of sportsmen from Romania and abroad. He built training facilities such as football, basketball and tennis courts, gyms and a swimming pool. The biggest investment was a biathlon track which now allows him to host international competitions. His business now includes 5 hotels and 17 villas, with a total of 369 rooms, and two restaurants, with over 500 seats each. This development also involved paving a 5km road through the mountains to improve access to some of the facilities.

Another good example for an innovative approach in linking to wider stages comes from the owner of one of the most famous guesthouses in Bran. Young, educated and with a good understanding of the workings of the World Wide Web, he was inspired to purchase an Internet domain that included the word 'bran' at a time when online advertising was still in its early days. For a long time, the website of his guesthouse was among the first results listed by Google whenever someone searched for this area of the country. By linking his *pensiune* with the name of the destination, he managed to secure a lot of visibility. The popularity snowballed over the years and his guesthouse is today on high demand as one of the oldest and best known *pensiuni* in Bran. Apart from relying on ANTREC, growth-oriented entrepreneurs sought to make their own links with touring agencies. For instance, in the beginning of the 90s, a local pub owner from Moieciu managed to partner up with a touring agency with the help of his brother who was living in the nearby town of Braşov. The agency was sending buses of tourists to eat at his pub in the village. The earnings were good and the pub owner invested in a larger restaurant and a guesthouse. He kept developing his business and today he owns 6 villas with 96 rooms and two restaurants and he plans to add a swimming pool and a spa.

Many of the average guesthouses only rely on the advertising services of two or three more popular portals. Few of the people I interviewed were very pleased with the efficiency of this method, but at the same time they were not seeking alternatives and their knowledge and understanding about the workings of search engines and Internet

visibility was fairly limited. In contrast, the minority[85] of hosts who diversified their promotion channels and started using Booking.com, a foreign portal of growing popularity in Romania, showed themselves pleased with the results. Apart from finding the service more reliable in attracting guests, they also felt that tourists who used this site were of a better quality – either foreigners or Romanians with higher education levels. While minimal businesses rely only on word of mouth publicity, one of the most luxurious *pensiuni* in Moieciu advertises on electronic billboards in the centre of the capital and on over sixty portals and tour operators' websites.

While advertising connections are easier to track, the links with various control authorities are more difficult to unravel. Many suggest that ANTREC mediated such connections, creating for some guesthouse owners more tolerant encounters with the state institutions. There are many established *pensiuni* that maintain close ties with ANTREC's founder. Many of them seem to be from the ranks of villagers who were previously factory workers or just farmers and they had more difficulties in dealing with the bureaucracy involved in running a business. As I have shown, the actions of ANTREC's founders in Bran and Moieciu are controversial and some entrepreneurs distanced themselves from this organisation. Those who managed to maintain long-lasting relations with them had to be willing to accept the trade-off between advancing their business and losing part of their independence and financial gains.

5.5.2. Balancing embedding and disembedding: kinship ties and links to the non-local

One of the things that non-local entrepreneurs did not anticipate and capture in their 'gaze' was the role of kinship networks in organising work in villagers' businesses. These networks gave locals an advantage over the in-migrants as they provided a bigger and more flexible pool of labour. Urbanites rarely relocated and often just one of the two partners spent more time in the village managing the guesthouse and the employees. Villagers' households, on the other hand, comprised two or even three generations who could take part in running the business. The division of labour in a *pensiune* mirrors the conventional system of task allocation within the household. To some extent, catering for guests meant increasing the workload specific to each family member. Since women are more likely to work inside the home, taking care of cooking and cleaning, tourism-specific jobs such as welcoming and entertaining guests also tend to fall more often under their responsibility. This is well reflected in the women to men ratio among my respondents, which is roughly 2 to 1. There is also a slight tendency

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[85] While in 2012 only a few hosts relied on this method, now, more than two years later, there are 130 guesthouses from Bran and Moieciu advertising on Booking.com.

that women take charge of the paperwork and accounting of the business. According to official statistics for 2014, a little over half of the businesses registered in Bran, Moieciu and Albac were on the name of a woman. Men, meanwhile, deal with outdoor activities, taking care of the animals, buying supplies, providing wood for the fire, mending things in the garden or participating in construction and maintenance works. My observations notwithstanding, asking people about their chores in the guesthouse, their typical first answer was that 'everybody does everything' which gave me the feeling that they have no strong normative commitments regarding certain tasks being gender-specific. Indeed, I saw cases when the division of labour noted above is flexible and people may take on extra duties from other members of the household. At times of high tourist demand it is not rare to see men help with cleaning or serving food and whenever the husband or wife is employed, the other partner takes on some of his/her tasks in the guesthouse. The number of people working in a *pensiune* varies with the amount of work that needs to be done. During the peak periods, more family members can be summoned for help. At times like the holidays, extended kin living in the vicinity might come to give a hand. During vacations, members of the younger generations who live in towns might also join their parents in the village and give a hand with running the guesthouse.

Family businesses divert from the ideal model of the market since they do not select their workforce through competition (Carrier 1997:22) and this puts into question the quality of their workers. However, the flipside is that household members may be caught in work relations that in an impersonal enterprise would be classified as exploitative. Running a *pensiune* demands a lot of hard work. The fact that one is at home makes it more difficult to separate between work-time and family-time, or leisure, but the reality is that people are often 'at work' in one way or another for 12-14 hours in a day. Overall, by relying on local households and kinship networks villagers had a competitive advantage over the in-migrants. Not only were they more adjusted to the seasonal nature of tourism, but they were able to cope better with the financial crisis. The fall in tourist numbers and accommodation prices took its toll particularly on migrant guesthouse owners who had loans. Apart from the instalments, these owners had to cover the maintenance costs[86] of rather large villas and pay salaries to their employees. To reduce their expenses, their first step was to cut down on staff. This meant discontinuing services such as catering and consequently having less income. A further money-saving strategy was to stop paying taxes by moving to the informal

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[86] Large houses are costly to heat up during the winter when temperatures drop well below the freezing point. Even when they have no guests, people must provide minimal heating in order to prevent the pipes from freezing and breaking.

sector. However, this limited their possibility to advertise and led to a further decline of their business. The final compromise they could make was to leave the *pensiune* under the administration of a local and return to more lucrative businesses in their hometowns. Whatever income the guesthouse still brought was used to cover the maintenance costs and pay the administrator. At the same time, those who did not want to abandon their business had to eventually relocate and manage the guesthouse on their own. This sometimes resulted in married couples being divided, as only one partner was able to move, while the other stayed in town with other commitments. Ironically, while for villagers the accommodation business provided an opportunity for keeping families together, for some urbanites it had the opposite effect.

According to the mayor, there are about 1000 non-locals residing in Moieciu, making up to 45%-50% of the population. In spite of their numbers, partnerships between in-migrants and villagers are quite rare. Relations between locals and non-locals who opened guesthouses in Bran and Moieciu are distant, and even strained, and this is reflected in a very weak embedding of the in-migrants in local social and kinship networks. Few of the urbanites who opened *pensiuni* actually settled in Bran and Moieciu together with their families because they generally had other work commitments in their home town. Even if they ultimately planned to retreat to the village, they did not take this step unless their tourism business became profitable enough to support them. At the same time, they could not run a lucrative guesthouse on their own and they had to hire staff. Their labour costs were significantly higher than the locals', particularly since many of them chose to bring along staff from their hometown. Sometimes this decision followed an unsuccessful experience of working with locals. Complaints about local employees refer to alleged laziness, rudeness with guests and even an attempt to take advantage of the owner's absence by renting rooms on the side and pocketing the earnings. One of the in-migrants that I met was so distrustful of the locals that she was reluctant to buy any farm products from them for serving in her *pensiune*. She argued that those who are 'trying to make a business out of farming' must have counterfeit products because they cannot possibly have enough animals to produce so much. When I pointed out that some people do have many cows and sheep, enough for obtaining a big surplus, she implied that she had never seen these animals. This is possible, since she did not live permanently in Moieciu and only came during the summer and winter, when animals were either in the mountains, or in the stables. However, the fact that she knew so little about local practices reflects very well her limited and distant interactions with the villagers. I believe her case is not unique.

Generally, when speaking to non-locals, I always heard at least one account intended to illustrate the 'bad nature' of the native population. Some urbanites argue that locals were welcoming in the beginning, while they were interested in selling land or learning from the urbanites, but later relations deteriorated. Some of them use negative stereotypes usually associated with peasants, describing the villagers as uneducated and backward in their thinking, but also as thieves, profit-oriented and difficult.

Interestingly, I was presented with similar stories from locals who claimed that urbanites were friendly in the beginning, offering them jobs in construction, but once their guesthouses were finished, they started complaining about noise or smell from the animals and they restricted the villagers' access on their property. Villagers refer to outsiders as 'străinaşi' - literally *little strangers,* from 'străini', meaning both *strangers* and *foreigners* in Romanian, or as 'bucureşteni', meaning people from Bucharest, who are often described as 'the worst'. As I happen to be from Bucharest, this undoubtedly tempered my respondents' critique of this group. The most frequent complaint that I heard was that outsiders who afforded to invest more in their guesthouses encouraged tourists to become choosier by offering higher accommodation standards. People argued that urbanites who purchased land kept their plans of opening guesthouses a secret. Now, when there are fewer tourists and the competition has increased, they are seen as problematic, although I suspect they were not considered such a threat in the beginning. Migrants are also condemned for building large, when in fact, the three largest developments are owned by locals. Undoubtedly, the fact that ANTREC's founders were also non-locals was another source of resentment, since many people felt that the two ladies were trying to get rich on the villagers' account.

In Albac there are no businesses owned by non-locals, but there is some indication that a situation similar to Bran and Moieciu may be developing in Arieşeni, a commune 30 km away from Albac. Arieşeni is also a skiing resort and has known a longer history of tourism, even prior to 1989. In my short visit there, I interviewed a lady who was running a tourist information point. She had been one of the people trained by OVR in the early 90s and had remained loyal to their vision, supporting small-scale family-run accommodation. She explained that non-locals own many of the large villas there and that even if they present them as holiday houses, in fact they function as unregistered *pensiuni,* representing unlawful competition for the locals. Even if not very often, I did hear villagers in Bran and Moieciu express contradicting perspectives about the in-migrants, criticising them, while at the same time acknowledging their contribution to the development of the area. Non-locals, on the

other hand, often insist on their positive influence stressing that it was thanks to them that villagers became 'more civilised' and learned how to provide tourist services. Overall, given the problematic relations between villagers and in-migrants, most urbanites remained disembedded from local networks and this was detrimental to their businesses. Research in other areas suggests that trusting and supportive relations between in-migrants and locals can be beneficial for both parties. Based on their study of tourism businesses ran by in-migrants in the rural destination of Northumberland, Bosworth and Farrell concluded that enterprises owned by non-locals were more successful when they achieved social and economic embeddedness (2011: 1491). They were also found to be supportive of local businesses by introducing links to the extra-local networks and advertising the region to a wider public (1491-1492).

Kinship ties are not only enabling business growth. Sometimes, commitments to the interests of the younger generation may limit the parents' entrepreneurial pursuits. This typically happens when children leave for high school or university and decide not to return to the village after their studies. Parents who had to pay tuition fees and cover the living expenses of their children were not always able to keep up with the pace of development in accommodation standards and they had to limit themselves to running a *minimal* or an average guesthouse. Asked whether he would consider making any changes in his *pensiune* in order to please his guests, one man replied:

> *Yes, but you see, it is not possible. I would like to and we have a plan*[87] *to make a lot of things, but only with what you get out of it, you cannot. The children are in college, in school, expenses are much higher* (Mihai Zarnea, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

When children are old enough to support themselves, even if the parents might have more financial resources, they might lack the drive to develop their business further. I heard many villagers say that they are not too concerned if tourism fails because their children and their families will use the extra houses or rooms. If the younger generation migrates, it becomes less meaningful to invest in housing in the village. At the same time, having channelled a good part of their income into their children's education

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[87] Although this may seem to contradict my previous observations regarding the absence of coherent strategies and plans, it is important to bear in mind that I based my argument on examining discourses about the early days of one's entrepreneurial ventures. As people gained experience and developed their *pensiuni*, plans and strategies started to take shape. This illustrates once again the processual nature of entrepreneurship – business skills are not always a prerequisite for starting an enterprise and they can be acquired through practice.

meant lagging behind with improvements to the accommodation amenities. If they wanted their *pensiune* to become competitive again, they would have to make a more substantial investment. Instead, many owners from the older generations were happy to settle for a *minimal* guesthouse, generating a smaller income, which they could direct towards supporting farming activities.

> *I was pleased when they [tourists] used to come, I thought that if I got [some money], I could hire someone to collect my hay* (Viorica Radu, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

Sometimes, children who left the village may show an interest in the tourist business offering financial support and help with the promotion and with the paperwork. As long as they live and work in the city, such input can keep their parents' *pensiune* operative, but it is not enough for significant business development. On the other hand, if they marry and remain in the village, the young may receive financial support from their parents for starting up an accommodation business of their own. Parents also help by featuring their newly established *pensiune* in their online adverts and by sharing with them some of the visibility they had already acquired. This kind of direct support among kin only works between parents and their children and seems to be absent among siblings. I met several *pensiune* owners who had a sister or a brother who were also in the tourism business. Even when these relatives happened to be more successful, they seemed to offer no support. Once, one of my hosts introduced me to a neighbour who was trying to make a start in the tourist business. Her accommodation unit was still unregistered and did not even have a name yet, so they were unable to advertise and attract tourists on their own, relying mostly on their neighbours' overflow of guests and on word-of-mouth advertising. After we left, my host pointed out that their neighbour's sister has a well-established and popular *pensiune* but never sent tourists over and never gave any support to her sibling.

Households with numerous members were not always a guarantee of success. Time is one of the most important but equally elusive resources need for developing an accommodation business. As I have shown, for villagers, work in *pensiuni* tends to be a complementary activity and very few of them are able to live only from tourism. Those who own guesthouses must divide their time between farming, employment, and/or running another business. In this context, having at least one member of the household permanently at home and willing to prioritise the tourism business can make a notable

difference to the development of the guesthouse. For instance, a lot of the owners do not have enough time to prepare meals for their guests, even though they admit that many tourists are interested in staying in *pensiuni* with demi-board or full board. One of the *minimal pensiuni* I stayed in belonged to a household with three generations living together. However, the teenage boy was in school, his father was employed in another village, while the mother and the elders were left to take care of the animals and the guesthouse, leaving no time to prepare and serve meals to their guests. I believe that villagers' attachment to farming may have prevented part of them from growing their tourism business. As I have shown, farming is strongly interlinked with the locals' sense of identity. Animal husbandry was their main source of livelihood for a very long time, so most villagers were unwilling to give up this safety net, even if for the same amount of time invested, tourism had the potential to offer much higher earnings than sheep and cattle.

All of the innovative and growth-oriented entrepreneurs were able and willing to dedicate themselves fully to running the business, they did not need to commute anywhere for work, nor did they have to milk the cows twice a day. The story of one of the most established and well-known guesthouses in Bran illustrates this well. The structure of the household was similar to the previous example and the families also had comparable levels of wealth and education. However, in the case of the successful *pensiune,* the son took two gap years before going to university and dedicated this time to developing the family business. He continued to do so during his holidays, and upon finishing his studies, he returned home to run the guesthouse.

In time, however, *pensiuni* change and they can pass from one category to another. I previously described how a business could move from being growth-oriented and established, to a more minimal type. Within household there are complex processes of decision-making (Chibnik 2011) and not all members may share the same goals. Household needs vary depending on the age and numbers of their members and even more growth-oriented and innovative owners may at times put family interests before the development of the business. When the entrepreneur from my previous example got married and had his first child, he decided to build a rather large house for his family, while advancing very slow and even interrupting the construction of a new unit for their gueshouse.

5.5.3. Entrepreneurial moralities

Examining the plans and expectations of guesthouse owners reveals their understanding of entrepreneurship and it can also tell us something about the normative universe surrounding their business practice. People hold beliefs about what economic actions are appropriate (Luetchford 2005) 'political ideas about how the economy works and how different contributions are assessed and rewards divided' (Luetchford 2005:399). With very few exceptions, villagers I met in Bran and Moieciu consider profit maximisation a legitimate pursuit and they say that people are entitled to make ends meet in the best way that they can.

Many if not most of the owners of growth-oriented and established *pensiuni* exhibit the classic capitalist ethos described by Weber (1997 [1904]), emphasizing the reinvestment of profit and using their gains in a maximizing way:

Everything you earn, you invest. Not even now are we saving money for anything else. [My husband] already has plans to make two more rooms. Everything is on investment (Valeria Vlaicu, guesthouse owner, Bran).

We reinvested everything that we earned. We were very united and determined in what we did. And every year we did something. I believe that we did all that we could, considering our financial power (Cosmin Marinescu, guesthouse owner, Albac).

All that we earned we invested, we started with one bathroom, now we have fifteen' (Corina Cristian, *pensiune* owner, Albac).

Although many business owners described themselves as pushed into entrepreneurship by outside forces, their actions revealed much more agency, independence, and responsibility. This is an indication that it was their lived experience that inspired them and that the new practices instilled entrepreneurial values, rather than entrepreneurship being conditioned by a specific pre-existing ethos. For some owners, 'doing tourism' – owning a successful guesthouse and being a good host – has actually turned into a value in itself, something reminding once again of Weber's notion of 'vocation' and professional calling (1997 [1904]). In such growth-oriented or established *pensiuni,* members of the younger generation sometimes pursue degrees in tourism and hospitality or in business management. This is telling as it suggests that tourism

entrepreneurship is considered central to the reproduction of the household.

> *I see everyone, richer, poorer, those who come to us, they can afford it.* [tourists] *We can no longer afford to go anywhere, if money comes into our yard, can you realise…? My brother has a degree in tourism, my boy did training at… we are retired, but the most interesting thing for us is to be our own masters, to have our own business, to be able to manage* (să poți să te descurci). *And what does this take? To teach them how to work, to know how to respect the money and the people* (Sorin Ion, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

My argument so far had the underlining assumption that the 'gaze' of every guesthouse owner was built on the ideal of a successful, growth-oriented business. In fact, up to a point in my research, I actually took it for granted that everyone hoped to develop such a venture. My mistake was to overlap the notion of growth with that of success and hence I tended to look at *minimal pensiuni* hoping to find an explanation for their failure. However, I gradually came to understand that there are villagers who are satisfied and consider themselves accomplished just by earning an extra income from a minimal accommodation business. To use an oxymoron, I will call this '*self-sufficiency* entrepreneurship'. Many of the locally owned minimal *pensiuni* belong to this group.

> *How to say, I rent for whoever drops in. Not necessarily… I even had a month and a half when there was no one in my house, because there wasn't. No. What they find on the Internet, Carta.ro, Turistinfo.ro, we are there too, but from there [we receive] less [tourists]* (Cornelia Pricopie, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

Some owners were by nature less inclined to socialise and cater for guests, seeing the tourism business as a compromise, something that needs doing for lack of an alternative.

> *In order to sustain two kids in school, two houses… you need at least 2000 lei. If I had 2000, I wouldn't rent anymore, I would lock the gate* (Iulia Vereș, *pensiune owner,* Moieciu 2013).

It's a source of income for us, who have no factories here, no other possibility. Our soil is not fertile. Here you can't cultivate anything to say that you can make a living from agriculture. We cannot. Only with raising animals. This is it, what can you do? You keep animals, but if you cannot sale, there is no demand. And for this they rent, it is a source of income (Doina Pop, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

My husband became unemployed and we had no money, we didn't have how to make a living and we thought this is the last solution for finding a source of income (Elena Berceanu, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

These villagers tend to describe their tourism business as just a complementary source of cash.

I made the pensiune *for the welfare of the family. With what I have, with this I remain. The majority wants more, wants to extend* (Elena Florea, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

Although very rare, I also encountered echoes of the peasant logic of self-sufficiency. This is what the owner of a minimal guesthouse had to say when I asked if they plan to develop their business:

…no, something that is a lot is damaging. If you are a boss, maybe you will not pay your employees well… it's a sin […] God does not punish with a club, but some disease may come (Rodica Cucu, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

In support of this, she told me the story of the most prolific entrepreneur in the area who had lost his wife to cancer, in spite – or indeed, because of – his thriving and ever expanding tourism business.

I have described some of the minimal guesthouses as a type of 'self-sufficiency entrepreneurship'. The logic of self-sufficiency was usually defined in an objectivist way and it was seen as the material base necessary for the survival and reproduction of households. However, if we ask people what, for them, is the content of this 'sufficiency', we might be surprised to learn that an entire wealth of things are now part of their minimum requirement for survival. What is at stake is not just the biological

survival, but the social one, as individuals demand to be recognised and respected by other members of society and the criteria for this acknowledgment are subject to change. What is distinctive about the *pensiuni* economy is that to some extent, consumption overlaps with production. Villagers invested in houses that can be seen both as a potential vehicle for further profit and a status symbol in the local prestige ecomony.

