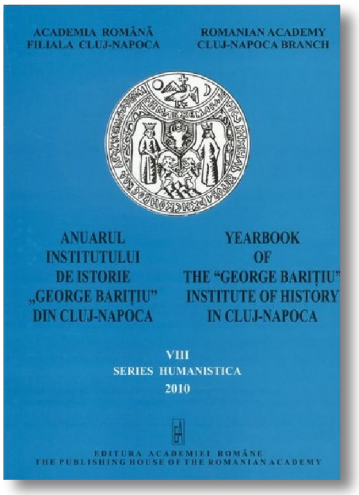

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CULTURE ECONOMY AS RESOURCE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERIPHERIAL (REMOTE) TOWNS IN ROMANIA

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> "Culture has become the plaything of journalists and historians, the Barbie-doll of sociologists, the Toys-'R'-Us of the cultural anthropologists. It is an idiot's delight."[1]

Abstract. *Cultural heritage as a potential endogenous resource for local and regional development has been "reinvented", being used especially in areas lacking "traditional" economic resources, areas lagging behind. As the approach of culture has been revised, the two concepts that were before considered as exclusive, culture and economy have become complementary, culture being seen in the last thirty years as a creative industry. The EU policies that have revised their strategy, stressing more on the role of the local endogenous resources in regional development have opened up new possibilities for countries lacking traditional economic resources. In Romania several urban and rural administrations have revised their development strategies, emphasizing the role of local cultural heritage in their upbringing. This paper intends to show through the case-study of a small-town from Eastern Transylvania the way cultural heritage is used by the local actors as strength in their regional development strategy.*

Key words: *culture economy, urban culture, consumption, urbanization, remote areas*.

The above quotation was meant to shock and stir up a little bit the reader's interest for the fore-coming article. Even if we consider Lasky's remark as being too harsh, we must admit that if we make on overview of the essays of the last decades, culture is one of the most often cited concepts social scientists use. An important aspect of these writings is that in the last two decades there has been a shift from the traditional approach of culture as being an "art for art's sake".

[1] Melvin Lasky, *The Banalization of the Concept of Culture*, "Society: Social Science and Modern Society", vol. 39 (6), 2002, p. 81.

An. Inst. de Ist. „G. Barițiu" din Cluj-Napoca, Series Humanistica, tom. VIII, 2010, p. 31–38

One of the problems social scientists face is the multitude of approaches to the concept of culture. The approach of culture has been widening, being considered recently as not only a vehicle for values, but having multiple social and political functions. By now, the word can mean almost anything, starting from the culture as being a spiritualized set of values till the culture as an endogenous key resource for local and regional communities. Even if economists have doubts in the quantification of the cultural capital of a certain community, and even more to the way it can contribute to regional development, the term "culture economy" has been often used in the late decade by academics, practitioners and politicians[2]. The EU in 2005 has elaborated a document on Culture Economy, emphasizing the role culture plays in preserving the European identity, as well as the benefits local cultural markers have on regional development[3]. In this document, culture is compared to other sectors of the economy, culture has an additional dimension – it not only creates wealth but it also contributes to social inclusion, better education, self-confidence and the pride of belonging to a historic community. Culture is also a powerful tool to communicate values and to promote objectives of public interest that are broader than wealth creation. Although cultural economy has been traditionally equated with the study of cultural industries, increasingly the term has a much broader meaning.

The *locus classicus* for the relationship between culture and economic development is considered to be Weber's[4] study on the relationship between Protestantism and entrepreneurship. Since then the concept of cultural economy has been used several times, but as "culture economy" only in the last three decades by geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and of course last but not least economists. Bros Lajos, in his attempt to conceptualize the changes in the dialectic of culture and economy, makes an overview of the way culture is accepted. For example he mentions the fact that in 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhohn have already reviewed 168 definitions of "culture"[5]. This was years before "culture" became a buzz-word and the number of definitions, operationalizations and interpretations exploded. The problem of defining culture is summarized by Bohannan as it follows: "We define culture by whatever purpose we ascribe to it in our theorizing, and are hence allowed to continue on our way without examining it."[6]

One of the classical works on the topic of the changing nature of the post-industrial capitalist consumer society (seen as the postmodernist perspective), the

[2] Noel Castree, *Economy and Culture are Dead! Long Live Economy and Culture!*, "Progress in Human Geography", vol. 28 (2), 2004, p. 216.

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc873_en.htm.

[4] M. Weber, *Die Protestantische Etik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus*, Tübingen, Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1934.

[5] Brons Lajos, *Rethinking the Culture – Economy Dialectic*, http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/1625/, 2005, p. 21.

[6] P. Bohannan, *Rethinking Culture: A Project for Current Anthropologists*, "Current Anthropology", 1973, p. 367.

idea of culture economy, comes from is that of Lash and Urry[7]. They argue on the fact that space has become