Peasants and lifestyle entrepreneurs (Bosworth and Farrell 2011) are two categories generally assumed not to be concerned with profit maximization. Bran and Moieciu come to contradict this view. Local villagers own the three largest and most growth-oriented businesses in the area. The majority of migrants who opened guesthouses were driven by a hope to maximise returns and only minority of them had set up their guesthouses with a desire to experience and to share with tourists the enjoyment of countryside living. The case of urbanites moving to the countryside and starting a tourism businesses has been documented before, but mostly in Western European countries, or in countries that did not experience a socialist regime (Bosworth and Farrell 2011:1476). In those cases, lifestyle entrepreneurs were generally found to be more driven by particular notions of life quality than by a quest for profit (Bosworth and Farrell 2011:1475). They were said to run businesses that were in line with their interests, values and personal beliefs (Marcketti *et al.* 2006 241) and cherish family goals over profit (256). They have also been reported as intentionally avoiding business growth in order to preserve their desired quality of life (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000:379). This profile is not representative for most of the non-local owners of *pensiuni* in Bran and Moieciu. In the Romanian context, such enterprises are more likely a quest for profit, than a sign of attachment to the slower pace and aesthetics of a rural lifestyle. As I have shown, values that are central to the official discourse on rural tourism are rarely inspiring entrepreneurs, be them local or non-local. There is very little evidence of their desire to preserve local heritage or to highlight and safeguard the natural resources of the area, in spite of these being central notions in the discourse of NGOs and states institutions.

The only point where moralities collide is between owners of registered businesses and those who are part of the informal economy. The former complain about the unlawful competition made by those who, by not paying taxes, are able to offer lower accommodation prices. Conflicts sometimes arise when owners of unregistered businesses suspect that their neighbours have filed in complaints to the authorities. The overall climate is however rather tolerant and in spite of their discontent, villagers tend

to place more weight on the belief that people should be left alone to manage their own businesses (*să se descurce ficare cum poate*). At the same time, in the post-crisis context when tourists numbers declined and the accommodation market was oversaturated, feelings of competition intesified. Tourists came to be perceived as a 'limited good' (Foster 1965). In the community theorised by Foster, villagers valued social equality and were mindful of anyone accumulating too many resources. By contrast, tourist destinations that I studied are governed by a much more competitive and individualist ethic, which, coupled with the idea that tourists are a limited resources, became the source of anxiety and resentment.

5.6. Conclusions

Bran, Moieciu and even Albac are likely to be some of the rural areas of Romania with the highest incidence of entrepreneurs. Since this is in many ways an exception for Romanian villages, it may seem that whatever learning we can draw from this story is only contextual. If, however, instead of taking this case as an anomaly of sorts we take it to be an 'experimental ground' or a 'post-socialist incubator for rural entrepreneurship', what it brings to light and the questions it raises gain a wider relevance. If neoliberalism is a 'hegemony exerting pressures' (Kalb 2014:198), the development of the touristic destinations I studied shows that its forces can take many guises, finding a nurturing environment even in settings that were apparently marginal and organised by different, if not even contradicting, principles. Moreover, the dense business landscape of rural tourism reveals a number of contradictions inherent in the very models of 'neoliberalism', 'capitalism' or 'the market'.

Unlike its neighbouring East European countries, where the socialist regimes of the 80s started tolerating private enterprises to varying degrees, in Romania most forms of entrepreneurship were not allowed (Croitoru 2010:70). After the fall of communism, the private business sector developed mainly in towns, not in villages[88]. It is tempting to assume that in the rural destinations that I studied, urbanites with previous entrepreneurial practice, or at least exposure, had an advantage over local villagers who, for their most part, just had the experience of factory work and small-scale trade with farm products. In-migrants came with the clear objective of developing a business; they were financially resourceful and were able to make substantial investments in their *pensiuni*. For locals, this was intimidating and many of them complained about the unfair competitive advantage that these non-locals had. A closer examination of the

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[88] Data from the National Statistics Institute shows that on average, from 1995 to 2012, rural areas had less than 25% of all the new enterprises that were being set up in Romania.

transformations that came with the economic crisis revealed that the odds of success were not, in fact, on the side of the urbanites and it also brought into question their entrepreneurial skills. One of the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter was what makes businesses successful. While recognising that 'success' is hard to define, being a relative notion with many nuances and particular meanings for different individuals, its converse, 'failure', seems a little less controversial and it was easier to observe it in the case of in-migrants. For them, failure meant putting their guesthouses on sale and closing them down, or moving to a *minimal* business in the informal sector while waiting for a buyer. What made so many in-migrants in Bran and Moieciu fail in their pursuits was the burden of a large financial investment, coupled with weak local embedding and a poor understanding of tourism entrepreneurship. In contrast, as I have shown, locals had two significant advantages. For them starting an accommodation business was less risky since it did not require a substantial investment. Most of their *pensiuni* developed at a slower pace and this enabled them to adapt better and to gain some understanding of the tourism 'market'. Perhaps most importantly, locally owned businesses were embedded in household and kinship networks that provided a cheap and flexible pool of labour. Ironically, instead of showing the limitations and marginality of rural people, the fate of the urbanites revealed the vulnerability of actors who were otherwise better integrated in the 'mainstream' socio-economic system: these were the entrepreneurs who were most business oriented, who invested the largest sums of money and who were better connected to the outside than villagers.

In the same context, many of the villagers' entrepreneurial pursuits proved to be more sustainable and rewarding. The different types of businesses developed by locals, usually in combination with other economic activities, illustrate well the flexibility of peasant households in their relation to the market. As Harris puts it,

> *the relatively autonomous space they occupy is not the result of a pre-capitalism failing to be transformed by its encounter with capitalism. Rather, it is the opposite: the shape and character of the existence of peasants in the world today is determined by the wider system. [...] And it speaks to the ability of the world economy to work without capitalisation of all economic forms'* (Harris 2005:430).

Or, in my respondents' words:

I say that we keep our courage and faith. We don't need to… and even if clients were very few, I will not despair. I'll go with the rake on the hill, I'll go to the cows, I'm not getting any headache [worrying] that I won't be able to direct my spare time towards something else. [...] Anyway, everybody here has cows, sheep, chicken, pigs. With this we would live… I know how… I see that this was an opportunity that we had, having so many clients and being able to do what we did, and being left alone, [if] we won't have anymore… that is that (Laura Stan, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

Without having experienced life in a capitalist or market-based economy, villagers proved that they had some of the qualities required by these systems. As Makovicky argued, even when individuals share some of the traits promoted by the neoliberal discourse, these are not necessarily a recent development (Makovicky 2014:12). Flexibility and dynamism in response to external pressures (Harris 2005) or the ability to innovate (Hernandez 2014) are qualities that echo a neoliberal ethos, but in the case of mountain villagers in Bran and Moieciu, largely pre-date it. Hernandez's work in Cuba demonstrated that participation in the informal economy is often driven by self-interest and relies on people's ability to be enterprising, alert to opportunities and inventive in their use of resources (Hernandez 2014:122). The Cuban strategies for securing a livelihood that she described are very similar to Romanians' experiences during communism, particularly in the 80s. In a context of scarcity and low income, people needed to be constantly alert to any opportunity for obtaining resources (Hernandez 2014:117) and this has equipped them with some of the skills that were later required in their entrepreneurial pursuits. Although the socialist system was not officially encouraging individual initiative and risk-taking, things were different in the underground economy. People did take economic risks when they kept animals undeclared or when they sold farm products through informal channels and they had to be inventive and constantly prepared to seize opportunities[89]. Their individualism, their self-reliance and their inclination towards bending the rules in their favour prepared them for some of the challenges ushered in by capitalism.

Although people in Bran and Moieciu tended to associate the decline in the quality of social relations to tourism, as I have shown, this transformation relates to the

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[89] Farming also accustomed people to risk. Such risks included: animals becoming ill, getting a bad batch of cheese, having your cow eaten by the bears, or having no rain in the spring, which resulted in poor quality grass and less hay.

wider Romanian society and is likely rooted in the communist period. Villagers elsewhere in Romania have been described as following an individualistic ethic with little recourse to notions of 'mutuality and responsibility for others' or the idea of a 'common good' (Umbreș 2014:129). The competitive economy of tourism found a fertile ground, a society where cohesion was already weakend and where people were not very concerned with the welfare of the community. It has been long since members of rural communities in Romania could be described as bounded by a coherent value system. While there are certainly some views shared by most of the villagers I studied, there are also areas where moralities are differing and not all owners of *pensiuni* are guided by the same values. Their entrepreneurial pursuits may be anything from a desire to keep up with the rest of the community and display an image of hardworking people, to a means for supporting children in school and a source of extra cash for acquiring consumer items, to an end in itself, in the case of lifestyle entrepreneurs. Even when one aim seems to be dominant, people draw from a combination of motives. Furthermore, if we follow Kalb's 'relationally realist approach' we must take into account the fact that people's various connections and allegiances are not always consonant – 'all these different forces may be pulling in partly different directions and confront persons with not always easily reconcilable claims, obligations, and ultimate goals' (Kalb 2014:197). For Kalb, these are 'paradoxes and contradictions of living life in severely neoliberalized social contexts against the backdrop of a state-socialist past and an insecure capitalist presence' (197).

Processes of learning become particularly relevant in the context of post-socialist transformations where the frequent bureaucracy and policy changes required firm owners to constantly adjust their knowledge (Smallbone and Welter 2009:18). If we shift our focus to these processes of learning, then the questions that follow are how do people acquire their new knowledge and how do they develop an understanding of entrepreneurship. In many ways, entrepreneurship itself can be described as a learning process and research has shown how 'individuals who were initially "necessity driven" can become proficient in identifying opportunities (Smallbone and Welter 2009:229). Even someone who was initially pushed into entrepreneurship can discover later on a real knack for this type of activity and many of the owners of established and growth-oriented *pensiuni* that I met had this experience.

Not having where to work… you could only work in town, in Braşov, the commute [was] pretty expensive. Let's make a guesthouse, no? […] Together

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with my parents. A family business, and then, we extended slowly, slowly. We made a restaurant, then we rented another guesthouse. Having more [tourists] than we could accommodate, we compensated with the rented guesthouse and we ended up having four [guesthouses] (Filip Dan, *pensiune* owner, Moieciu).

Unlike people in the West, members of postsocialist societies had very limited or no exposure to an entrepreneurial culture. Although, as I have argued, many of them did possess skills that would qualify as 'entrepreneurial', they had limited contact to the formalised aspects of business management which involves specific legal and fiscal issues, as well as advertising strategies. In such a context, individuals who opened a business had to rely more on their ability to learn, which meant that those who had spent a longer time in school had an advantage. This is consistent with results of several studies cited by Smallbone and Welter which have indicated that in postsocialist settings the level of education was more influential than network membership in determining entrepreneurial activities. Similarly, a survey of both tourism entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in rural China, revealed that human capital, referring to people's skills, knowledge and competencies (Zhao *et al.* 2011:1574) actually played a more important role for starting up a tourism business than social connections did (Zhao *et al.* 2011:1587). As I have shown, in the mountain villages of Bran, Moieciu and Albac, entrepreneurs first emerged from the ranks of those with higher education and/or who had previous work experience other than farming and factory work. Later, imitation played an important role as people shaped their tourist offer by reproducing the actions of their neighbours. Research in other parts of the country points at similar findings. Looking at the process of implementing development programs in rural Romania, Mihăilescu concluded that presenting people with written information does not bring significant results and that 'people are persuaded to try something new not by hearing that it is possible, but because they have seen their neighbours doing it' (Mihăilescu 2000:14).

However, the downside of a reliance on imitating the visible and material aspects meant that people tried to replicate business models about which they had incomplete knowledge. As architecture and the material endowment of guesthouse were the most visible and easiest things to reproduce, they became the focus for the majority of owners. At the same time, people lost sight of resources that are otherwise central to the ideal model of rural tourism: the natural environment and the local culture.

Creed wrote about how, during the socialist regime, Bulgarian villagers were captivated by the packaging of foreign western goods. Describing a scene from 1987, he shows how his hosts were very impressed with the design of a box of tea that he brought from the US (2002:121). After praising and admiring the container, their conclusion was that they will never be able to compete with this kind of packaging and that the Bulgarian economy had no chance in front of the Western one (121). Interestingly, their conclusion also noted that the product inside the box was in fact not very different from their own teas (*idem*). I believe that the economy of visibility so important in the tourism industry was one of the most important challenges with which Romanian villagers in Bran and Moieciu were faced. People were required to work on their packaging and their interface to the 'outside' and this visual mediating was not only related to advertising texts and imagery. The notion could be extended to include how people built their houses, how they decorated them, how they received guests and presented their offer, how they selected and displayed elements of their culture or surrounding environment. While they seem to have few issues with managing an increasing amount of work, being self-employed and self-reliant, finding capital for investing, or building the material base for tourism, *pensiune* owners were not so proficient in dealing with new layers of meaning generated by an economy of visibility relying more and more on branding, packaging and on one's ability to reach beyond the local. This problem started to bear more weight in the post-crisis context of a declining tourism and an oversaturation of the accommodation offer.

According to the market model, people can be grouped in winners or losers, depending on how well their practices conform to this template (Carrier 1997:28). As Carrier points out, those who stress production and ignore marketing may ultimately fail: 'winners shape themselves to market demand and keep up to date; losers think that all they have to do is build a better mousetrap and wait for the world to beat a path to their door' (29). This is not, he continues, necessarily because of the marketing content, but because the firm that advertises conforms to the model of the market that is generally accepted and projects an image of trustworthiness (*idem*).

Furthermore, Smallbone and Welter have argued that the type of entrepreneurial ethos and practices that emerge in a post-socialist context are largely influenced by the institutional context of the country (Smallbone and Welter 2009).

From an economic perspective, the transformation of a centrally planned into a market-based economy involves three main aspects: first, a shift in the dominant

form of ownership from public to private; second, a liberalisation of markets and a removal of price controls; and third the creation of market institutions (Smallbone and Welter 2009:12)

The Romanian case of rural tourism entrepreneurs brings further evidence along the same lines. For the large number of guesthouse owners who run unregistered establishments, the ever-changing regulations and the taxes required for formalising their business were too much to cope with. In the market model described by Carrier, 'the interests of people-as-consumers, however, are presented as more uniform, universal and just than the interests of people-as-workers, which often are presented as unjust, sectional self-interest' (Carrier 1997:52). This is manifest in the wealth of norms devised by the state in order to protect consumers, which are only burdening producers. Given their inclination to be independent and self-reliant, many owners of *pensiuni* resisted these regulations, even if ultimately this meant running an unregistered business. Ironically, in the Romanian villages I studied, qualities like individualism, self-reliance and independence that are defining for the neoliberal or capitalist subject and that initially helped villagers to develop their guesthouses, in some cases became detrimental to business growth. While here I have shown how this outlook made people reserved in receiving advice from outsiders or networking with non-locals, in Chapter 6 I examine in more detail how it created a favourable context for the informal economy of tourism.

Chapter

Amusement and Anguish in the 'Oasis of Tranquillity':

Tourist-Host Encounters in Romanian Rural Guesthouses

6.1. Introduction

Tourists and local hosts participate in a joint process of discovering and reinventing the countryside, leading to the 'institutionalisation' or embedding of rural tourism in Romanian society. Tourists' demands and behaviour had a significant contribution to the development of the accommodation businesses that I described so far. This chapter pays closer attention to the articulation between what hosts have to offer and what their guests demand. This translates to the following, more specific questions: What kind of experiences do tourists to Bran and Moieciu seek and what is the role of notions like 'nature' and 'culture' in their experience? What – if any – is the identity claim made by domestic tourists who decide to spend their holidays in the countryside? Do they report any 'enhanced' sense of national identity? Turning to the hosts, I ask how do they perceive tourists and their wants and how do they try to respond to them? In parallel to this, I also examine what, according to hosts and their guests, are the prerequisites of hospitality guiding their interactions. I start by introducing the tourists who come to Bran and Moieciu according to a typology of guests that is used by local hosts. I then move on to presenting and discussing the reasons why tourists travel to these particular destinations, looking both at what they report and at the accounts presented by local hosts. I discuss these findings by relating them to other studies of postsocialist Romania. I then briefly touch on the ways in which the tourist experience brings into question issues of local and national identity. I continue by looking at the main reasons of discontent that guesthouse owners and tourists express regarding each other. I close with a theoretical discussion about hospitality and I suggest a number of issues that could be researched further.

Part of my knowledge about tourists' expectations and desires is drawn from 222 tourist reviews written on one of the most popular travel advice websites in Romania (AFA n.d), which I presented in more detail in my section on methods and sources. For the purpose of this analysis I decided to focus only on reviews about Moieciu, given that this is the location with which I am most familiar. I made the distinction between positive and negative reviews based on their individual taglines,

reading 'I recommend' or 'I don't recommend', depending on what option was ticked by their author. Authors of reviews must also give marks for different aspects of their stay, on a scale of 1 to 10. I considered positive those reviews that had an average mark of 9 or higher, and negative those with a rating of 6 or below. In this way, I identified 155 positive reviews and 67 negative ones. All of the reviews are written by Romanians, so unless specified otherwise, whenever I mention tourists, I refer to domestic ones. A word of caution is in order before I discuss my findings. It is difficult to ascertain whether certain details are mentioned in a review because they were central parts of the author's experience, or because the website admins and the other users of AFA encourage and guide people towards a particular style of narration. Whenever a novice posts a review that is deemed incomplete, he or she receives questions from other users and from the Webmaster regarding details found to be lacking. Long, detailed reviews are encouraged and always praised by other users of AFA. Indeed, the average length of a review is 334 words, much longer than the assessments generally found on advertising and booking portals. AFA also has a marking system and users assign points to reviews that are considered to be more informative. Rankings are made according to these scores and whoever reaches a certain score wins a holiday sponsorship from the websites' admins[90]. In the case of the regular users of the site, it can be expected that they have appropriated some of the typical assessment criteria used in the reviews, which are now part of the 'gaze' or framework employed by them when traveling. The following comment written by an old member of AFA in response to a newcomer's post is suggestive:

> *We are waiting for more details about what the guesthouse offers, services, etc., etc. I know, I know, it's difficult in the beginning… but wait until you see the end :))) ...when you will be on holiday and you will feel anxious to return as soon as possible in front of the computer (or laptop) to share your adventures as detailed as possible* (aby12).[91]

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[90] Currently only two users seem to qualify for this award. Because it is highly popular and receivs many visits, the website makes money from displaying advertising banners.

[91] I use fictive names in order to protect the identity of my resondents and that of the website users. Whenever I do not mention the source explicitly, the reader can distinguish between interview and online data by the format of the name to which to quote is attributed. When I quote passages from online reviews, I use usernames in a similar format to those employed by their authors and I spell them without a capital letter. The source of all online quotes is www.amfostacolo.ro.

Nevertheless, I am concerned here with what emerged as normative in this virtual space of storytelling, rather than with establishing the accuracy of any account. The 'tales of fortune and misfortune' (Bendix 2002:477) shared on the Internet offer insights into tourists' expectations and 'gaze' (Urry 2002) – the framework that they employ when they travel away from home in order to live in a *pensiune* for a few days. Analysing these posts meant identifying the 'ingredients' that make a stay good or bad and understanding the criteria used by tourists for assessing their experience in a guesthouse. I found negative reviews of particular interest, as they can reveal additional information about tourists' experiences. As other studies have pointed out, negative assessments are not necessarily the 'reverse' of the appreciative accounts and the two types of reviews might focus on completely different aspects (Alegre and Garau 2010). For instance, while tourists will always praise a host who offers big portions of food or who provides a dessert free of charge, they will never complain if the servings received were standard-sized and the dessert was included in the bill. Negative reviews are accounts of expectations not being met. As such, they are a good way of investigating the underlining hopes that tourists bring with them to a destination. It is interesting to note that negative reviews make more extensive use of stories. When writing a positive review, if superlatives are used, they are not necessarily backed up by a lot of narrative detail. On the other hand, when tourists have a complaint, they provide richer accounts. Why is it that a negative assessment needs more evidence? Positive experiences conform to a shared ideal that can often remain abstract ('*welcoming* host', '*perfect* accommodation'). A tourist experience that diverted from the ideal brings into focus the specific details of what is desirable. If we investigate what tourists did *not* appreciate, we gain access to the taken-for-granted norms of an accommodation experience. Finally, negative reviews also give glimpses into hosts' unwelcomed behavior and provide details that guesthouse owners would be unlikely to share with me in an interview.

The three main aspects on which tourist comment in their reviews are: the wider setting – or the destination as a whole, the house with its garden, and the host. They also frequently mention the food and the activities they engaged in.

6.2. Tourists in the eyes of hosts: a typology

About 80% of the tourists who stay in guesthouses in Bran and Moieciu are Romanian urbanites. The occasional foreign visitors tend to gravitate around those few establishments that collaborate with tour operators and advertise in foreign guidebooks

or on international websites. If we follow the distinction made by Bendix between 'vacation' – something that implies 'return visits to safe, welcoming places for rest and regeneration' and 'journey' – and travel – underlined by a quest for new experiences (Bendix 2002:472), we should probably describe domestic tourists in Bran and Moieciu as 'vacationers'. Local hosts, however, refer to their domestic guests as tourists, and I prefer to be true to their wording[92]. As Bendix ads 'the longing for the extraordinary, surprising and memorable permeates all touristic endeavors, including the annual holiday' (Bendix 2002:472). Even if most Romanian visitors are not coming to the countryside in search of novelty, they all hope to experience something memorable and different from their everyday lives.

In my interviews with hosts, I tried to discover their perception of tourists and tourists' demands. I guided the discussion with the following general questions*: What kind of people come here? Why do they come? What are they looking for? What are their demands?* In their answers, local hosts tended to group tourists according to three criteria: demographic, financial, and moral, with some of the emerging categories overlapping. According to the first criteria, there are 'the family people' (*familiştii*), the youth (*tineretul*), and foreigners (*străinii*). Financially, people are divided into those who have money, and those who do not. Finally, according to the moral assessment, there are some tourists who are nice, serious, decent, well-mannered and kind, and others who are a combination of: fussy, hard to please, messy, disrespectful, unkind, aggressive, bullies, people who create problems, who want to take advantage of the host and who lack an understanding of what tourism is supposed to mean. The *family people* and the *foreigners* are always in the category of guests who are commended for their good behavior, while *the youth* are generally criticised and condemned for their inappropriate demeanor. There is less consensus regarding a correspondence between the moral and the financial aspects, and I heard people linking rude and disrespectful behavior both to wealthy tourists and to less resourceful ones. Unfortunately, I had very few opportunities to observe or to interact with such groups of alleged troublemakers. They also seem to be absent in the online data. The reviews from AFA are inevitably selective and they reflect the experiences of only a limited category of vacationers. The vast majority of those writing reviews are people between their late 20s to their late 40s, most likely part of the '*familişti*' group identified by locals. It should be then stressed that when I discuss tourists' viewpoints, I refer mostly to the above-mentioned group.

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[92] Foreigners are often referred to by the generic '*străinii*' (meaning foreigners, or strangers) or, more specificaly, by their nationality.

Although this can be seen as a limitation of my data, I believe that it does not come in the way of finding meaningful answers to the questions that I put forward. *Familişti* are the norm, the 'standard' tourists, and together with the hosts, they are the most influential creators of the touristic offer. 'The youth' (*tineretul*) and 'the foreigners' (*străinii*) remain the negative and positive poles of a continuum and they serve as ideal types against which tourists and tourism are often discussed by the locals.

6.3. Quietness and air: the immaterial embedding of the tourist experience

Tourists often begin a review by noting the main reasons for their travel. Although a holiday is a complex event that cannot be reduced to one or two experiences, they generally frame their stories by referring to what they hoped to achieve from their trip. Similarly, in my interviews, I asked people to tell me what was their main reason for coming to Moieciu. I found that both hosts and guests frame the desired tourist experience by using intangible and abstract attributes. Online stories and interview accounts converged and highlighted the restorative properties of being in the countryside or in the mountains. People noted that they planned to recharge their batteries, to escape from the daily stress and 'madness', to relax, and to forget about worries. Their stay was described as a remedy, an antidote to the 'evils' of their regular urban working life. Such a discourse expresses one of the motivations for travel that received the most attention in the anthropology of tourism, and tourists seem to fit the portrait of 'those alienated modern workers whose life revolves not around the job, but around the vacation and the weekend away from home' (Nash 1981:463). Tourist advertising widely employs a rhetoric about the renewing qualities of holidays, so it is not at all surprising to find that peoples' answers may sound like a line from a commercial:

> *We really wanted to get away from the city, to disappear from the city. From that madness of cars, dust. We wanted very much to get away from there, to calm down a little, to recharge our batteries in the mountains* (Daniela, tourist in Moieciu, accompanied by her husband and brother).

The absence of quietness is always sanctioned and it is not rare to find negative reviews making references to noise, usually coming from other guests. Tourists also complain about unwanted smells from the kitchen, from the farm, or from the bathroom.

Asking local hosts why do tourists come to their village, almost invariably their first answer was 'for the quietness' (*pentru linişte*). If I pressed for more details, I was told that people come to Moieciu and Bran in order to rest and relax and that they are drawn to the area by its quietness, its nice scenery and greenery, by the clean air and by the local natural products. With the exception of food, these are attributes of the destination over which hosts have limited control. Moreover, they are far from being specific only to Bran and Moieciu and they can be found in many other mountain villages of Romania. This layer of discourse and representations is not revealing much. Intangible attributes like 'quietness', 'relaxation', 'scenery' or 'clean air' need to be unpacked by looking in more detail at what people particularly like and actually do during their stay in the countryside. In the next section I examine more closely the ways in which tourists speak about and engage with the natural environment during their sojourns in Bran and Moieciu.

6.4. Loving the view, but not without the barbeque

As already mentioned, people invoke the restorative effects of vacations as their main reason for travel. Although nature is presented as the source of these benefits, we find surprisingly little engagement with it. Trekking and exploring nature are not among tourists' top pastimes. Indeed, as locals point out and as I noticed myself while discovering the area, if one walks the paths around the village and towards the mountains, tourists are a rare sight. Accordingly, their online reviews seldom feature stories about hiking in nature. There are 1015 tourist reviews on AFA dedicated to Bran and Moieciu, out of which 979 are concerned with guesthouses and only 36 are classified under the category 'trips'. Out of the last group, 6 reviews do not actually deal with excursions in the nature, but with sites that provide some sort of organised pastime: a museum, a touristic complex with a swimming pool, a skiing slope, or the 'house of terror' amusement exhibition. The overwhelming interest of tourists is for accommodation and less than 4% of them show a wider engagement with the area. Moreover, many of these trips are made by car and most of the tourists who come to Bran and Moieciu do not expect to engage in any active exploration of nature. The quote below is telling as it captures a woman's reaction when someone from her group of friends suggested a trip on the mountain:

I don't know how it would be for them, but for me, at least, it was an unacceptable option… what, to abandon this pleasant idleness and the conversation with the ladies in order to climb the mountain? (dazzy95)

The rare occasions when tourists do venture on a trip on foot are presented as great challenges or accomplishments, even if such trips are only short walks in the surroundings of the village. Given the geography of the area, some amount of climbing cannot be avoided.

You must also climb the last hill (about 100 m), even if it's the steepest one (this is why many quit), but when, at last, you arrive up, you are rewarded for all of your efforts. Up there we understood why a local told us 'climb all the way up, don't get lazy at the base of the hill'. First time I climbed alone, because my wife was tired, but when I saw how beautiful it is up there, I went down, and, with a lot of effort, I convinced her to come up. This is how I climbed that hill twice. Everything takes about one hour, with breaks included, it is not difficult, but it depends on a person's training. But I tell you: it is fully worth it (raku_daku).

[When my friends suggested an excursion] I got excited, because the ascent by car seemed like a good idea, one that we already tested yesterday. Just as I agreed to go, I found out that we will not be taking the car […] I decided to go, nonetheless, with the decisive argument being the possibility of [doing] a bit of shopping [i.e. on the way, passing the bazaar next to the Castle]. We headed towards Vila Bran, which is located on top of a hill, behind our pensiune. *In a straight line, it is less than 1 km away. […] All I can remember from the tormenting climb, was my crazy heart beat, which I felt up in my throat, and an acute lack of oxygen in my lungs. When we arrived up, I was of a discreet purple colour and thousands of bells were ringing in my ears. That I could walk there, was truly a miracle... and that I didn't collapse there, was a second miracle… Now I understand, this is what extreme sport means* (ioanap).

It's been a long time since I last climbed like that, but because that hill was quite steep, we took small breaks – we were on holiday after all, and there was nobody chasing us (dyana).

The natural environment is most often contemplated from a distance. In their reviews, people refer to it as 'the scenery', 'the view', 'the panorama', 'the natural setting' or 'the surroundings' and describe it as 'superb', 'wonderful', 'dream-like', 'picturesque', 'extremely beautiful', or 'fantastic'. References and superlatives remain very generic. More specific elements such as the river, the forest, a rock, or a hill, are mentioned whenever the *pensiune* happens to be located near them, but the engagement with them remains minimal. The quality of the air is also noted and contrasted to the town's polluted atmosphere. The balcony is one of the tourists' favorite locations for admiring the view. This space is neither inside, nor completely outside. It offers guests some of the privacy that they have in their rooms, while still allowing some contact to the outdoors. The mountains remain a static landscape, a frozen painting to be contemplated from the distance, not a living environment to be explored and experienced. Taking another – and often final – step closer to the surrounding environment, we find that tourists place a lot of emphasis on a *pensiune's* garden. The desirable garden is big, very tidy and clean, furnished, and equipped with various props for both adults and children's pastimes. It always has at least one gazebo, a cradle, a barbeque, a small playground for kids and a car parking, with enough 'green area' left to be aesthetically pleasing.

> *The garden is very well kept with a turf that would make envious even the largest stadium that we have* (mike).

This space should allow children to roam free and play while their parents have more time for themselves.

> *The guesthouse's amenities kept my child busy so I was able to rest* (vera_82).

Cars are almost as important as any family member and people always appreciate a good parking, complaining whenever the space they find is not deemed adequate.

> *The yard also had a very large parking where our cars were indeed spoiled* (flo_calator).

Gazebos, cradles and balconies become mandatory props in a mediated nature

contemplation. Their absence or inaccessibility is a legitimate topic for a negative review.

> *We specifically asked the owners over the phone about the gazebo. They assured us that there is one and that we will have total access, but to our surprise, the access was equal to zero. The gazebo was used as storage for wood and other multiple materials from the household* (popaif).

The barbeque is the new staple activity for a holiday in the mountains.

> *You know how it is, without a BBQ, you don't feel like you are in the mountains* (bbq123).

> *When the corks of beer or champagne bottles are popping one after another and the sausages and* mititei[93] *are sizzling on the grill… Then you don't even feel how time passes, you don't realized that it is 2 am and you must go to bed, because you need a few hours of sleep, so that next day, you can start over* (cory_c).

Locals offer similar depictions of tourists' pastimes. They describe them as staying outside in the garden, resting, relaxing, barbequing and eating. According to hosts I interviewed, sometimes their guests go for walks, or they visit nearby attractions, but they rarely venture on longer trekking trips.

> *Romanian tourists come for relaxation, for barbeques, parties… for relaxing, in general. Recreation and barbeque. They don't even want to climb the mountain. They wants to sit nicely there at the back, by the barbeque, to have a drink, eat well, rest…* (Alexandru Tomescu, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

> *They don't come out of love for the area or for the clean air; they sit with their back towards the Bucegi [Mountains] counting the insects on the walls of the guesthouse* (Ovidiu Marin, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

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[93] A popular Romanian dish in the form of rolls made of minced beef, pork and lamb meat, mixed with spices and baking soda and cooked on a grill.

I heard ironic comments from villagers who call these tourists Bucharest 'barbequers' (*grătaragii de București*) and express their disappointment.

> *I thought like this: what do they need? A sunbed to stay in the sun, to take a walk, to come back and read a book… No. No. Wrong. This is not what people need. People need this: to scream, to shout as much as their vocal cords allow, to play music with the volume on maximum, to barbeque from the morning until the evening* (Ana Pădure, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

> *You come to the mountains, ok, you have some barbeques, but not like this, everyday, with the* manea[94] *playing at maximum volume, the barbeque, and that's it. When you could be taking advantage of this area, going, seeing, charging yourself with positive energy* (Laura Dumbravă, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

6.5. Luxury and comfort: the material embedding of the tourist experience

Narratives of both hosts and guests revealed that the tourist experience is strongly anchored in the materiality of the guesthouse. Tourists have many expectations regarding the quality of their lodging and this is where hosts try to concentrate their efforts. The most frequent demands encountered by *pensiune* owners are: cleanliness, large rooms with en-suite bathroom, a big garden with children's playground, a barbeque, a fully equipped kitchen, a balcony, hot water and a TV. Whenever tourists note in a review that the architecture of the *pensiune* is 'old' or 'traditional' they also add that, for them, this was not an inconvenience. We get from this a glimpse of the taken-for-granted expectation that tourists generally desire 'modern' accommodation.

> *It should be noted that the guesthouse does not have a modern feel, [only] a few rooms are newer, but believe me, once you are there, these details become unimportant* (popescu_a).

The online reviews reflect a strong concern with rooms, bathrooms, kitchens and living areas, but tourists seldom have any comments about the overall aesthetic of the house. All the emphasis is placed on the interior of the *pensiune* and the key aspects here are size, amenities, and hygiene. Tourists are relentless in their praise of large clean rooms

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[94] *Manea* or *manele* is a music style with influences from Turkish, Arabic, Greek and Roma folk music.

with matching bathrooms and they place similar emphasis on big kitchens equipped with all the appliances one can need. The room furnishing is sometimes described in more detail, although generally people only note that the design is done 'with taste' and that the bed is comfortable. The plasma TV is never left out and its size is often mentioned.

> *It is a villa where you are going to feel good the moment that you step over its threshold, at every step you will come across its comfort and luxury, and your card will not turn red when you will have to pay the bill! The rooms are modern, with en-suite bathrooms, the kitchen is spacious, the dinning room is bright, armchairs are comfortable, you have coffee tables for drinking your coffee in the morning, you have a plasma TV'* (elmer).

Odd enquiries may come from prospective guests and hosts told me about their surprise when they were asked what is the house covered with or what exactly is there in a room, in spite of photos being available on the website. They are also surprised to hear some people complain about the limited number of TV channels or the excess of wood in the interior decorations. Some of the facts included in the online reviews also give evidence of tourists' heightened awareness regarding the material aspects of their stay. To name a few such details, I found references about the colour and the fabric of the bed cover, the matching colours of the soap and bathroom tiles, the exact size of the bed or the bathroom in centimetres, the sealed packaging of the toilet paper and the soap. I received similar accounts in my interviews. This is how a mother explained her choice of guesthouse:

> *the amenities. It's clean, the food is good. The price quality ratio is recommended to everyone. I mean starting with the fact that it's very clean, the shower gel [is] Dove, Zewa toilet paper[95], do you understand? So, there are some details to take into account when you travel with your child* (Paula Petrescu, tourist in Moieciu accompanied by her husband and two children).

While a young couple revealed to me that they had chosen the guesthouse because:

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[95] One of the most luxurious and expensive brands of toilet paper on the Romanian market.

we were passionate about one of the bathrooms because it looks like one from home [....] we liked the room because it's bigger than at home (Felicia Ion, tourist in Moieciu accompanied by her boyfriend).

Negative reviews indicate that tourists are intolerant of imperfections: scratches on the furniture, a blocked shower drainage, or squeaky stairs can disturb the desired order and become grounds for a complaint. Rooms and bathrooms found to be too small are also criticized. On the positive side, the presence of other 'luxury' amenities such as a sauna, a spa, a fitness room, or a pool table, are noted and appreciated. These, however, are seen as a sort of bonus, and if absent, will not be mentioned in the negative reviews. Admittedly, there is a category of tourists who want to actively distance themselves from this group of consumers. They describe the guesthouse of their choice as 'not pretentious' (*fără pretenții),* 'not showy' (*nu de fițe),* 'not luxurious' (*nu de lux).* They are, however, a minority.

There is strong emphasis on hygiene as references to cleanliness seem ubiquitous in the accounts of both tourists and hosts. Most of the guesthouse owners that I interviewed mentioned 'cleanliness' as one of the central demands of their guests.

The most important thing… the cleanliness. I have nothing to reproach here. Usually, no matter how clean a guesthouse might look, you can still find all sorts of things done in a hurry, but here I was not able to find anything. The bedding smelled like fabric softener and clean air, and even the kitchen cloths smelled nice (mica1970).

First of all, I noted the cleanliness (after an entire summer spent in various guesthouses, I had something to compare with) and the entire house was shining (omiddder).

Rooms furnished with taste but the biggest surprise was the cleanliness, which compelled you to maintain it (alex_troc).

The bathroom was impeccable, the bedding was immaculate white, and so were the towels… (ioanabanana)

The guesthouse is superb, extremely clean (roxy1).

Everything is clean, smells nice… and the bathroom look irreproachable (toni).

I could sum everything with EXTRAORDINARY: accommodation – irreproachable, food – impeccable, hosts – wonderful, bathrooms – large and clean, rooms – spacious and clean (comandorul).

Conversely, substandard hygiene becomes the target of a negative review. Some of the complaints I found on AFA refer to dirty fridges, dust in the rooms, a sticky sofa, unwashed cutlery, filthy bedding, a greasy cooker, extremely dirty cupboards, dirt from the previous clients, no toilet paper, no soap in the bathroom, or a grimy toilet bowl. Hosts themselves can fall into the unclean category:

The owner is dirty, he serves the table wearing the same clothes that he has when he cleans the ponies [stable], and so does the cook (titi_mod).

Tourists may very well be concerned with cleanliness because hygiene standards vary a lot from guesthouse to guesthouse. The first three quotes mentioned in the beginning of this section, together with the numerous complaints I found on AFA, suggest that not all guesthouse owners share the same notion of cleanliness. In this light, my findings might appear as nothing more than pragmatic demands for a decent accommodation experience, but they become much more interesting if looked at through an anthropological lens.

6.6. The aesthetics of achievement

Mary Douglas has famously illustrated how hygiene rules can play a role in the symbolic maintenance of boundaries (Douglas 1966). As she argued, ideas of dirt should be seen as an expression of a group's system of symbols, reflecting shared classifications and ideas of order (*idem*). What kind of boundaries are therefore hosts and their guests trying to assert? We can find the answer by looking at a number of studies that focus on postsocialist changes in Romanian society, which reveal that the preoccupation with cleanliness is far from being confined to the tourist-host encounter. Researching domestic material culture in the town of Suceava, Drazin described how cleaning practices are part of a process of 'reinterpretation of the past, through rejection of certain elements' (Drazin 2002:103). According to him, the emergence of new ideas

of hygiene in a postsocialist Romanian society can be linked with people's increased access to a globalised market, offering a rich variety of cleaning products (106), as well as to their exposure to the new aesthetic standards for home decoration promoted by the media (107)[96]. The contemporary desirable home boasts spacious interiors covered with parquet, rather than carpets, and with furniture that is free of any adorning cloths. There is a strong contrast with the preferences of older generations who had a tendency to keep all possible surfaces of floors and furniture covered[97]. In this context, the younger generation rejects the material culture of the older one by associating it with an image of dirt and clutter (121). Easier to clean, the new interiors are linked to ideas of efficiency and they are also evidence of a household's successful participation in the market (116). An inability to reproduce these consumption patterns in their own households gives people a sense of failure (Kideckel 2010:144).

Cleanliness ideals go beyond the domestic order. As Kideckel observed, a new material culture of labour emerged in postsocialist Romania and what is promoted now, particularly in the media, are 'images of "clean" work with the help of technology' (Kideckel 2010:75). Workers and peasants have limited access to such valued jobs and they must find alternative ways of asserting their claims to desirable social identities. Showing a concern with domestic hygiene can be one way of achieving this and Kideckel described most of the apartments of miners and factory workers that he visited as 'impeccable' (145). Similarly, in rural areas from Oltenia[98], Mihăilescu observed villagers' interest in home improvements and garden amenities such as gazebos and cradles. This was coupled with a growing dislike of farm animals, linked to dirt and backwardness (2011:45). Mihăilescu explains how the household can be seen as the main stage for displaying new identities of modernity and success (*idem*). The same conclusion is supported by Iancău's research on village architecture in Apuseni (2013) and Moisa's study of the houses built by migrants in Certeze, which are found to be important status symbols and material proof of success (2011b).

Current notions of achievement and their aesthetic and material expressions must be placed in their historic context and all of these authors find continuity with processes started in the socialist period. First, as the industrialisation and urbanisations projects triggered intense urban to rural migration, life in an urban block of flats became a sign of achievement for many former villagers (Tudora 2009:54). Building regulations

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[96] Although Drazin does admit that at a more symbolic level, cleanliness has always been associated with progress, even in the socialist period (Drazin 2002:122).
[97] Drazin presents a detailed description of one such household (2002:117).
[98] An administrative district in the South of Romania.

for rural areas also followed an urbanising trend and required people to build houses with at least one floor above the ground (Mihăilescu 2011:40). Second, the restricted freedom and the scarcity that characterised the communist regime, particularly during its last decade, turned the household into the main refuge for most Romanians (Moisa 2011b: 50). For many urbanites life in a block of flats proved disappointing, particularly as Ceauşescu implemented his 'savings' policy by limiting heating and hot water (Tudora 2009:54). Consequently, in postsocialist Romania, the image of the ideal home became a villa in the suburb (*idem*). As Tudora's interviews with Bucharest residents show, the inspiration for the new homes comes from the 'Western bourgeoisie house' (56). It is interesting to note Tudora's finding that the old houses in Bucharest, often deteriorated and in need of repair, were contrasted to the aesthetically pleasing 'new' architecture of the suburban villa, and rejected as 'old', 'ugly', or 'dirty' (58). Since the nouveau riche were the first to move to the suburb in the new villas, these houses became a symbol of social status and economic accomplishment (57-59). Tudora concludes that her respondents, both architects and lay people, share a sort of '"aesthetic confusion" […] whereby *beautiful* is synonymous with *big* or *clean,* while *ugly* is synonymous with *small* or *dirty*' (62). Turning to rural areas, Iancău observed how villagers tried to make a break with a past of being subordinate and marginal, by emulating an urban style in their housing choices:

> *For locals, to live in a traditional house was equivalent to being a peasant, which automatically positioned them as inferior to the towns' people. The urban taste is a step towards Western modernity, where there are no more peasants. A mechanically worked garden, a courtyard designed as a public garden and a large house equipped with bathroom, double glazed plastic frame widows and new types of decorations are the way to succeed in climbing the social ladder* (Iancău 2010:77).

Indeed, in Bran and Moieciu hosts see the constant refurbishing of their guesthouses in order to please tourists, in terms of an evolution. Some owners explained to me that more demands are normal, since 'life evolves'.

> *Of course demands are growing because everyday life evolves, no? So do we, no? We eveolve, it's normal that deamands grow and that you make, every year, obviously, a space for relaxation and spending the free time. Here in the*

guesthouse that I made I have a conference room, a relaxation area, a sauna, a pool table, a gym (Rodica Iancu, guesthouse owner, Bran).

This evolution depends on distancing one's self from the peasant and farming economy of the past by displaying a tidy garden and providing clean, modern accommodation. Part of this symbolic delineation of boundaries meant that many villagers relocated their stables out of the tourists' sight or renounced their farming activities completely.

We had the household[99] but after making... bit by bit they [i.e. her children] *tore down stables and all* [laughing]. *Yes, after making the guesthouse, [they said] that it smells, that I don't know what, that it's no good [...] We didn't even keep a pig anymore, nor chicken because they make a mess, and like this, we were 'householders', and we 'unhouseholded' ourselves (*am fost gospodari și ne-am desgospodărit*) (Maria Matei, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

When villagers talk about their farming, they often make references to the dirt and the manure involved in their work. At the same time, most tourists want to avoid 'dirty' sights and some of their reviews show that they were bothered by intrusions from the farm animals in the form of smell or manure found on an alleged football field. The boundary being set here is between a 'backward' messy countryside and a 'clean', 'civilised' and aestheticised modern rurality. The disorder and apparent 'dirt' of a local farm is not compatible with tourists' idyllic gaze of the countryside. Tourists' main focus, however, remains the indoors. Although it is highly unlikely that their own homes are always impeccably clean, with furnishings that show no signs of wear and tear, they demand this from their holiday accommodation in the countryside.

6.7. Tasty food and nasty Romanians

Villagers and tourists share to some extent the same ideals of achievement. In their wish to stress similarities with the 'modern', 'Western' or urban worlds, locals are not trying to project a distinctively local identity. Quite the contrary, they display the same material signs of social achievement and economic success that tourists recognize and are likely to pursue. Tourists, in their turn, show little interest for any cultural distinctiveness of the area. Speaking to them and reading their reviews one finds that the

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[99] In Romanian, household also denotes a family's small farm and a 'householder' (*gospodar*) is a hardworking person who manages his/her small farm with dedication.

main interest for 'local' things is confined to the culinary realm. Most of the reviews make reference to local cheeses and to a couple of local dishes, praising the natural farm products that they ate. However, they show little interest for the actual farming practices that are essential in producing this food.

Ethnographic accounts of hospitality practices often point at the central role played by food (see multiple examples presented by Cândea and da Col 2012:S8-S10, Telfer 2000) which is said to be the main ingredient of hospitality' (Selwyn 2000:35). Offering and receiving food, or sharing a meal, can establish and enhance relationships. Food can also be an expression of one's self and, by extension, of a group's identity (Selwyn 2000:28). Although tourists who come to Bran and Moieciu praise the local farm products and give enthusiastic depictions of their culinary experiences, it seems that the opportunities that hosts have for offering food to their guests have been diminishing. People blame this on the impact of the economic crisis of 2009, which left tourists with less financial resources. Not affording to pay anything more than accommodation, they now turned to self-catering options.

> *And I told you, with the meals, people come exactly, they bring food for breakfast, they have a coffee, eat a sandwich, they come and barbeque at lunch and they don't want you to cook for them* (Mioara Vasile, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

Another reason invoked is that there is an increasing number of regulations regarding food provision, and hosts fear inspections from the Consumer Protection or from the Sanitary and Veterinary Direction. They also fear cases of accidental food poisoning that would trigger bad publicity and might get them fined. I heard stories of food poisonings that happened not because of the hosts, but because of food eaten by tourists in some other place. However, the initial blame fell on the host. In one case, when a group of children got sick, the news made it into the media. Even if later it was discovered that the source of poisoning was ice cream eaten somewhere else, the reputation of the guesthouse was already damaged.

The shift from home made meals provided by local hosts, to self-catering arrangements, is introducing distance between hosts and their guests. Instead of cooking and sharing meals with tourists, guesthouse owners become, once again, concerned with the material endowment of their houses, focusing on the features of kitchens that need to be fully equipped and spacious.

As I have showed so far, traditions and authenticity are not among the main concerns of tourist. Most part of the reviews make no reference to these notions, and I found a similar situation in my interviews. However, as the interviews were guided by me, I tried to bring these issues into focus more often and I found that foreigners are always said to be very curious about the local life and the surroundings, venturing on long trips along the mountain paths. Hosts recall with pleasure how their foreign guests would enthusiastically take part in farm activities, joining them for hay making, milking the cows or cooking local dishes. Foreigners are commended for showing more respect. They are particularly praised for being very nice, considerate and not demanding in terms of accommodation and amenities, sometimes even asking to sleep in the hay barn. However, in spite of the admiration they express for foreigners' interest in local culture and in the natural environment, local hosts rarely[100] build these elements as permanent parts of their offer. It appears that foreigners are simply not numerous enough to exert a visible influence over the way in which hosts create their offer.

The representations shared by locals about their foreign guests are built in contrast with the image of domestic tourists, and by extension, of Romanians in general. The tourist-host encounter prompts people to reflect about the nature of 'the Other' that they encounter. In the case of domestic tourism, however, there might not be a very different 'Other'. Herzfeld has argued that 'the stance the host takes toward the guest reproduces collective attitudes to the social or cultural group that the latter represents' (1987:77). Since in Bran and Moieciu neither hosts, nor guests, are particularly concerned with notions of local culture and identity, the host-guest encounter can also be read as an encounter between Romanians. Indeed, both hosts and guests often employ the generic term of 'Romanians' in their discourse. A closer look at this discourse gives an interesting glimpse into Romanians' self image.

As noted in the introduction, some studies of rural tourism suggest that this practice can be a way for urbanites to connect with their national identity (Armaitiène *et al.* 2006; Creighton 1997; Hyung yu Park 2010). Asking whether Romanians also experience an enhanced sense of national identity when they come to Bran and Moieciu, I came to a rather different discovery. Instances when people express a sense of appreciation for Romanian qualities are rare and overshadowed by a more frequent rhetoric where the Romanian attribute has undesirable connotations. One often finds negative reviews concluding with remarks that describe the experience as something

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[100] Notable exceptions were discussed in Chapter 3.

'typical for Romanian tourism', or more general, as being characteristic for Romanians. Specific complaints refer to dishonest hosts who fail to provide the offer that they had advertised, overpriced services, and rudeness. These comments reflect a shared discontent with the ways in which tourism is managed in Romania, as well as a disappointment with Romanians' behaviour, in general. Furthermore, when a positive review makes reference to Romania or to Romanians, the conclusion is, almost always, that this is an exception for this country, something out of the ordinary. Positive remarks are made about the country's scenery or nature, but they are generally followed by a note of disappointment with how these resources are managed[101].

Anyway, this left me with a bitter taste, one more proof that we deserve our image as a nation – you can draw your own conclusions! (baciu_bogdan)

At the [...] guesthouse [you can find] the Romanian mentality of siphoning some money off (xenopol).

Unfortunately I didn't find the comfort boasted about by the owners, but I had unforgettable moments, in a negative way. This is how tourism is done in Romania [...] At least we learned something from this experience, that the saying 'appearances can be deceiving' is perfectly suitable for tourism in our country (dana13).

Sometimes other guests present in the *pensiune* can provide further opportunities for noticing how disagreeable Romanians can be.

Obviously, there was a 'gentleman' who ignored the No Smoking sign and everyone present who did not smoke sign [and he smoked] ... we are in Romania, after all (raven*).*

Laudatory references to Romanianness are only made occasionally, when people describe their culinary experiences.

I had a fantastic Christmas, with traditional food and musicians, the way an authentic Romanian likes it. But this is only for the connoisseurs, I actually ask

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[101] There is actually a fairly well-known saying that reflects a similar outlook. Romanians like to say - with a good dose of self-irony - that 'we have a beautiful country, too bad it is inhabited'.

the precious ones to drink their whiskeys and collectors' wines somewhere else!
(poliana)

Romanians' dissatisfaction with each other comes through from the hosts' side as well. Apart from complaining about the younger generation, guesthouse owners are unhappy with many of the Romanian tourists, in general. They claim that people are fussy, rude, and increasingly demanding. At the same time, there is always the comparison with foreigners who are praised for being very well behaved, more interested in the village life and in the surrounding nature, and generally 'very nice people'. Romanian guests are also contrasted to domestic tourists who used to come to the area in the past, who are described as being calmer and also more active - true lovers of mountains and nature, with little concern for their accommodation.

6.8. Parasites and prisoners[102]

We can understand better the seeds of these discontents if we examine what happens when tourists' expectations are not being met and when boundaries set by the hosts are ignored. The order can be disturbed both by intrusive or restrictive hosts who turn their guests into prisoners, as well as by parasitic tourists who fail to show respect and appreciation for what they are being offered. I will examine in what follows the main problems that arise in the tourist-host encounter by looking at the most frequent complaints voiced by each side.

What I have described so far suggests that domestic tourists want, in fact, the experience of having a villa in the countryside. They are keener to discover the lifestyle of the wealthy urbanites, owners of holiday houses, rather than the peasant farmers' lives. Through their focus on hygiene, tourists want to distance themselves from other tourists, as well as from the hosts. A dirty room interferes with the illusion that the place is one's own. It acts like a reminder that they are, actually, not in their own home, but in a house that belongs to someone else and that was shared with many other guests. The invitation extended to the guest to 'feel like in one's own home' is an 'exaggeration by inversion' (Herzfeld 1987:80) meant to mask the dependent status of the guest. The paradox of hosts and guests sharing the same home is that, if the tourist is to feel 'at home', the host should no longer be 'at home'. Reading tourists' complaints, we can observe a strong desire for privacy, which is meant to safeguard their sense of ownership over the room or over the entire guesthouse. Negative reviews reveal their

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[102] I owe the analogy to parasites and prisoners to Shryock's article about bad guests and bad hosts among the Balga Bedouin (2012).

distress whenever the hosts interfered by, for instance, coming to their room to pick up a personal item[103], making noise, allowing noise from other guests, or exposing them to smells from the kitchen.

Boissevain has showed how cultural tourism brings risks of intrusiveness. In their quest for authentic backstages, tourists are invading the locals' privacy (Boissevain 2006:3). Ironically, in Bran and Moieciu, such accounts are absent, while fears about hosts invading tourists' privacy are much more frequent. These fears come through from what I would call an 'apprehensive gaze', and are noticeable whenever tourists writing a review feel the need to reassure their readers regarding what they *did not* find in a particular guesthouse.

The hosts were welcoming, you did not feel their presence (ro_traveler).

The hosts are very welcoming and they don't bother you with anything (Edina).

The hosts are easy going and discrete, it's very important to us that they don't breathe on the backs of our necks (roby24).

The owner, a very discrete young man who did not pester us with stories, and who, after making sure that we are ok, went to mind his own business (clujeanca).

As far as the hosts are concerned, no problem, I don't know if I saw their face 2 or 3 times. They are, how to say, they don't show themselves (marele_sef).

Guesthouse owners sometimes recalled stories about hosts who are known for making their guests feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed by policing them or by intruding. Examples I heard included the owners showing up in their bath robe and spending time in the same kitchen with tourists, smoking and drinking in their company, or getting into arguments with them.

By comparison to tourists, hosts are more often inclined to stress the role of communicating with their guests. Many guesthouse owners argue that an essential part of being hospitable is being present and communicating with one's guests. If I asked

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[103] At the same time, hosts are expected to enter in order to pick up the trash and I found several reveiws were tourists complained that nobody came in to remove the bin for an entire week-end.

them to tell me how is a good host supposed to behave, I often received answers like the following:

From what time I had, I used to stay maybe until 12 in the night talking to clients. It was important that you have what to talk about (Rodica Vasile, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

You must be there with them so they feel well. Not to go there and slam the plate. Go, talk to them, tell them stories because they are delighted, many who are born in the town have no idea how the cow is milked or how you raise a pig... many like it... (Cristina Velea, guesthouse owner, Bran)

What these passages suggest, together with my discussion on tourists being parasites or prisoners, is that there is no general agreement regarding the acceptable distance between guests and hosts, both on a social and on a spatial or material level. Unlike most forms of commercial hospitality, rural tourism is based on hosting guests in one's own home, (Telfer 2000:40). Until not long ago, in the beginning of the 90s, villagers from Bran and Moieciu could host tourists if they had just one or two 'extra' rooms that they did not use on a daily basis. Guests would stay in rooms that were originally designed for the owners' use and they would share the bathroom with their hosts – if there was one, or use the outdoor toilet. Today, most guesthouses are designed to keep the two groups apart. This distancing was however gradual and there are no definite 'recipes' of hospitality accepted by everyone

Turning to hosts' complaints about tourists, I also found strong discontent with some of their behavior. Hosts want their guest to acknowledge and respect their efforts and there are two ways in which tourists fail to do that: by complaining and by destroying and breaking things. Guesthouse owners frown upon people who make excessive demands for 'luxury', showing that they are not satisfied with their rooms or with the amenities. Examples of such requests include: larger bathrooms, less wood visible in the guesthouse, rooms with balcony with a view, a swimming pool, sauna, Jacuzzi, large plasma TV set, TV set with more channels and various unusual culinary demands. This group is perceived as pretentious, pompous, fussy, or fake and they are described with irony:

[Tourists are] strange, hard to please… they believe that the cart is a Mercedes (Toma Costea, villager who offers cart rides in Moieciu).

You cannot come for rural tourism and ask for Manciuria Caviar (Silvia Teodor, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

They come with [big gold] necklaces, they want five bathrooms (EV, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

A host once mentioned that until not long ago they used to bake bread in an outdoor oven. When I asked whether they tried to offer it to tourists, she replied with humor, stressing their major concern with bathrooms:

No, don't you worry [laughing] *they can't be bothered by homemade bread. If you were to tell them that you can give them home made bread in the bathroom, to eat it in the bathroom… well this, I cannot understand* (Ilinca Nicolae, guesthouse owner, Bran).

The most dreaded and feared category of guests is 'the youth', (*tineretul*). Guesthouse owners would even turn down accommodation requests coming from groups of young people because they almost always plan to party. I heard numerous stories depicting the youth in a very negative light, describing them as heavy drinkers who become violent, destroy things, make noise and get into arguments with the host or with other guests. Extreme cases include firing a gun and fireworks inside the house, pointing a gun at the host, or leaving the guesthouse through the window in the night in order to avoid paying for their stay. Bad guests are known to damage furniture, doors, windows, and even walls. Hosts are fearful and sometimes they do not even dare to discipline such tourists, who are said to be drunk and unpredictable. Such guests might become violent or may later seek revenge by publishing negative reviews on the Internet. Many guesthouse owners say that they avoid receiving groups of young people and that they started turning down their requests by claiming that they have no vacancies.

Hospitality enables the affirmation of social hierarchies: the guest must accept the 'moral authority of the host' (Selwyn 2000:34) however, 'the possibility of rebellion, betrayal, upset and sudden reversals of status are, by definition, always

present (34). When tourists criticise what the owners offer, or, even worse, bring damage to their *pensiune,* they fail to acknowledge the hosts' efforts. These efforts, as I have showed so far, can also be read as a display of the symbols of achievement. Not acknowledging and disrespecting these markers causes feelings of anguish. Herzfeld suggested that at the level of representations, hospitality is an act of power that helps to reverse the roles of domination between one group and another. 'The stance the host takes toward the guest reproduces collective attitudes to the social or cultural group that the latter represents' (Herzfeld 1987:77). Villagers who for so long have felt marginal and subordinated have now the means to make a different claim. When urbanites break hospitality norms, hosts have an opportunity for asserting their moral and financial superiority. Local hosts do this through two contradictory theories that they present as explanation for the decline in the 'quality' of guests. According to the first one, the economic crisis forced owners to lower prices and their rooms became available to a wider range of people. I was told that the most demanding and, at the same time, disrespectful, are those people who actually own less fancy and luxurious homes than the kind of accommodation they request. The *pensiune* owners, of course, only assume this, as none of them have actually seen what kind of homes their clients have. The second theory states the contrary: the middle class cannot afford holidays anymore, so it is the nouveaux-riche who come to their guesthouses. Although this group has the financial advantage, people usually question its members' morality, suspecting that their success was achieved through illicit means (Kideckel 2010:144). Herzfeld captured a similar situation when he wrote about Greek hosts' reactions when they felt their hospitality was not reciprocated by a category of tourists who were seen as morally questionable and had little money to pay. 'As unilateral givers, then, the Greeks are enabled to use the moral implications of reciprocity to reverse the historical and political dependence of their country upon the West (1974:86). Interestingly, in the Greek case, hosts preferred domestic guests, while foreigners were the ones seen as morally questionable and potential sources of trouble.

6.9. Hospitalities of Bran and Moieciu

In order to understand how people in Bran and Moieciu negotiate the meanings of 'tourism' I now turn to the notion of 'hospitality', which lies at the core of this institutionalised practice, and I relate my findings to the conceptual framework suggested by previous research in this field. I reflect on the specific expectations and practices that underlie the tourist-host encounter in Bran and Moieciu, hoping to

observe what 'type' of hospitality is becoming normative for this destination in particular, and perhaps, at a more general level for rural tourism in Romania.

The *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* has recently published a special issue dedicated to hospitality. The editors, Cândea and da Col, start with a plea for an anthropology of hospitality, showing how this concept entangles many of the issues that are central to the discipline. According to them, although hospitality may be a topic with more potential for analytic exploration than the classic theme of the gift, it was rarely the main focus of anthropological research and theory (2012:S1-S2). Some of the issues they highlight as being entangled in the study of hospitality are reciprocity and proprietary rights (Herzfeld 1987:75), boundaries (78), rule-bound action and agency, identity, the tension between generosity and parasitism and the material embedding of social transactions' (Cândea and da Col 2012:S1-S2). Another central aspect in the study of hospitality is the conceptual delineation between its 'social' and 'commercial' forms. Selwyn implies that an analytic distinction should be kept between commercial and non-commercial hospitality, in the same way in which, following Mauss, gift-giving is not best understood as a type of trade (2000:35). In a similar vain, Telfer points at an essential opposition between 'private' and 'commercial' forms of hospitality (2000:40). She discusses 'genuine hospitality' and implies that it is linked to altruistic motives and 'concern for the guests' pleasure and welfare [is done] for its own sake' (44). 'Genuinely' hospitable people are those who 'enjoy making people happy by entertaining them' (45). Lugosi, too, believes that 'hospitality is emotional and sincere engagement' (Lugosi 2007:10). It is debatable whether enjoyment of contact and sincerity can be adequately assessed, but what can be done, however, is to take into account when people themselves report experiencing these feelings. Some of the people I interviewed argued that they really enjoy interacting with their guests, describing themselves as sociable and friendly people. At the same time, there were others who confessed that they find hosting people difficult and disappointing. In spite of the theoretical delineations, empirical reality suggests that the boundaries between commercial and social forms of hospitality are blurry. Paid transactions neither preclude, nor guarantee that hosts will feel enjoyment in caring for their guests, in the same way as they may or may not make tourists feel genuinely welcomed. As I will try to illustrate, for people to be perceived as hospitable, what is more important is their mastery of a particular 'code' of hospitality. In the commercial forms of hospitality on which tourism relies, there is a very formalised component of the exchange, in a way, the basics, that both hosts and guests are expected to know. Hosts open their doors to

tourists, offering them a clean and safe place to sleep and sometimes a meal, in return for their money. The commercialization of hospitality is predicated on the idea of fair exchange from which both parties involved derive equal benefits. Social hospitality, however, builds on uneven exchange relations, where the host is expected to be the generous one, giving in a 'disinterested' manner.

Tourists to Bran and Moieciu are enthusiastic whenever they feel that they are experiencing this type of hospitality and they give excited accounts about any occasion when the hosts surprised them with a treat on the house – often a drink or a cake, with some service free of charge, or with being flexible regarding their check-in and check-out times.

> *Should I also tell you that she [the host] would ask as whether we would like another portion? This is the first place where I was asked such a thing!!! And, moreover, without any extra cost…. Congratulations to the host once again!!!* (mada_lina)

> *…our host, miss Daniela was waiting for us with cake straight out of the oven. I cannot begin to tell you about the way it smelled!! You must go there to see and taste!* (dobretudor)

But are these 'offerings' really disinterested and do they always reflect 'genuine' hospitality? Hosts are well aware that guests who felt that they received more than what they paid for are likely to return or to attract other clients, either by writing a positive review online, or by recommending it to their friends and family[104]. Some ways of showing openness and hospitality are highly institutionalized and scripted. Offering a drink on the house might have sometimes stemmed from an emotional impulse of the host. Nonetheless, after witnessing the positive effects of this gesture, the host might reproduce it even in contexts in which the emotional trigger might be lacking. Such gestures become more calculated and they are on the edge between social and commercial forms of hospitality.

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[104] Guests are seen as messengers who are going to tell stories about their experience in one's home/village (Herzfeld 1987:78). The desire to project a positive image is another incentive for treating them well. When hospitality is commoditised, guests become important sources of advertising.

They give the ingredients and… I cook, what can I [do], it's like a bonus, so they come back some other time. Otherwise if you don't help him with nothing, he takes it into account, if you don't give him at least a coffee or a blueberry brandy (afinată) *or a plum brandy* (palincă) (Stefana Olteanu, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

I have a horse that I use [for work] in my garden and I thought I would make people a favour [by offering rides in a horse drawn cart], maybe they come back some other time. They are [also] very happy with the products, polenta (bulz)*, cheese, milk. If they want, I give them on the house* (Viorica Voicu, guesthouse owner, Bran).

To help them feel good, so that that they return some other time. If not, next time, they won't come, if you are not amiable with them. To... for the regular clients[105] we [give]... actually, for the others too – a palinka, some plum or berries brandy, something on the house, some attraction... a donut[106] (Nicu Vlad, guesthouse owner, Bran).

Even paying guests desire and expect signs of disinterested hospitality. Indeed, even if being offered something 'on the house' is presented by many as a surprise, it also became part of their 'gaze', and they notice when the host fails to provide this 'unexpected' service.

Another finding: this time they didn't offer anything on the house… it is that small detail that makes the difference and that makes you feel like you are on holiday… or, whatever, somehow like you are at home… The conclusion is that what starts well, unfortunately ends not so well. I don't want to say bad. I will still go there, of course, just so I can convince myself that this was an accident. I hope that Mr. Petrescu will not start to practice the famous 'Romanianisms' that we find at every step we turn. (sobrane44)

At the same time, hosts who try to charge extra for any of the 'bonus' amenities can be the target of complaints.

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[105] The host named them '*clienţii casei*' which translates to 'house clients'.
[106] *Papanaş* in Romanian – a popular dessert resembling a donut made out of cheese dough and topped with jam and cream.

Hosts must be able to combine a commercial transaction with elements of social hospitality. They must, on the one hand, offer something that would make tourists willing to spend their money, and, on the other hand, skillfully camouflage this commercial transaction. As Herzfeld pointed out, hospitality is versatile in practice and depends on the skills of the participants in employing and manipulating the rules of the game (2012:S216).

Invoking the financial underpinning of the relationship is done both by hosts and by guests whenever the other party is perceived as breaking the rules of hospitality or failing to meet expectations. When they feel that they were not offered hospitality, they blame it on the financial nature of the transaction, arguing that the hosts are only interested in money making. This may well be the case for some of them, and I heard people confess that if they had another source of income, they would stop receiving tourists. One host bluntly expressed this at the departure of a group of teenagers by commenting that they were:

Nasty, arrogant and upstarts. Good that they left... they were so bad... Or, actually, these are good too, but not them, their money (Doina Matache, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

At the same time, when owners speak about bad guests, they also invoke monetary exchange as grounds for their reckless and condescending behaviour.

If he pays you, he is here [pointing up], and you are two meters below him, he doesn't respect anything (Ioana Florea, guesthouse owner, Bran).

I have showed so far that tourists are pleased when hosts appear as giving something more. The host may convincingly 'mimic' this without feeling an actual loss. Next I show what happens when hosts actually feel that they are giving more and that they are entering an unfair exchange.

Herzfeld pointed out that hospitable relationships are underlined by the expectations that the guest is grateful and shows respect (1987:81). He illustrates this with two stories from a Greek community where complaining and offensive guests were reprimanded and even driven out of the village. In commercial forms of hospitality, the fact that guests reciprocate with money makes the nature of the exchange problematic. As stories from Bran and Moieciu show, some tourists stray from the norms of respect

and gratitude. As long as hosts remain attached to them, as I have argued, this becomes the source of deep dissatisfaction. Moreover, the financial gains involved in running a guesthouse are usually very small and even when tourists behave well, hosts still feel that they are the ones who give more. As the financial crisis weakened tourists' purchasing power and triggered a drop in their numbers, hosts had no choice but to drop their prices. This has added further strain on the reciprocity of the exchange. In this context, even apparently benign behavior such as leaving the lights on in the living room or taking very long showers might be a source of anxiety for owners who are mindful of their utility bills. Guests who feel as though they are in their own homes and exhibit such behavior, might unwittingly turn into parasites. On the other hand, hosts who tell their guests to save water or turn off the lights whenever they leave a room run the risk of upsetting them. Indeed, for some, the irritation is so strong that if they write a review online, they will mention the event as a negative part of their experience, while other tourists are even bothered by polite written notices. Host who feel that they are not respected for their hospitality will gradually come to resent their guests.

> *Some want to take advantage of our kindness. They see that you are gentler, too welcoming and… they think that if you give them something, they want everything, they think you are more…* (Florin Preda, guesthouse owner, Bran)

To avoid 'parasites', some owners try to select their guests by an initial assessment. As Cândea and da Col put it, 'hospitality, be it human or non-human, usually opens with some form of test' (Cândea and da Col 2012:S13). There are, indeed, owners who argue that they became good psychologists. More than once I heard them justify this by their previous employment in a job in services or administration that required them to interact with other people (*am lucrat cu omul*). Some of them say that they are able to tell what kind of people they are dealing with just from the initial phone call or from the moment that they step through the gate. Signs which I was told they take into account in evaluating a person include their facial expression, their greeting style and even the length of their beard. Another sure method of evaluating tourists is by presenting them with the rules of the house from the onset, mentioning such things as a ban on smoking in the rooms, on playing loud music, or on driving on the lawn.

Tourists who return establish closer bonds with their hosts and in some cases such relations have been maintained over long periods of time. These guests gradually pass from 'clients' to 'fiends-like' and even 'friends'. According to Selwyn, the basic

function of hospitality is 'to establish a relationship or to promote an already existing relationship' (2000:19). His argument rests on examples of tribal non-Western societies, where commercial forms of hospitality were not known. My findings in Bran and Moieciu demonstrate that such relations are not always hindered by the commercial nature of the transaction. In spite of the commodification of hospitality, the encounters between hosts and guests in rural tourism can become the ground for long lasting relationships of friendship. Hosts were always happy to point out that there are tourists who phone them regularly, send postcards, and return whenever they can, sometimes bringing them gifts or products that are not available locally. They also visit each other in order to attend family events such as weddings or baptisms.

It seems that for the time being, there is no consensus regarding the norms of hospitality for tourism in Bran and Moieciu and people are still negotiating the meanings of 'tourists' and 'tourism'. I often heard problematic guests being described as people who '*don't understand what tourism means*' – with the variants 'agrotourism' or 'rural tourism'. This is another way of saying that guests do no behave according to what is seen as normative for their role of tourists. More than once I was told stories about guests who, when admonished for their misbehavior, invoked their position or their political connections. In response, the host would argue that '*I don't care who you are, but in my house, you are a tourist*'. Similarly, tourists who complain about hosts – or Romanians, in general – sometimes conclude that they '*do not know how to do tourism*'.

Hospitality is not an intrinsic and immutable quality of a people. It is a set of practices based on a moral order, and when this order changes, hospitality practices change. It is contested and redefined during the course of social interactions. Hosts in Bran and Moieciu position themselves and react depending on the perceived quality of their guests. The ruder the clients get, the less hospitable the hosts. Conversely, tourists who feel that the host is not following the prerequisites of hospitality are likely to voice their discontent and appear disrespectful. Finally, my findings suggest that rather than speaking of one single 'hospitality', we might learn more by observing how different versions of hospitality are extended to different categories of tourists. Guests clearly perceived as dangerous, such as groups of youth, can be rejected from the onset; others, who might only seem 'questionable', would be cautioned against damaging the TV's remote control, while foreign 'nice' guests may receive an extra room, free of charge.

6.10. Conclusions

Although the discourse on which rural tourism is built, stressing natural and cultural elements, is to some extent part of the tourists' gaze, what seems to be more important for people who come to Bran and Moieciu is the material embedding of their experience. 'Nature' is something to be contemplated from a distance and tourists rarely engage in an active and exploratory way with the surrounding environment. Instead, they enjoy a mediated nature contemplation in the comfort of gardens, endowed with what became a staple of rural tourism: barbeques, gazebos and wooden swings. Their experience is strongly linked with the materiality of the *pensiune* and they have a wide range of expectations regarding the standard of their lodging. Their aspirations towards 'modern' and 'clean' domestic space intertwine with those of local hosts, being linked to notions of achievement and success that became common in post-socialist Romania. Tourists and hosts in Bran and Moieciu seem little concerned with any cultural distinctiveness of the area, or of the countryside. Encounters between hosts and domestic tourists are not framed in terms of the urban or rural identities of the participants. Instead, people are more inclined to relate to each other as co-nationals. The rhetoric use of the 'Romanian' attribute brings into light the dissatisfaction that Romanians seem to share with each other. At the same time, hosts relate to representation of 'the Other' tourists, authentic lovers of nature and well manner people who seem to exist only abroad or in the past.

The complaints of both tourists and their hosts reveal a number of issues. First, they suggest that there is no shared agreement concerning the acceptable distance between guests and hosts. In their wish to experience the dream of having a villa in the countryside, many tourists seek a sense of ownership over the room or of the entire *pensiune* and they prefer absent hosts. At the same time, owners of guesthouses, wary of potentially dangerous guests, might restrict tourist' freedom by supervising them too closely. Tourists can turn into parasites in two ways: either by reckless behavior, damaging the hosts' property, or by being rude and 'fussy'. A failure from the part of tourists to show that they recognise and value the material achievements of the host is met with the locals' attempt to position the tourists on an inferior position on the scale of success. Locals want to be seen as modern, accomplished people and if tourists fail to act accordingly, hosts react by denying acknowledgement of these qualities in their guests.

In spite of the commercial underpinning, the expectations invoked by both parties suggest that hosts as well as tourists are attached to the ideal of social

hospitality, where guests should be grateful and subordinate and hosts generous and protective, offering their services in a 'genuine' and disinterested manner. Problems arise when, in practice, tourists expect to 'own' the place and hosts resist by imposing too many regulations. In order to create a hospitable environment, hosts must master an entire 'choreography' (Shryock 2012: S24), giving the guest the illusion of an unequal exchange. However, things are complicated when hosts sense that the financial and social rewards they receive are insufficient. A market governed by low accommodation prices and populated by ungrateful guests has brought disappointment to many guesthouse owners. There are, however, some interactions that seem to be more rewarding. Hospitality scripts often depend on which category guests belong. Villagers in Bran and Moieciu, and Romanians in general, are more hospitable towards foreigners than towards their co-nationals. Co-nationals are potentially threatening and problematic, while foreigners are always well behaved. The first group's morality is uncertain – hosts do not know whether they are going to play by the rules, or not, since some of them 'don't understand tourism'. Foreigners, just like tourists in the past, are said to be 'the real tourists'. Finally, there are also long-lasting relations established between hosts and their regular guests. Given these findings, I have argued that instead of talking about 'hospitality', a better avenue would be to discuss 'hospitalities', observing specific practices and norms related to the different categories of guests.

Chapter 7

Destinations without regulations:

Informal practices in Romanian rural tourism

7.1. Introduction

In the summer of 2013, news programmes and newspapers in Romania reported about what they called an 'illegal[107] *pensiune'* in Bran. This guesthouse, it was discovered, was organising camps for groups of children, providing their accommodation as well as their meals, in spite of having no licence to do so. Even if it they already received a fine and a warning from the authorities, the guesthouse owners continued to host children, who were lodged in groups of six, in double rooms with three beds. Moreover, the building – which was unfinished – was placed right under the high voltage lines, something that raised questions about how the guesthouse received planning permission. However, the children and the parents who were interviewed for the news bulletin argued that they had no problem with the guesthouse or with the way the camp was organised (Digi24 2013a). The following day, news reports showed how a new group of children arrived to the same guesthouse. Parents who were interviewed and asked whether they were still willing to leave their children there said that they have no issues with the guesthouse (Digi 24 2013b).

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[107] In everyday Romanian language, 'illegal' is often used to describe informal economic activity, even when the activities involved are not, in themselves, illegal (i.e. explicitly banned by the law). By comparison to selling narcotics, running an accommodation is not prohibited by the law, so a guesthouse that functions without registration is technically 'outside' the law, and not against it, as the term 'illegal' may suggest.

Figure 35 - Unregistered guesthouse that was found hosting school camps.

In spite of the media's attempt to portray this story as something sensational, the case only reflects the realities of Romanian rural tourism, an 'industry' where both providers and consumers of services are highly tolerant of informal arrangements. I was not particularly concerned with the legal side of tourism, until I realised that it lay at the root of the difficulties I experienced in finding and approaching my respondents. In spite of the abundance of online advertising for guesthouses or *pensiuni* and the dozens of large villas present in the area of my fieldwork, I found that 'getting in' was not that easy. First of all, I was struck by the fact that many guesthouses had no signboard. Even though, judging from the architecture, one could easily recognise a building designed to accommodate guests, when I tried to approach the owners, they often denied running a *pensiune* and refused speaking to me. When people did agree to talk, I often felt that they were suspicious and secretive. I was soon able to understand what was going on, as everyone I did manage to interview made comments about the 'black market of tourism' (*turismul la negru*). Perhaps more surprisingly, I often encountered the same reserved attitude in guesthouses that were supposed to be registered. I gradually came to see that people, worried that I might be affiliated with some of the control authorities, wanted to avoid any official assessment of their practices. It became clear that if I wanted to get a good understanding of rural tourism, I had to pay closer attention to 'black tourism', or *turismul la negru,* as it is usually referred to in Romania.

I start this chapter by laying the conceptual grounds of my argument through a brief review of the literature and I point at the very limited range of existing research on informality and tourism. Next, I describe my sources and methods and I present a brief history of tourism in Bran, Moieciu and Albac. The following section looks at the

normative framework that regulates the activity of guesthouses. I then move to a depiction of *intended* informality and I explain why remaining in the shadow can be a sensible choice given the current fiscal and legislative context. The argument is continued in the subsequent two sections where I discuss *unintended* and *contextual* informality and I show how law-enforcing authorities are contributing to a climate of uncertainty and tension. Zooming out of the site of my fieldwork, I frame informality in a wider context by using national level data regarding the shadow economy and by identifying links with Romania' socialist past. I then return to look at the local history of Bran, Moieciu and Albac, and I find a few examples that can suggest some continuity between past and present practices. Finally, before concluding, I examine the positive and the negative implications of informality for the local guesthouse owners, as well as for the state institutions responsible with regulating tourism.

7.2. Informality and tourism

Although there is a wealth of literature about either tourism or informality, the two areas have been generally kept separate. This fact has been recently highlighted by Thomas, Shaw and Page (2011) in their comprehensive review of the research done on small firms in tourism over the past two decades. Their finding is that 'almost all of the literature on small firms in tourism ignores informal economic relations' (970) and they conclude that 'research in this area is long overdue' (971). Indeed, studies with a specific focus on informal enterprises in tourism are rare and they seem to deal mostly with cases such as those of street vendors in beach resorts in Thailand (Smith and Henderson 2008), Indonesia (Cukier and Wall 1994) or Dominican Republic (Kermath and Thomas 1992), or with organised boat trips to reefs in Phuket (Biggs *et al.* 2011). Meaningful parallels to the Romanian case are difficult to draw considering the very different socio-economic contexts of these studies. The most notable difference is that in these cases, there is a wider gap between non-local investors, mostly foreigners, and the local entrepreneurs. Unlike locals, foreigners had significant financial resources that they could invest in accommodation businesses, while locals remained involved mostly in street vending. The accommodation units are part of the formal economy, while street vendors, together with the smaller scale businesses organising boat tours, make up the informal sector. In the case of Romanian rural tourism, both local and non-local entrepreneurs are in the business of providing accommodation and both groups may be linked to informality. In the case of the research on beach resorts noted above, the

delineation between formal and informal seems to be much clearer[108], so there was less need of a theoretical discussion about the nature of informality. The authors of these studies mention almost nothing about the rules and regulations constraining tourism businesses, and they do not go into any detailed ethnographic accounts regarding the actual informal practices observed. In this context, my research on the informal practices in Romanian rural tourism has the potential to fill in some of the gaps in tourism research, while contributing, at the same time, to the literature on informality and bringing valuable ethnographic details from a yet undocumented area.

Following Castells and Portes (1989:12), I take the informal economy to be 'a process of income-generation characterized by one central feature: it is unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated' (Castells and Portes 1989:12). This definition overlaps with the International Labour Organisation's perspective on informal economy as 'a part of economy that is hidden from the relevant authorities' (ILO 2013:2). The two definitions point at two essential aspects, which need to be taken into account when talking about informality: first, rules and regulations, and second, the specific institutions and authorities responsible with devising and enforcing norms. As Hayoz (2013) shows, informality should be always understood on the backdrop of formality. There are many forms and degrees of informality in the case of rural tourism. First, businesses can be completely and deliberately ignoring regulations, by choosing to stay in the shadow. I call this *intended informality*. Second, while doing their best to be law-abiding, they can be unwittingly breaking regulations. I will refer to this as *unintended informality*. Third, even when trying to follow the regulations, *pensiune* owners might find themselves in situations in which resorting to informality would either maximise their profit/minimise their losses, or help them achieve a desired outcome. This will be defined as *contextual informality*. Although intended informality can also be contextualised, and contextual informality is indeed a deliberate action, the former involves a desire to evade all regulations by remaining completely outside the eyes of the authorities, while the later occurs in the case of those guesthouse owners who, in spite of making some efforts to abide by the law, find themselves in situations in which they prefer to by-pass the regulations.

In Romania, people use 'black market' or literally 'on the black' (*la negru*) in order to describe any unregistered transaction, regardless if it is licit or illicit. I will use this terminology interchangeably with other concepts typically associated with the

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[108] This distinction depends on whether a business is registered for tax purposes, or not.

informal economy, such as: underground, subterranean, informal, hidden, irregular, shadow, or black (Bovi 2003:61). I also use the more specific vocabulary employed by locals in the case of rural tourism, dividing *pensiuni* into two broad categories – with papers (*cu acte*) and without papers, or 'on the black' (*la negru*). Since I never wanted to ask people direct questions regarding the legal status of their business, I had to stir the conversation towards a point where they could feel comfortable in disclosing the fact that they were unregistered. Only about a quarter of them actually admitted to such a fact, while more than a third were very eager to point out that they *have* papers and they were quite willing to discuss about their bureaucratic and legal challenges. With the rest of the respondents I was not able to discuss the legal status of their business explicitly, so I generally assumed that they were not registered/classified. After my return from fieldwork, I gained access to an official database from the National Tourism Agency (ANT) that lists all the classified accommodation units in Romania. Based on this, I discovered the following interesting facts: out of the 66 *pensiuni* where I conducted interviews in Bran and Moieciu in 2012-2013, 34 were classified (21 with local owners and 13 non-locals), while 32 were not (with 21 local owners and 11 non-locals). Although this would suggest that around 50% of the accommodation businesses in Bran and Moieciu belong to the shadow economy, real numbers are probably higher. Given the high number of refusals I received, I can assume that many of those who did not want to speak to me were part of the informal sector. During my short trip in 2008, I interviewed 9 guesthouse owners. I have no official data for that period, but based on the 2013 record, all but one appear to be classified and registered. As for the younger tourist destination of Albac and its surrounding villages, I found that out of the 18 locally-owned *pensiuni* included in my research, only 4 were not listed in the official database of ANT. Through my interview questions I explored, among other things, the legal challenges faced by both registered and unregistered businesses. I focused particularly on the bureaucratic requirements of setting up a guesthouse and on the additional regulations imposed by various authorities. An important topic in these discussions was that of the controls, or inspections (*controalele* in Romanian). Almost everybody has, or knows, a story about inspections from the authorities and these accounts gave me a good opportunity for understanding people's feelings about various regulations and about those who are meant to enforce them. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, there are obvious limitations with the interview and participant observation methods. I suspect that people often kept from me things that they might have felt would have put them in a bad light. I tried to compensate for this by looking at mass

media accounts about the 'black market' of Romanian rural tourism. This approach revealed many interesting cases, including stories about some of the very people I had interviewed.

7.2. Formalising tourism: registration, classification, and authorisations

The growth of rural tourism was accompanied by efforts from various authorities to control and regulate this line of business. An increasing number of legal demands, the frequent changes in the legislation and poor access to information have turned setting up a guesthouse into a serious effort. Currently, there are two important papers a *pensiune* must have in order to be out of the shadow economy: a registration certificate from the Trade Register, which turns the owner(s) into taxpaying 'economic operator(s)' (*operator economic)* and a classification certificate from the Tourism Authority, which is meant to be 'a codified and concise way of expressing the accommodation's services and degree of comfort' (ANT 2013:4). Guesthouses can belong to one of two types: 'touristic' *pensiune turistică*, in which case they should not have more than 15 rooms, or 'agrotouristic' (*pensiune agroturistică),* provided that they have up to 8 rooms, they serve their guests with meals cooked with local farm products and they present tourists with opportunities for observing or engaging with farm-related activities. The classification certificate assigns a touristic *pensiune* a rating between one and five stars and an agrotouristic one a rating of one to five daisies. The issuing procedure of this paper requires an on-site check carried out by representatives of the Tourism Authority who assess the accommodation unit's level of comfort and facilities. A registered and classified *pensiune* must subsequently obtain the following authorisations: Sanitary, from the Regional Public Health Department; Sanitary-Veterinary[109] from the *Sanitary*, Veterinary and Food Safety National Authority; Fire Safety, from The Inspectorate for Emergency Situations*;* Environment, from the National Agency for Environment Protection*;* and Labour Protection, from the Labour Inspectorate. Obtaining these authorisations is, obviously, not straightforward, and an average of eight other papers are required in order to file just one application. Moreover, starting with the year 2002, the person running a *pensiune* must be able to prove that he or she took a course in 'guesthouse administration'. As of 2013, *pensiune* owners must also provide evidence of employment and suitable qualifications for anyone working in their guesthouse. Medical and health and safety certificates must be obtained for any employee. Overall,

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[109] For accommodation units that offer catering services.

given the amount of papers required and the waiting times involved, it is estimated that it could take around five months in order to receive a classification certificate (Dănăilă 2013).

The results of a survey carried out by the Romanian Ecotourism Association (REA) highlighted the fact that most of the problems of registered guesthouses stem not from legislation directly related to tourism, but from regulations from areas that overlap with this activity. The main complaints of the respondents concerned bureaucracy, the long waiting time, the lack of information, the high costs and the corruption one has to deal with when applying for different authorisations. When asked to name rules perceived as 'restrictive, pointless or abusive', people often mentioned regulations concerning food provision, which establish the same requirements for small *pensiuni* with less than 5 rooms, that only cater for their guests, as for large accommodation units with restaurants open to the public (Romanian Ecotourism Association 2013:3). Admittedly, the Tourism Authority has made efforts to simplify the classification procedure. In 2011 it was decided that the classification certificates will be issued based on owners' self-assessments and that the Tourism Authority would carry out subsequent check-ups. At the same time, the Tourism Authority stopped demanding proof that owners hold the Environment, Sanitary, Sanitary-Veterinary and Fire-Safety authorisations, leaving the designated institutions to enforce their own control mechanisms. However, the on-site verifications from the Tourism Authority prior to issuing the certificate became mandatory again from 2013, when it was discovered that owners tended to be over generous in their self-assessments (Suciu 2013).

7.3. *Intended* informality or 'la negru': unregistered and unclassified *pensiuni*

When 'looking at informality from the side of formality' (Hayoz 2013:52), one of the most prominent and widely discussed issues is unregistered work, which is usually seen as being driven by a desire to escape taxing (International Labour Office 2013; Schneider 2013; Adair and Neef 2002). This is noticeable in the academic literature, as well as in the mass media, where one can find occasional accounts about the 'fight' against 'tourism on the black [market]' and about unregistered *pensiuni* being closed down and fined by the authorities (NewsBv 2013; Digi24 2013a; TVR 2013). In the following section, I examine the case of guesthouse owners who take an active decision to stay in the shadow, avoiding thus any type of taxation. I start by looking at the income and expenses of the average *pensiune* and show why many people find taxes unsustainable. Some of the unregistered businesses were never part of the formal

economy, while others used to be, and, at one point, decided to make the transition to the undeclared sector. The tax burden, together with the pressure of inspections, are the main reasons people invoke for their choice. The migration towards the informal sector intensified between 2009 and 2010 when the taxation system changed and a flat tax was introduced[110]. This meant that even companies that had no income had to pay around 2,250 RON per year. Small firms were the first to feel the negative impact of this policy and many of them closed down or suspended their registration. For many *pensiune* owners, this was the moment when they decided to end their businesses, at least for the eyes of the law:

> *The first* pensiune *registered with the Trade Register was mine. I had it from 1992 until 2010 and then I gave [my registration] up. I did it because of the party leadership [politicians], because of the system in which we live and the high taxes. I used to work only for the state, I would be left with nothing. […] If you pay taxes, you already must give money from your own pocket just so you can say that you have a* pensiune *– not to have some profit. You won't get the minimum wage, even if you work on the black; with 8 rooms, nothing'* (Pavel Ulmu, owner who renounced his 'papers' after 18 years. He says he was the first to register his business in 1992).

Indeed, many registered owners argue that it takes them half of the tourist season only to recover their tax money, while those functioning without a license are not paying anything. People often confessed that under these circumstances, they were considering 'reducing their activity', meaning going off the books. Another reason invoked for tax avoidance is the unfair competition from rich investors, often non-locals, who attract tourists by offering high quality accommodation. Locals who lacked the capital to invest in improving their offer must keep the prices low if they want to attract any tourists. I give below an estimate of the average income and expenses of an unregistered guesthouse with 8 rooms, as they were presented by Mihai Costea, one of my respondents. From an average room price of 80 RON, 20 RON go towards cleaning and maintenance including: professional laundry services for the bedding and towels, personal hygiene products for the guests, cleaning products for the room. This means the owner makes about 60 RON per room. Given the seasonality of tourism in the area,

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[110] The tax did not actually bring any extra money to the state budget, but instead it resulted in many small firms closing down and it led to an increase in unemployment (Dragu 2009). The flat tax (*impozit forfetar*) was cancelled after one year.

the average occupancy of a *pensiune* was estimated by Mihai to be 20%, so by calculating 365 x 20% x 60 x 8, we will arrive at an income of 35,040 RON From this amount, the following expenses must be deducted: 10,000 RON for heating, 3,600 RON for electricity bills, 1,500 RON for advertising and 1,000 RON for other expenses, living the owner with 18,940 RON. This is equivalent to a profit of 1,578 RON a month. Considering that almost always there are at least two people running a *pensiune*, this means each of them would earn 789 RON in a month, not much over the net value of the minimum salary in Romania at the time the interview was taken[111]. We can see from this that even without paying any taxes, the average unregistered *pensiune* will not be bringing much profit to its owners. But how would these numbers look if the same guesthouse was registered? In Romania there is a fixed tax rate of 16%, so from the yearly profit of 18,940 RON, we would have to extract 3,030 RON, remaining with 15,910 RON. (Taxes for the local administration follow: 90 RON/room for trash disposal (so eight times this amount for a guesthouse with 8 rooms), land and building tax[112]: for an older building that has been extended/refurbished this will be at least 2,000 RON, a hotel tax of 1%: another 189 RON, tax for licence renewal: 7 RON. More recently, The Romanian Copyright Office started charging a tax for the 'public communication of musical works in order to create an ambient' (Romanian Copyright Office 2014a). For a guesthouse, there is a fixed rate of 50 RON per month plus VAT (Romanian Copyright Office 2014b), amounting to a total of 750 RON per year. A 'road access tax' of around 200 RON is also required from those guesthouses that are placed in the direct proximity of national or district roads. After deducting all the taxes, the net gain of running a guesthouse for a year amounts to 12,044 RON, meaning about 1,000 RON per month, per household. If this is divided further between at least two people, the amount they gain is well under the minimum wage. Moreover, this calculation does not take into account all the expenses involved in setting up a *pensiune* and people's need and desire to recover their initial investment. It also omits the occasional fine any *pensiune* owner is bound to pay[113]. At the same time, given the competitive accommodation market in places such as Bran and Moieciu, owners are pushed to constantly work towards improving and enhancing their facilities. This requires further investment, but given the low profit brought by tourism, not many

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[111] In July 2013 the minimum gross salary in Romania was set to 800 RON (HG 23/2013) while the net value was 601 RON.

[112] Set by the local council to be somewhere between 0.25% and 1.5% of the assets' value. In Bran the building tax is 1% of the value of the property.

[113] As I will show below, control authorities from various institutions pay regular visits to registered guesthouses, visits that almost always conclude with a fine.

owners are able to keep up. Consequently, they seek to attract tourists by keeping their prices low or lowering them even more. Under these circumstances, to pay taxes would really mean one would be left with almost nothing, so moving to the shadow economy, or remaining there, seems like a sensible strategy[114].

If taxpayers seem to frown upon those who run their businesses on the 'black market' and sometimes outwardly condemn them, they do so not because they wish to sanction unjust civic behaviour, but because they regard them as unlawful competitors who afford to lower the room prices, thus attracting more clients. However, in spite of this dissatisfaction with those working 'on the black' – *la negru,* cases when one files an official complaint against them are very rare. When this does happen, it is usually a case between a local and a non-local. This is interesting, as it shows that there are feelings of solidarity among those offering accommodation, both registered and unregistered, which work somehow against, or in spite of the institutions enforcing regulations. As Portes and Haller have pointed out, 'high levels of state repression and external threat clearly strengthen solidarity bonds among those involved in informal activities' (Portes and Haller 2005:408). It is important to note that although registered business owners stress that they *are* taxpayers and posit themselves somehow higher on the 'morality ladder', paying taxes often means paying only *some* taxes. Almost all of the business owners who declare themselves taxpayers will have ways of avoiding parts of the payment. Although classified guesthouses are required to keep an evidence of their guests and send it to the Tourism Authority, this is done only partially and many transactions remain unrecorded. As tourists rarely expect or demand to get a receipt, much of the profit of guesthouses can remain unrecorded. Using undeclared workers is another common practice in many *pensiuni*, particularly in those where the inflow of tourists is not constant and the need for extra help is irregular. Extra services are sometimes provided without having the required authorisations. In a survey of registered and classified guesthouses carried out by the Romanian Ecotourism Association (REA), 35% of the respondents admitted serving meals to tourists without having a license to do so. 65% of the guesthouses providing catering services said that

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[114] It is perhaps worth noting that taxes were not always such a burden. Legislation started by being supportive and offering incentives to guesthouse owners. Between 1994 and 1999, guesthouse owners were exempt from having their income taxed for a period of 10 years. Unfortunately, in 1999, these fiscal facilities were cancelled and starting with 2005, there is a fixed tax rate of 16% of the income (with a brief interruption in 2009, when the flat tax rate was introduced).

they acquire local products, and 74% of those who do, do not register these transactions (Romanian Ecotourism Association 2013)[115].

7.4. Pressure from control authorities and *unintended* informality

Apart from tax avoidance, the second incentive for remaining in the shadow is the desire to escape inspections. For all guesthouse owners, receiving a visit from the controllers (*controalele*) is an unpleasant event that usually results in them having to pay some money – either in the form of a fine, or in the form of an 'attention' (i.e. bribe), or both. All of the institutions issuing the registration and the classification certificates, as well as those granting the four or five other authorisations required for a *pensiune* to operate, have designated control bodies responsible with on-site inspections. The variety and complexity of regulations, the frequent changes in legislation and poor access to information[116] are all fostering what I called *unintended* informality. None of my respondents ever spoke fondly of the control authorities, which, instead of being seen as representing and defending quality or health and safety standards, are considered to be solely after (usually private) financial benefits: on the one hand, they are able to notice the slightest breach of regulations, just so they can give a fine, while on the other hand, a major trespassing of the law can be overlooked, provided the *pensiune* owner 'takes care' of the inspectors. The high frequency of inspections, the perceived arbitrariness of the penalties imposed and the sometimes-corrupt behaviour of the control authorities, have generated widespread perceptions of harassment and abuse. I will illustrate this argument below with three telling stories, two of them told by my respondents, and the third one presented in the mass media. An owner from Bran once recalled how after treating a team of controllers with a meal and offering them farm products to take away, the inspectors would still refuse to leave because they had not been able to find grounds for fining him. To solve this problem, the man took initiative and provided them with an opportunity: he invited in a villager who happened to be walking by and he asked the shopkeeper (his *pensiune* also had a

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[115] It may be surprising that REA was able to obtain these numbers. I think guesthouse owners felt safe in disclosing information to REA, knowing that the NGO will protect their privacy and defend their interest. People trust REA and see them as being 'on their side', trying to defend their interests and improve the touristic offer. The association is very selective and it follows a strict and long set of criteria for granting membership to guesthouses. Their main focus is to develop a small-scale sustainable type of tourism in close connection to the natural environment. They encourage cooking with local farm products and they are rather lobbying for deregulation.

[116] Even for me, uncovering the exact legal requirements a guesthouse must follow was a daunting and time-consuming task. For a villager inexperienced in research and without the skills and means to search for information online, the only source of legal knowledge comes from the local authorities or from organisations such as ANTREC. However, there is no institutionalised procedure for keeping *pensiune* owners informed and whoever wants to be updated would need to enquire on his/her own.

small shop/pub) to treat the man with a brandy. In the end, he indicated to the controllers that the man was not given a receipt. Another interesting detail of this story is that one of the tourists accommodated in that particular *pensiune,* who witnessed the scene, was a senator. The guest offered to 'put in a good word', but the owner refused. I was startled by this account and asked for an explanation. Apparently, had the controllers left without cashing in a fine, they would return sooner or later, only to find a more serious offence and impose a higher penalty. This story suggests three things: first, there is a higher authority towards which controllers are held accountable and they must provide some proof of their activity. Second, I can imagine that if they are compliant in this way, *pensiune* owners can sometimes get away with more serious, or potentially more consequential, infringements of the regulations. Even owners who are law-abiding are not always able or willing to follow regulations to the letter. Finally, although the owner's rejection of an intervention from the senator could be seen as a sign of commitment to respecting the law, it comes into contrast with his act of staging a breach of regulations and with the hospitality extended to the controllers. His refusal of an outside interference could be more likely an attempt to preserve the local informal arrangements existing between *pensiune* owners and control bodies. Another one of my respondents, this time from Moieciu, recounted a similar story.

> *For instance, we had some tourists, they were from the OPC[117] from Bucharest – but we didn't know that they are from the OPC. And the OPC from Braşov came. They went in, they saw that it's full of tourists: [they requested] 'please, a [private] booth or something'. Probably they were after some bribe or something… But ok, as I was with everything in order… And they argued with the others: 'what, you barge in like this' – those tourists from the OPC – 'without showing any ID, nothing?' It doesn't seem fair to me to be an inspectors and say nothing, show no ID. And finally, they nit-picked until they found some dust on the ceiling panelling, and this was the reason why we received a fine* (Bianca Cernea, *pensiune* owner Moieciu).

This episode pointed at two things. First, it showed that within the separate regional branches of the same institution, The Consumers' Protection Office, one could find different approaches. The inspectors from Bucharest, who were off duty and found

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[117] OPC is the acronym for *Oficiul pentru Protecţia Consumatorilor* – Consumers's Protection Office, which has now changed into *Autoritatea Naţională pentru Protecţia Consumatorilor* – The National Authority for Consumer Protection. The old acronym is still widely used.

themselves on site as tourists, criticised the unprofessional practices of their colleagues from Braşov. Although locals' discourses tend to lump all the control authorities together, it is important to remember that institutions are not monolithic entities. Even if some of their members do follow informal practices, there can be others who respect the official protocol. It is true that many locals can recall episodes when inspectors seemed to be only interested in private gains, but it is difficult to assess the actual frequency of these events. Problematic inspections make stories that are good to tell and they serve to reinforce the constant questioning of the authorities' legitimacy. Overall, guesthouse owners fell that these authorities are not genuinely interested in helping them to improve their businesses or in contributing to a better experience for tourists[118]. Rather, they believe, they want to maintain 'the upper hand', while demonstrating to their superiors that they are doing their job and in some cases 'pocketing' some money.

Stories like the ones I described above are not confined to village talk and they sometimes make their way into the mass media. An article published in the press in 2009 (Cotidianul 2009) describes the owners of *pensiuni* as victims of the Financial Guard, forced to move to the black market because of inappropriate inspections. It illustrates the point with the story of a guesthouse owner who received a control from three inspectors who, in spite of showing their badges, appeared to be off duty. They arrived in what seemed to be a personal vehicle and they were not wearing uniforms, while one of them was even dressed in shorts. The inspectors found a problem with the guesthouses' till and they collected a 1,000 RON fine. The owner was unfamiliar with the legal requirements of this procedure, but as he did a little research later he discovered that during control operations, the officers are required to wear uniforms and drive official institutional cars. Moreover, they need to have an order from their superiors for undertaking this task and the number of this document should be written on any fines they hand in. However, the owner noticed that when doing the paperwork for his penalty, the inspectors used a badge number instead of this number. The *pensiune* owner suspected that the officers fined him because he did not try to offer them any bribe. The article ends with the owners' rhetoric question: '*If we are illegally fined, why should we continue to function legally?*' (Cotidianul 2009).

As in the previous story, this episode is presented in a way meant to highlight the inspectors' double standards. They are shown to follow regulations to the letter as

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[118] This very different reality was found by Bosworth and Farrell in the UK. Although guesthouse owners from Northumberland described inspectors as 'nitpickers', they also praised them for giving helpful advice and being experienced and knowledgeable (2011:1489).

far as the *pensiune* owners are concerned, but they neglect to respect the protocol of their own jobs. Many other accounts about controllers reflect a general perception that these institutions are enforcing absurd sanctions for minor infringements of regulations. For instance, someone complained that they had to pay 1,000 RON for writing '*Vila*' instead of '*Pensiune*' on their signboard, another family was charged 800 RON by the Romanian Copyright Office for allegedly playing 'ambient' music to their guests, while another man had to pay 1,000 RON for having a pack of undated pork in his freezer. Even more advanced tourism practitioners can be caught off guard given the frequent changes in the legal requirements. The vice-president of one of the regional branches of ANTREC was fined for not having an environmental authorisation (*autorizaţie de mediu*). He however contested the decision arguing that as far as he knew, a guesthouse only needs an environmental permit (*aviz de mediu*), not an authorisation (Pandurul 2010). Indeed, the legislation has seen frequent changes and it is very difficult for practitioners to keep up with the modifications. Between 1995 and 2013 the law concerning the registration and classification of guesthouses has been revised and modified seven times. These changes are presented in brief in the table included in Annex 1. If we take into account that the normative framework regarding the requirements for obtaining the other four or five different authorisations also suffered modifications, we can see that it becomes easy for *pensiune* owners to engage in *unintended* informality. Paradoxically, regulations – something meant to provide order and stability – are contributing to a climate of uncertainty and anxiety.

> *...they [guesthouse owners] are badgered all the time by these parasites. All breeds of controllers, because there are many laws that change from one day to another and controllers will come to you. And often, you invest today, put in a heap of money, you make all your papers and you wake up the next day that you are no longer conforming* (Marcel Costea, guesthouse owner, Bran).

> *We did our best to be close to the law… but it is not possible… controls, we even had three in one day [...] too many controls crush one, they give uncertainty, fear [...] I will not do tourism for as long as I live: paper work, Fire Safety license, Environment, files, files, files… you get fed up of running* (Tatiana Ungureanu, *pensiune* owner who was trying to sell her *pensiune* at the time of the interview, Bran).

Controllers come all the time. Instead of helping us, they attack us (Mihalea Verdeş, *pensiune* owner, Bran).

Instead of being encouraged to do something, you are beaten down. You want to be correct and with everything in order, controls drive you crazy, while others laugh in your face [...] The OPC comes, the Guard, from the Environment they come, the Firemen. They all tread on us. You must be according to them... be... I understand it, but ... it should be the same for everybody, the same law. This is how it is, what can we do? (Emil Dincă, guesthouse owner, Moieciu).

7.5. *Contextual* informality

I defined *contextual informality* as intentional breaches of regulations carried out by those actors who otherwise are making an effort to comply with the legislation by registering and classifying their *pensiune* and by staying out of the shadow economy. Not surprisingly, I found almost no direct accounts of such practices in my interviews. Those respondents who owned registered and classified guesthouses were projecting an image of law-abiding citizens, which would have been contradicted by any stories about them evading regulations. Interestingly, there were frequent references about what other guesthouse owners do: they register a single accommodation unit when, in fact, they have another, undeclared one, where they rent more rooms; they serve food from the supermarket claiming that it comes from local farms; they empty their septic tanks in the river; they make informal agreements with the inspectors to get away with their rule-breaching. Moreover, as shown by the stories I presented above, people do imply that inspectors are waiting to receive bribe, which suggests that this has to occur in other cases, with other guesthouse owner. Only once did someone confess paying a bribe, but this was in a context in which the corrupt inspector took the money, but did not keep his part of the agreement. This story was meant to illustrate, once again, how unreliable control authorities can be.

More instances of regulations being breached by registered guesthouses can be found in the mass media and they include: locals serving or selling to tourists products from the supermarket packaged into 'local, traditional food' (Horeca 2013; Vlad 2010) and guesthouses emptying their septic tanks into rivers (Dincă 2011) or lakes (Stoica 2014). All of these practices are aimed at reducing one's expenses and increasing the profit. An efficient septic tank is very costly, as well as the alternative of having a

specialised company to come and remove the waste, while offering supermarket food is timesaving and it brings quick benefits for very little work.

Last, but not least, there is the breaching of urbanism norms. Architecture displays some of the most visually striking changes brought in by tourism in Bran and Moieciu, demonstrating that regulations stipulated by the Local Urbanism Plan have been ignored. Although according to the local regulations, only buildings with up to two floors can be authorised, it is not uncommon to see three or four storeys high villas. The minimum distance from the river or between dwellings was also disregarded and houses are now overcrowded along the main road or built very close to the water. Striking colours are not unusual and one can see red, orange or purple houses dotting the new countryside landscape. In this case, it is mostly the non-locals who are breaching the regulations. A lot of the land that the locals agreed to sell was located either by the river, or in the near vicinity of their house. These plots were normally kept for grazing and they were not considered suitable for building. According to the mayor of one of the villages, some of the non-locals used their political connections to the District authorities in order to by-pass the urban planning decisions taken by the local administration. However, a former council member I interviewed suggested that the mayor himself was overseeing the violations of the urban planning norms:

I fought [against reckless building] as a member of the local council, but the building permits were given underhand by the mayor. I won't talk about corruption and other phenomena [...] I insisted to pass on a council decision: no building on plots smaller than 1000 square meters. But the mayor didn't want, he had his own tricks, he is an awful scrounger this mayor, he is terrible (Costin Drăgan, former local council member).

Many of my respondents from Bran and Moieciu share a feeling that the local authorities are more concerned with their own private benefits than with the welfare of the villages. News in the mass-media seem to confirm this picture: the mayor of Bran has a suspended prison sentence of 1.5 years for illegally passing a plot of land from the ownership of the Bran Museum, to that of the town hall. This land, which is found in the vicinity of the castle, remained in the property of the local administration, although the castle itself was returned to the heir of Princess Ileana, its owner at the time of the communist expropriation (ProTV News 2010, Jurnalul Brașovean 2011). The land currently hosts a bazaar and brings important tax revenue to the local budget. Since

nothing has been invested in the infrastructure or in the promotion of the area, people generally assume that the bazaar is the mayor's private business.

7.6. Romania: socialist legacy and problematic transition

While the voices of my respondents are convincing in their depiction of a context in which non-compliance with state regulations seems like the most sensible choice, a historically and anthropologically grounded perspective can bring a deeper understanding of the current informal practices in Romanian rural tourism.

The informal practices that shape Romanian rural tourism are embedded in a wider social and historical context (Wallace and Haerpfer 2002). Informality is by no means confined to the tourism business sector or to rural settings. Most Romanians would be able, based on their own experience, to describe a situation in which they witnessed or were involved in an act of bypassing state regulations. Frequent mass media accounts of tax evasion, bribe, nepotism, defalcation, and corruption, reinforce the notion that the phenomenon of *informality* is pervasive[119]. Results of a survey conducted on political, judiciary, and public procurement elites in Eastern European countries showed that in Romania, 54% of those questioned strongly agreed with the statement that 'people in this country only obey the law when it suits them' (Grødeland and Aasland 2011:20). The main reason for solving things informally was explained on the account of habit by 47% of the respondents, while 24% related this to a desire of solving things quicker, and 25% claimed that it is easier to secure a favourable outcome this way (Grødeland and Aasland 2011:24). According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index[120], in 2013, Romania had a score of 43, ranking on the 69th place out of 177 countries included in the survey. The study measures the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 stands for high levels of perceived corruption and 100 for perceptions of a very clean public sector. Different econometric estimates of the size of the shadow economy in Romania in the total GDP of the country vary between 28.5% in 1995 and 38.3% in 2000 (Ciupagea 2002:191). Analysing the period between 2003 and 2012, Schneider found a slight decrease in the size of Romania's shadow economy, from 33.6% at the beginning of the interval, to 29.1% in 2012 (2013:3). The same research estimated that in 2013, the country's

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[119] For instance, at the very moment of writing this, the news headlines highlight the following statement made by Romania's president in a recent speech: 'we have a problem inside our society, which is very tolerant to corruption' (Băsescu 2013).

[120] According to Transparency International, 'the CPI scores and ranks countries/territories based on how corrupt a country's public sector is perceived to be. It is a composite index, a combination of surveys and assessments of corruption, collected by a variety of reputable institutions. The CPI is the most widely used indicator of corruption worldwide' (Transparency International 2013).

underground sector represented 29.6% of its GDP. Out of the 31 European countries included in the study, only Bulgaria had a higher percentage, while the average value was only 19.2% (*idem*). Ciupagea describes the context that generated present realities: the long transition following the 1989 revolution was marked by two periods of economic recession, high inflation rate[121], low wages and a decrease in the number of employees from 8.1 million in 1989 to 4.5 million in 2000 (2002:193). Taxes were increased in an attempt to compensate for the smaller number of contributors to the welfare system. As a result, by the end of 1999, Romania had the highest social contribution tax rate of all the EU-candidate countries (116). Trying to cope with the difficult economic climate, many people turned to informal work arrangements.

Going further back into history, we find current informal practices in Eastern European countries to be rooted in their socialist past, a perspective often highlighted in the academic literature (Sik 1992; Neef 2002; Polese 2008; Van Assche *et al.* 2013; Giordano 2013). The communist rule in Romania was particularly harsh, subjecting the population to a coercive regime of surveillance and control (Verdery 1991:428) and leaving people increasingly deprived in the decade preceding the 1989 Revolution (426). The main way in which Romanians sabotaged the system was by developing a thriving informal economic sector through which they tried to re-channel resources according to their needs (Kideckel 2006:62-67). Stealing from factories and from the collective farms started to be considered legitimate, and it was labelled as 'taking'. Practices such as these had to be supported by a corresponding worldview. According to Sik, to be active in the second economy meant that one had something to hide and 'to avoid cognitive dissonance, this could be done only by questioning the legitimacy of state-imposed policies such as taxes and wage regulations' (1992:172). Drawing from Galasi and Kertesi (1985, 1990), Sik shows that 'everybody from managers to unskilled workers looked to tricks, lobbying, bargaining and loopholes rather than improving efficiency or quality, where all sorts of personal networks and informal organizations run the economy' (Sik 1992:170).

Research focused on Romania's postsocialist transition suggests that the state was not very successful in becoming a source of morality for the population. The virtual devastation of former collective property, such as farms and factories, is a telling example: everyone from the managerial group to the former workers appropriated some of these resources (Mateescu 2005). Mateescu's interviews with people engaged in 'collecting' the last remnants of a pig factory show how her respondents justified their

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[121] The inflation rate never went below 33% during 1991-2000 (Ciupagea 2002:193).

actions by implying that stealing also occurred at higher levels of state bureaucracy and that the state actually tolerated this behaviour. The state was used as a moral alibi for bending the rules, and at the same time for refusing to take personal responsibility for one's actions (2005:17). Drawing on ethnographic research in three different Romanian companies from the public service sector, Heintz also shows how 'socialist anachronisms' persist, underlined by a shared belief that the entire society is corrupted (Heintz 2005:104-105). She finds companies to be deceiving their employees, employees deceiving their bosses and their clients, clients deceiving enterprises, and their employees, all together, deceiving the state – which in any case, is considered to be deceiving them all[122] (74). Finally, participation in the second economy also taught people to be focused on short-term profit, to work slowly and have no initiative, and to stress quantity over quality (Sik 1992:171). It is not difficult to look at guesthouses through this framework: the almost exclusive focus on increasing accommodation space, building big and constantly extending existing buildings reflects an orientation towards quick gain.

As I described in more detail in Chapter 3, the local history of Bran, Moieciu and Albac also bears testimony to the ways in which people managed to organise their economic life by going around the political authority. Faced with political regimes that were not perceived as legitimate, people found ways of avoiding certain regulations, trying to escape rules and taxes that they considered overburdening. The skills for bending the rules and for going around the law did not become obsolete when the political regime changed. Quite the contrary, in a more lax political and economic context, they carried on and they broadened, expanding to emerging business areas such as tourism. During the communist period, there were strict official limitations regarding the number of animals someone was allowed to have, and for each of these animals people had to pay or give a share to the state. For this reason, villagers were tempted to declare fewer animals than they owned and this meant keeping the rest of their livestock away from the eyes of the state. Villagers sometimes resorted to inventive techniques, such as building a secret underground level in their barn. The hiding was sometimes done with the support of inspectors from the local authorities, as the following event recounted by one of my respondents illustrates. The mayor sent the man, together with the Party Secretary, to investigate a lead they had on a villager who was allegedly hiding 100 sheep. He reproduces the following dialogue:

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[122] Forms of deceit include tax evasion, fake work contracts, packaging and selling products at higher price than their real worth, and so on (Heintz 2007:76).

'You, Nelu! Tell us: look – there is a complaint on your name, the mayor sent us, and so on..' He [Nelu] says:

'Mr. Director, it's true that I have 100 unregistered sheep. But I have 100 at the hodaie *[barn far up on the hill] and 100 at home. If someone comes, they find here 100, if they go there, they find 100 too, but they don't go there anymore'* [Laughing] *'Ok, then, cook us a steak there, give a glass of wine, and we'll be on our way'* (Ion Roată, Moieciu).

The story presents a scene resembling current practices in tourism. Instead of sheep, people now try to hide tourists or rooms, and tolerant inspectors are still invited for a meal now and then.

Totalitarian political regimes, by their attempt to permeate every aspect of social life, generated powerful representations concerning the opposition between the state and society. Since the dissolution of the communist regime in Romania, these notions were kept alive by a perception of inefficient governance and corruption. In the words of Giordano, informality 'is strictly linked to the dreadful experiences that members of a given society have continuously had with the state both in a recent and distant past' (2013:42). According to him, a state's failure to gain legitimacy in the eyes of its people, leads to the emergence of what he names *'public mistrust societies'* (Girodano 2013:31). In these cultures, the prevailing system of morality places more value on the private sphere, represented by family and kin relations, than on the public one. It is this perceived opposition between the two realms that generates informality (*ibid*). Looking at the particular case of rural guesthouses, this perspective puts informal practices into a new light, showing how *pensiuni* could be prone to informal transactions because of traits inherent in their very nature. Guesthouses are small firms, often family owned, with self-employed workers, and to a great extent overlapping with the household production. The household economy is confined to the private sphere and it has generally been described as 'a non-monetised, autonomous group of activities such as growing one's own food and repairing the house' (Wallace and Haerpfer 2002:33). Guesthouses could be seen as an 'intensified' version of household production. In a *pensiune,* people spend extra time with house-related works such as cleaning, maintenance, or building more living space. They also produce more food or they acquire products locally through the unregulated transactions among villagers. Work is usually carried out as a form of social transfer where family members and kin help out.

Usually, such activities remain outside the market and they do not generate income, but in the special case of guesthouse-households, 'the market' actually comes in with the paying tourists as household activities become commoditised. Since for the family members, who own and run the business, the *pensiune* overlaps with their home and it is strongly associated with a private space, this can explain their tendency to ignore state regulations and their reluctance when it comes to paying taxes or to receiving inspections.

Linking with Giordano's concept of 'mistrust societies' (2013) there is another theoretical strand that comes to enhance the understanding of informal practices in the post-socialist context that I observed. The literature on conspiracy theories examines how, particularly in societies that experienced significant and rapid shifts in their political and economic life, people become suspicious of the political establishment (Pelkmans and Machold 2011:72). The result of this mistrust is the emergence of conspiracy theories, which are a means for explaining the 'invisible workings of power' and 'a means through which ordinary people articulate their concerns' (Sanders and West 2003:7). Marcus examines such theories in what he calls 'post cold war societies' and shows how they can be seen as a sensible way of reasoning for people who were subject to political regimes that lacked transparency and indeed had their hidden agendas (Marcus 1999). In the same volume, Grant looks at the suspicion directed at the nouveaux riches in post-Soviet Russian society in an economic context in which the rules of the game are not clearly defined and people have difficulties in distinguishing the borders between fraud and crime (Grant 1999:257). Beyond noting the reasonableness of resorting to conspiracy theories in order to explain unseen forces and incomprehensible and sometimes impersonal macro-economic changes, Pelkmans and Machold point at the role of such theories in contesting and asserting power (2011:66). From this angle, theories of conspiracy 'will only stick if power differentials are large enough' (76), meaning that unlike the theories promoted by less powerful groups, those embraced by people in power are likely not to be labelled as conspiracies (74). Turning back to the entrepreneurs in my rural tourism destinations, their discourse about control authorities seems to fit the depiction of a conspiracy theory. If, following Pelkmans and Machold, we renounce the problematic task of ascertaining the truth-value of such theories[123], and instead examine their use value (2011:67), we see that they work as a powerful critique of the political establishment and they reveal the mistrust that people

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[123] Indeed, as I never actually witnessed the actions of control authorities, all I can work with here are the stories/theories about their actions that people circulate.

have regarding the authorities and the regulations that are meant to be enforced by them. The persistence of these theories deters part of the entrepreneurs from registering their businesses and creates a favourable context for informality. Meanwhile, as far as the authorities are concerned, there is little evidence that they take into account the existence of such theories. They make little or no efforts to either label them as conspiracies, or increase the transparency of their actions in order to quiet down critical voices.

7.7. The brighter and the darker side of the black market

> *The anthropologist and the interpretative sociologist view informality and its practices […] as being neither good, nor bad, neither positive, nor negative and neither functional or dysfunctional, but simply sensible in a given sociocultural context* (Giordano and Hayoz 2013:14).

Although my argument has so far been guided by this outlook, I would now like to step outside the normative boundaries of these disciplines and explore the positive and negative implications of the informal practices described. I believe that even though actions are sensible and 'rational' in a given context for a given actor, they still have (sometimes unintended) implications for the wider social context and for the long term. My questions are focused on the consequences of informal practices for the actors and institutions involved in tourism, and for the destinations as a whole.

In order to discuss the implications of informal practices from the point of view of the state and its institutions, I borrow from the political sciences a widely cited[124] model introduced by Helmke and Levitsky (2004). The authors speak of institutions, rather than practices, and they group them in four categories, based on whether their outcomes are convergent or divergent with the goals of the formal institutions, and based on whether the formal institutions are effective or ineffective in enforcing their regulations (2004:728). I reproduce below the matrix presented by the authors to illustrate their model:

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[124] See the recent volume coordinated by Giordano and Hayoz: Informality in Eastern Europe: Structures, Political Cultures and Social Practices (2013).

Outcomes	Effective formal institutions	Ineffective formal institutions
Convergent	Complementary	Substitutive
Divergent	Accommodating	Competing

Table 1 – A typology of informal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004: 728)

Unregulated transactions can bring benefits to the state 'the very entity which [they seek] to evade and undermine' (Portes and Haller 2005:419). In the Romanian countryside, informal economy enabled tourist destinations to emerge without any state investment. These destinations now attract not only domestic tourists, but foreigners as well. From this point of view, the outcomes desired by the Tourism Authority were convergent with the goals of the unregistered tourism entrepreneurs (i.e. what I referred to as *intended* informality). The informal rural tourism sector could be seen as *substitutive*, given that it achieved 'what formal institutions were designed, but failed, to achieve' (Helmke and Levitsky 2004:729).

Turning to the institutions responsible for issuing various authorisations, we can divide their aims into three broad categories: health and safety/consumer protection, environment protection, and safeguarding the urbanism plan. Given that *pensiune* owners have a strong motivation to make their guests return and recommend their services to others[125], they aim to keep them safe, healthy and happy. The number of permits an accommodation unit has, or does not have, may make no difference for the tourists. The story I presented in the beginning of this chapter illustrates this well. Looking at the online reviews on the AFA portal, I found that 29 out of the 94 guesthouses with very good reviews and with ratings of over 9 points[126], were actually unregistered (meaning 30%). Following Helmke and Levitsky's typology, these institutions appear to be, once again, *substitutive.* However, in the case of environment protection, breaches of regulations have divergent outcomes and informal practices can be seen as *competing.* Those who avoid paying the tax for waste management services take trash disposal into their own hands, often with very negative consequences for the environment. Trash bags can be spotted in the surrounding forest and septic tanks are emptied in the river, posing a serious hazard to the environment and to the people who come into contact with water. Finally, the bypassing of urbanism regulations has proven

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[125] The majority of my respondents stress that 'word-of-mouth advertising' is the best way of getting new clients and that many of their clientele consists of returning guests or people who were sent by former guests.

[126] On a scale from 1 to 10.

to be at odds not just with the existing codes and regulations, but also with the intended outcomes of those who chose to ignore them. Many people have found themselves owners of oversized villas that remain empty most of the time. Such large buildings, apart from the fact that they alter the countryside landscape, are difficult to maintain and very costly to heat up during the winter.

Turning now to the implications of informality for the local population, there are a number of benefits that can be noted. The undeclared economy provided a safety net for many households where unemployment was a problem. Even more, it enabled locals to significantly improve their housing and raise their living standards. It also helped reduce inequalities that would be given by the differences in education and bureaucratic-know-how, enabling almost any villager with at least one extra room available for renting, to gain a small income from tourism. A positive effect of the informal sector, noted by Portes and Haller, is the fact that it provides a protective environment for young businesses, which later enter into the formal sector (2005:420). Wallace and Haerpfer describe it as *'a seed bed for new* enterprises' (2002:32). This was the case with many of the *pensiuni*. At the same time, the reverse move, from registered to unregistered status, actually provided a mechanism for coping with the financial crisis. Many businesses decided to go off the books with their transactions and were thus able to survive.

Turning to the negative aspects, the 'black market' of tourism can be a hindrance to the registered, law-abiding businesses. Taxpaying owners have to keep prices higher than their unregistered neighbours and this often means attracting fewer tourists. Non-locals were the ones who suffered the most in this case because they were also burdened by bank loans and, unlike the local population, they lacked the option of falling back onto subsistence farming and agriculture. The number of non-locally owned *pensiuni* listed for sale is a telling evidence: only in the first two weeks of 2014 there were more than 100 new listings on one of the most popular classified websites. As regulations were easy to disregard, access to the market was also fairly easy and eventually led to the current situation in which the offer exceeds the demand.

While the shadow economy can offer people more security by keeping them away from the eyes of control authorities and reducing their expenses, it also limits the development of their business. Being unregistered and unclassified comes with the price of visibility, an important asset in a competitive tourist market. Because online marketing companies do not ask for any papers when registering a guesthouse on their website, some owners take the risk of advertising online. At the beginning of 2013, I

identified 61 unclassified *pensiuni* on one such website, by comparing the online listing with the official record of the National Tourist Authority. However, this simple procedure is also available to the control authorities and as they started resorting to this strategy more often, many guesthouse owners have been discouraged from advertising. Looking at more recent data I found a decrease in the number of unregistered *pensiuni* advertised online. In 2015 there were only 41 such cases on two of the most popular accommodation portals. This may be a sign that authorities have indeed started to resort to this method more often and it may also indicate a more serious engagement with tackling the issue of 'black tourism'. However, even the method of selecting *pensiuni* based on their online adverts is not without its difficulties. It is not enough to find a guesthouse listed online in order to fine the owners. Authorities must then prove that one really hosts tourists. When controllers do visit an unregistered guesthouse, the owners claim that tourists staying there are either family or friends. I frequently received this explanation myself. As many of these guests are people who return to the same *pensiune* year after year, describing them as friends is not even far from the truth[127].

The overreliance on social transfers is another negative outcome of informality. Family members who work in their own *pensiune* are seldom officially employed and without paying their social contributions, they are deprived of the state's support for health care, unemployment, and later on, a pension.

Finally, consensus and cooperation are more difficult to achieve in a community where there is no general agreement about what are the good and the bad business practices, and where neighbours find themselves in an increased competition for tourists.

7.8. Conclusions

Since the informal economy does not result from the intrinsic characteristics of activities, but from the social definition of state intervention, the boundaries of the informal economy will substantially vary in different contexts and historical circumstances (Portes and Castells 1989:32).

One of the underlining tasks of this chapter was to demonstrate the variety of practices hidden under the notion of informality. A typology with three categories was outlined and illustrated with ethnographic evidence from three touristic destinations in the

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[127] A method used by inspectors is to pretend that they are tourists. If they are offered accommodation and asked for paiment, then they have proof that someone is running an unregistered business.

Romanian countryside. I described unregistered businesses as cases of *intended* informality and I showed how the costs of being visible in the eyes of the state go beyond the monetary expense of the taxes. Once registered, guesthouses fall under the incidence of regulations imposed by various institutions. Numerous inspections from control authorities create a climate of tension and uncertainty. Frequent changes in the legislation and limited access to information are nurturing the context for *unintended* informality, when *pensiune* owners are inadvertently breaching rules that they did not know existed. There are also those situations in which people who run registered businesses and generally try to be law-abiding, ignore some regulations in order to either maximise their profit, or to minimise their losses. This was labelled *contextual* informality. Here, I paid particular attention to the bypassing of urban and environment norms. While I showed that in many of these cases, informal practices appeared as sensible choices in an unfavourable bureaucratic and fiscal climate, I also turned to the wider national and historical context in order to find further evidence regarding a particular worldview which is accountable for an inclination towards 'getting things done' informally. I suggested that the state and its institutions suffer from a deficit in legitimacy, partly because of Romania's socialist legacy, and partly given the country's difficult transition towards democracy, during the past two decades. Returning to the site of my fieldwork, I showed this worldview at work with examples from the local histories of Albac, Bran and Moieciu. Finally, I explored the positive and the negative implications of informality, showing how, in some cases, they proved to be supporting similar outcomes as those intended by the authorities and they were beneficial for the local population. I also drew attention to the negative consequences that informality can have for those owners who try to be law-abiding, as well as for those who remain in the shadow.

Apart from bringing a significant contribution to the incipient field of tourism and informality, this analysis can present interest for policy makers. A few courses of action seem to be immediately noticeable. Instead of blindly fighting anything that falls under the label of 'black market', the solution for the authorities could be to redraw those boundaries in a way that is sensitive to the specific needs of rural entrepreneurs. Awareness should be raised to the fact that tourism is rarely the only economic resource of the households and practitioners cannot be expected to invest so much time and money in the bureaucratic requirements of an activity which, given seasonality and fluctuations in the demand, is only complementary and often not even very profitable, given the high competition. Currently, the legislation concerning the four or five

authorisations required for a registered guesthouse has a broad reach and it is not specifically designed for the particular case of rural *pensiuni*. Simplifying and adapting these norms could prompt people to take them into account. In some cases, it has been demonstrated that reducing the fiscal burden has the potential of diminishing the informal sector (Ciupagea 2002; Sik 1992). Conversely, introducing more rules in an attempt to control informal transactions actually has the opposite result. This is what Portes and Haller have described as the 'paradox of state control' (2005:409). Simpler, more reasonable legal demands and consistency from authorities and control bodies are needed. The legitimacy of the regulations is weakened when people notice that those who are supposed to enforce them are, in fact, playing by their own rules, guided by private interest. The high frequency of inspections, the perceived arbitrariness of the penalties imposed and the sometimes-corrupt behaviour of the control authorities, have generated widespread perceptions of harassment and abuse, instead of a genuine respect for the law. Institutions should work towards changing these representations by showing more awareness regarding the needs and limitations of rural entrepreneurs and by providing a stricter control over the informal practices of their own employees. Stricter building regulations should be followed in order to prevent large, urban-looking dysfunctional houses completely altering the aesthetic of villages. The vast majority of visitors to the countryside are attracted by the 'rural idyll' imagery and they will eventually abandon a destination that fails to live up to their expectations. Also, environment regulations should not be taken lightly and local authorities need to provide an adequate infrastructure for waste management. If villages had a sewage system, then people would stop emptying their tanks into rivers. Overall, more effort has to be put into educating both locals and tourists towards respecting the environment. Unemployment has forced people to retreat to the household economy and tourism has brought an opportunity to turn domestic activities into a source of profit. In spite of an increasing taxation and regulation burden, people survived by largely engaging in informal transactions. Popular tourism destinations emerged largely through unregulated activities. However, if the taxation and regulation systems remain insensitive to the specific needs of rural tourism entrepreneurs and continue to encourage a generalised disregard of rules, the same informal practices that initially enabled tourism development may eventually engender its decline.

Conclusions

Rural tourism between idyllic gazes and restrictive norms

My research raises questions about the effectiveness and utility of many of the norms currently imposed on tourist entrepreneurs. After summing up my main findings, I examine the ways in which institutions could rethink and priorities policies in order to respond better to the needs of both hosts and guests.

The nostalgic outlook and idyllic gaze that generated the discourse about rural tourism and the type of self-reflexive reasoning that represents cultures as distinct objects to be packaged and displayed are fairly alien constructions to the tourism entrepreneurs I encountered. These images are highly selective focusing on a limited range of aspects with particular aesthetic qualities and a perceived positive aura, while leaving out potentially negative and problematic issues and ignoring specific local histories. It is telling that the very few guesthouse owners who made a conscious effort to conform to ideal representations of rural tourism were all urbanites or foreigners with higher levels of education and with a history of living abroad. The lived experiences of local villagers have shaped worldviews that in many respects are at odds with such representations. Instead of bucolic cottages inspired by the vernacular architecture of the region, they welcome tourists into large, modern villas equipped with state-of-the art facilities.

Echoing classic representations of the countryside, domestic tourists in Bran and Moieciu invoke the restorative effects of nature and quietness as being their main motivation for travel. However, a careful read of their online reviews, coupled with stories from local hosts, reveals that once arrived in a *pensiune* they are mainly concerned with material aspects of their accommodation. The guests' interest in amenities and the quality of their lodging has had a strong influence over the ways in which locals have built their offer. It is equally true that, as members of the same society, hosts and guests shared similar notions of achievement and success. The architecture of guesthouses was the materialisation of those ideas and aspirations. Given that tourists rarely venture out into active explorations of the surroundings, rural tourism became largely a house-centred event. Actions of commodifying local culture have been largely limited to transforming old farming equipment and household objects into elements of interior and exterior decoration. Hosts are also mindful of their guests'

growing concern with local food and regional dishes and they may also occasionally enact a 'traditional' welcoming, dressing in folk garb and serving plum brandy to their guests. As I have argued, elements such as old objects, recipes or scripted events belong to a pre-set repertoire of fixed forms disembedded from the practicalities of everyday life and easy to display and sell. By comparison, farming activities which still contribute to local livelihoods do not lend themselves so easily to commodification and they are rarely if ever part of the tourist offer. Moreover, sensitive to the domestic tourists' growing demands for 'luxury' and amenities, local owners do their best to move animals and barns to the backstages, away from the sight of their guests.

Guesthouse owners are not, however, giving up their animals. Farming provided a constant way of securing a livelihood throughout the history of the mountain villages that I described. Even more recently, when locals became tourist entrepreneurs they were not inclined to renounce animal husbandry. Cattle and sheep are considered more reliable resources than tourism, and people often invoke farming as their safety net in case their accommodation business fails. Indeed, the effects of the financial crisis in 2009 proved that, compared to non-local owners of *pensiuni,* local entrepreneurs were in a better position to cope with a drop in tourists' numbers. The beneficial links between farming and tourism seem to go both ways. With fewer outlets for selling their products, locals welcomed tourists' interest in consuming local food. Some owners of smaller guesthouses even described tourism as a means for covering part of their farming expenses. However, the two economic practices also come into conflict in some respects. First, farm-related activities can be time consuming and leave little room for catering for one's guests. Second, and most notably, wanting to protect their meadows, locals do very little to provide outdoor experiences for their guests. Admittedly, this is coupled with tourists' own lack of interest in exploring the surroundings.

Moving away from the realm of discourses and representations, I tried to show how the development of *pensiuni* was influenced by specific material and social constraints. This meant paying close attention to the economics of tourism and understanding guesthouses as businesses interlinked both with the wider forces of the market and with the socio-economic history of rural Romania. I was curious about how villagers faced the challenges and opportunities ushered in by Romania's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-based/capitalist system. I showed how a long history of living under oppressive regimes actually endowed locals with qualities that made them ready to embark on entrepreneurial pursuits. Individualist – placing their households' interest above other commitments, self-reliant, independent, flexible

and inventive, villagers channeled their resources and their efforts into creating *pensiuni* that could accommodate the growing numbers of guests with their equally growing demands for comfort and amenities. However, villagers had lived in a socialist system that did not offer any entrepreneurial models. Their knowledge and understanding of business management were limited and they had to face an uncertain and unstable legislation system. In the early '90s, NGOs offered valuable support. For many of the pioneers of tourism, organisations such as ANTREC or OVR provided advice, access to information, visibility and tourists. Although very influential at first, gradually these organisations lost most of their control over the ways in which locals developed the tourist offer. In places like Bran and Moieicu, ANTREC did not succeed in imposing its vision about rural tourism. This was partly because of the locals' independent nature, their distrust of outsiders and their discontent regarding the founders of the NGO. Another reason why ideal models and best tourism practices promoted by various institutions failed is because the information they shared, their discourse, was of a different nature than the practical knowledge accessible to villagers on the ground. To them, actual examples were more convincing than any advice. As I have argued, this reflects their history of learning by observing other people's actions in a regime of knowledge that was not conceptualised and abstracted, but enacted. Many of the decisions taken by guesthouse owners, especially when it came to the architecture of their *pensiuni*, were based on their desire to imitate whomever they perceived as successful entrepreneurs. However, accommodation businesses were more than large villas with modern furnishings. All the growth oriented guesthouse owners relied on things not immediately visible, such as connections to the outside, alternative sources of money, higher levels of education, previous experience in a job that involved contact with people, or a special concern with advertising. Moreover, I have argued that entrepreneurship itself can be a learning process and some *pensiune* owners, those who were more prone to review and examine their actions, have learned from their own experience. Imitation, then, did not necessarily lead to the same outcomes and some people found themselves owners of large houses that remained unoccupied most of the time. While in such cases villagers tended to argue that even if tourism fails, their villa is a valuable asset that will be used by their children and their families, non-local urbanites endeavoured to sell their guesthouses, sometimes to no avail. The economic crisis of 2009 brought to light some of the contradictions with which models like 'neoliberalism', 'capitalism' or 'the market' are riddled. Apparently marginal villagers with little entrepreneurial experience and limited financial resources proved to be better

adjusted to the 'whims of the market' than educated urbanites who made large financial investments in their accommodation businesses and who, in some cases, were experienced tourism practitioners. It was precisely the villagers' peripheral position in relation to the market system that enabled them to cope better with the crisis. To begin with, they did not rely entirely on tourism revenue and they had the safety net provided by their farms and/or by employed work. Secondly, by developing gradually instead of making a large investment in one go, they had time to understand and adapt better to tourists' demands.

As I described them, *pensiuni* can be placed on a continuum ranging from *minimal* to innovative and growth oriented. Positions on this scale are not fixed. I have shown how the growth or the decline of businesses can be influenced by kinship relations and by the legislative environment. Kinship can be a catalyst for growth when families pool their labour and coordinate their efforts into running the guesthouse, but it can also contribute to the stagnation or decline of the business when the younger generation moves away from home or pursues other goals, such as higher education. The unstable and burdensome legislative environment had perhaps the strongest impact over the evolution of guesthouses, determining over half of the owners to move to, or remain in, the shadow economy. I called this *intended informality* and showed how cumbersome paperwork, high taxes and inspections perceived as arbitrary and unjust have made it difficult for people to run registered businesses. Even *pensiune* owners who try to be law abiding and register their guesthouses find themselves in situations when they unwittingly break regulations. I described this as *unintended informality* and I distinguished it from *contextual informality* – the occasional informal transactions registered businesses engage in, in order to maximise profit or minimise loses. The fact that such a significant proportion of guesthouses rely on informal transactions has a number of implications. First, it allowed rural tourism to develop largely from the bottom up, without any investment from the state. By moving to the informal sector, *pensiuni* were also able to cope better with the effects of the financial crisis. While these are among the more favourable outcomes, the widespread tendency to ignore regulations has also brought detrimental effects. Breaches of urbanism and environment protection norms have altered the built landscape of Bran and Moieciu and they endanger some of its natural assets. Also, by remaining in the shadow, businesses cannot make too much publicity and are unable to grow.

It was argued that in international tourism contact with tourists often prompts locals to re-asses and affirm their identities and cultural distinctiveness, increasing their

self-confidence (Boissevain 1996:7). When I started my research I was hoping to learn more about the ways in which hosts and tourists construct and represent the Romanian identity. However, the destinations I studied were predominantly attracting domestic tourists, which meant that people were confronted with less distinct 'Others'. Moreover, as I have shown, very little of the tourist offer was built around notions of cultural heritage and Romanian identity. These encounters nonetheless brought to surface a rhetoric in which the 'Romanian' attribute is present. However, instead of praising the positive aspects of their tourist experience by seeing them as an expression of Romanian qualities, tourists are more inclined to invoke the Romanian label whenever something displeases them.

As far as Bran and Moieciu are concerned, during the past 25 years 'rediscovering the countryside' has meant largely reinventing its architecture and creating spaces for rest and idleness in the vicinity of new villas. The overwhelmingly domestic tourism demand contributed to a development that revolved around material markers of modernity. However, rural tourism is a changing reality, not a fixed order of things and a *pensiune* is not an immutable built structure, but a process, sometimes one of constant refurbishing, extending and redefining, and at other times one of decay or abandonment. Since one of the discourses nurtured by 'global' contemporary trends actually promotes the local and the indigenous as the true actors of modernity, Romanians might need to take a closer look at their distinctive cultural and material assets and, once again, rediscover and reinvent their countryside. Studies from other parts of Europe offer examples of destinations where local hosts moved from an initial drive to modernize to an interest in building tourism on more autochthonous elements (Zarika 1996). Boissevain's long-term research in Malta showed how a building boom that disregarded regulations and ideas of heritage was followed by nostalgia-driven interest in developing a more sustainable form of tourism and safeguarding traditional houses and village rituals (2007:22-23). Over the recent years there is indication that such a trend is gradually emerging in Romania, at least in the realm of mass-media and institutional discourses. This rhetoric, however, focuses on fragments of 'culture' disconnected from actual practices and realities, giving birth to contradictions and paradoxes. Cheese should be 'authentic' and home made, but prepared in state-of-the art innox sheepfolds, villagers should be hospitable hosts and welcome tourists in their homes, but not engage in informal transactions, destinations should offer trips to the past, but the road there must be paved and without any pot-holes.

With the overt aim of supporting tourism, preserving heritage and fostering rural development, state institutions and NGOs try to communicate or even impose standards of best practice. The models and rules communicated by them often fail to engage with truly meaningful aspects of the lives of hosts. Likewise, they are not particularly well attuned to the hopes and expectations of domestic tourists. Controls and regulations are meant to offer a safe and to some extent standardised tourist experience. In this process, they take away the power and the sense of responsibility of the actual people involved in a touristic experience, either as providers or as consumers of services. My findings show that both tourists and hosts have found ways to reclaim some of this power. Tourists are becoming proficient in representing a travel destination and spreading representations of guesthouses. As I showed in Chapter 1, the Internet has an increasing role in communicating information that tourists find relevant in making their holiday choices. I found it very telling that 30% of the *pensiuni* that have the highest ratings on the AFA website were actually unregistered. At the same time, there are registered *pensiuni* found among the most criticised accommodation units. Part of the norms that regulate rural tourism are meant to ensure that a hospitable environment is created. Guesthouses are supposed to be registered and classified according to a rating system of flowers, which transforms hospitality into something quantifiable and convertible into monetary value. However, my findings indicate that hospitality is above all a negotiated concept that depends more on the intricacies of the interactions between hosts and guests than on a standardised and state-sanctioned set of norms.

The Romanian Tourism Authority has invested more in promoting an image and less in actually improving local infrastructure and services. A good tourist experience has the potential to bring more guests. When your friends tell you what a lovely holiday they had in the Romanian countryside, you may be tempted to try it, while an ad among dozens of others in a glossy magazine can easily pass unnoticed. All *pensiune* owners agree that 'word of mouth' is the best form of advertising. Instead of investing in costly logos and glossy brochures, the Government could tap into the knowledge offered by tourists. Promoting, for instance, a website like AFA could help in sharing more relevant and more convincing information about guesthouses and destinations. Moreover, instead of trying to overregulate what happens inside *pensiuni*, state authorities should first concentrate their efforts on the public domain. They could contribute to creating positive tourist experiences by making sure that there is suitable infrastructure to support a tourist destination. So far, Bran and Moieciu still lack a sewage system and this leads to cases when accommodation owners spill their waste

into the river. When the local administration did try to improve access to utilities by introducing a gas line, the road works took place in the summer, during the peaks tourism months, causing nuisance to many of the visitors.

For *pensiune* owners, many of the regulations devised by the state represent burdensome bureaucratic and financial tasks. Instead of stimulating them to learn business techniques and helping them develop their businesses, authorities manage to antagonise tourism entrepreneurs. When inspectors fine a guesthouse because they discovered some dust on the wooden paneling of the ceiling, or because they did not find the prescribed number of hangers in the cupboard, the institutions they represent lose credibility in the eyes of the hosts. Policies need to be sensitive to the variety of accommodation businesses. For a small-scale *pensiune* with five rooms where household members are also running a farm and have to commute for work or study, tourism is only a complementary source of income. Such hosts are rarely willing to make the investment in time and money necessary to comply with all the norms. Instead, they remain in the informal sector, where they escape all regulations and state control but where they also suffer from a lack of visibility. Finally, policies and programmes that see tourism as a tool for developing rural regions usually fail to differentiate between various parts of the country and are insensitive to pre-existing social inequalities that exist in every potential destination. As I have shown, tourism is a highly selective phenomenon both in terms of the areas where it develops and the people it engages. Villages in the plains may need a more orchestrated effort to become attractive to tourists. Even if their geography does not make them immediately appealing to visitors, there is still considerable scope for designing tourist attractions. Such a process would need to be built on a good knowledge of local realities and contribute, at the same time, to educating local communities about tourism.

One of the main contributions of this thesis was to illustrate the discrepancies between what I called the 'discursive fields of rural tourism' and the local histories and practices that I encountered in Bran and Moieciu. Representations employed by advertising agents, by government strategies and by NGOs are selective and reflect an idyllic image of the countryside, whereas empirical realities reveal that different actors invest the countryside with different, sometimes contradictory meanings. Nation-building processes in Romania were accompanied by a discourse that portrayed the peasant as the archetypal Romanian. In spite of this favourable imagery, negative stereotypes also persisted and the countryside remained linked with ideas of backwardness and underdevelopment. Local hosts in places like Bran, Moieciu or Albac

showed a stronger concern with braking away from such notions than with enacting the roles of 'ideal' peasants. At the same time, domestic tourists who spend their holidays in these countryside destinations show little interest for finding their cultural heritage and they have done little to encourage local host to include such elements in their offer. For the few urbanites who lived abroad before moving to Moieciu and for the foreign tourists, the destination is indeed an idyllic place, a repository of heritage that needs to be preserved, surrounded by nature that should be safeguarded. Meanwhile, for the owners of *pensiuni* and their families, tourism is more than a response to a set of representations and demands brought in by NGOs and urbanites: it is foremost an economic strategy meant to secure part of their households' livelihood and well-being. I say part of, because those who are able to live only from tourism are exceptions. As I have argued, the majority of households that provide accommodation combine income from tourism with farming and wage labour. Understanding the economics of rural tourism meant seeing it as one strategy among other economic strategies and placing it in the wider socio economic context of the region. Here my main argument was that the experience of living in a socialist regime has been both a catalyst and a hindrance for business development. While locals in Bran and Moieciu acquired skills and orientations that enabled them to embark on entrepreneurial pursuits – such as individualism, a tolerance for risk and an ability to notice opportunities – they also developed mistrust towards state institutions and conspiracy theories regarding control authorities that made them prone to keep their businesses unregistered and thus limit their opportunities for growth.

In some aspects this thesis makes a break with the customary themes, methods, and sites of the anthropology of tourism. I carried out research in my own country, in a post-socialist setting, looking at rural destinations popular among domestic tourists. I paid particular attention to the economics of tourism and I aimed to understand the entrepreneurial practices that materialised in the *pensiuni* that were the central focus of my thesis. I also discussed in detail about informality, a topic usually left out by tourism research. I relied on a variety of methods and sources, from traditional fieldwork and participant observation to more structured interviewing, quantitative data and Internet research. Finally, in spite of its fame and long history as a tourist destination, the site I selected for my research was previously unstudied. In examining tourism's role in the rediscovery and reinvention of the Romanian countryside I paid close attention to guesthouses. I tried to reveal through my research a complex dynamics where history, discourse, economics, social relations and individual aspirations contributed to specific

ways of running businesses and shaped a particular version of rural tourism. Writing is a difficult process of forcing the intricacies of experience into a narrative. Anthropologists who are always mindful of minorities are faced with the task of silencing some voices and building an image of unity and coherence of accounts. As much as I tried to capture part of this diversity by discussing typologies and categories, my account can never be true to the unique story of each guesthouse.

Without hoping to build a faithful representation of reality, the anthropological emphasis on shared experiences and beliefs can still bring a heightened understanding of local communities. I have already suggested how this knowledge could serve outsiders, such as state institutions and NGOs who try to manage local interventions. At the same time, it could also encourage a self-reflexive process by which members of a group become more aware of their shared interests and problems. *Pensiune* owners have negotiated their way between idyllic representations and restrictive norms in creative and resilient ways. However, they have done so mostly on their own, without acting as a group or a community. Although in the post-socialist period they have embraced what they perceived as the delivery of representations of 'Western' culture, this has been a selective process. Consumption was the easiest and most alluring thing to emulate, while other things such as 'civil society' did not lend themselves so easy to appropriation. I use here the broader meaning of civil society suggested by Hann, which refers 'more loosely to the moral community, to the problems of accountability, trust and co-operation that all groups face' (1996:19). If tourism practitioners would become more aware of their shared needs and of their power to hold state institutions accountable, perhaps they could also influence the normative frameworks that have been imposed on them.

Developing the moral community, however, may pose greater challenges, requiring villagers to overcome their feelings of competition and the wider climate of mutual distrust that exists in Romanian society. My research offered only a glimpse of this issue when I pointed at the ways in which tourists invoked the quality of 'Romanian' when something displeased them. Perhaps it will only be when Romanians succeed in appreciating and trusting each other more, that they will look to the countryside in the hope of finding things that remind them of a shared history and distinctive culture.

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Image sources

Figures 1, 2, 3: Maps based on statistics from INS Tempo, courtesy of Eugen Glăvan.

Figure 4, 5, 11-13, 31: Authors' diagrams based on statistical data from INS Tempo.

Figure 6-10, 14, 18, 21, 23, 26-29: Authors' Personal Archive

Figure 15: Inn on Balaban (n.d.)

Figure 16: Hanul Oierilor (n.d.)

Figure 17: Laurent Jouault

Figure 19, 36, 38: Carta (n.d.)

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Figure 22: Am fost acolo (n.d) (Image on the left) and Hanul Oierilor (n.d.) (image on the right)

Figure 24: Teacă and Năstase (2014)

Figure 25: Ministry of Regional Development and Toursim (2011)

Figure 30: EuroGites (2011).

Figure 32: Viaromania (n.d.) and Carta (n.d.)

Figure 34: Turistinfo (n.d) and Carta (n.d.)

Figure 39: Carta (n.d) and Touristinfo (n.d.)

Figure 40: Steaua Arieşului (n.d.).

Figure 41: Digi 24 (2013a).

ANNEX 1 - **Changes in the legislation concerning the registration and classification of a guesthouse between 1995-2013**

YEAR	Types of guesthouses	Max. no. of rooms / no. of beds	Classification symbol	Tourism authorities in charge with on-site verification	No. of permits required from other institutions	Copies of permits must be included in the application	Additional requirements introduced
1995	Touristic	NS (not specified)	Stars 1-5	Specialists from the Ministry of Tourism and ANTREC representatives	2 or 3 for those providing catering	YES	
1999	Urban touristic	20 /NS	Stars 1-5	The Office for Tourism Authorisation and Control	3 or 4 for those providing catering	YES	Environment Authorisation
1999	Rural touristic	10 /30	Daisies 1-5				
1999	Agrotouristic	NS	Daisies 1-3				
2002	Urban touristic	20 /NS	Stars 1-5	The General Department for Authorisation and Control	4 or 5 for those providing catering	YES	Training in 'guesthouse administration' for at least one member of staff (in units over 2 stars/daisies)
2002	Rural touristic	10 /30	Daisies 1-5				
2008	Touristic	20 / 60	Stars 1-5	The General Department for Authorisation and Post-Privatisation	The same permits as in 2002 are required, but owners are not expected to send copies of the documents. They only sign a statutory declaration stating that they have the required permits.		Training in 'guesthouse administration' for at least one member of staff (in all units including 1-2 stars/daisies)
2008	Agrotouristic	8 / NS	Flowers - daisies 1-5				
2010	Touristic	15 /60	Stars 1-5	The General Direction for Control and Tourism Authorisation	4 or 5 for those providing catering	YES	
2010	Agrotouristic	8 / NS	Flowers- daisies 1-5				
2011	Touristic	15 /60	Stars 1-5	A commission from the public institution responsible with tourism	Self-assessment. Permits no longer required. The certificate is issued without the prior inspection from the authorities.		
2011	Agrotouristic	8 / NS	Flowers- daisies 1-5				
2013	Touristic	15 /40	Stars 1-5	A commission from the public institution responsible with tourism	Self-assessment cancelled. Permits no longer required by the Tourism Authority, but it is specified that they are still prescribed by the norms of other institutions.		Excerpt from the Employment Office to prove that members of the staff are employed.
2013	Agrotouristic	8 / NS	Daisies 1-5				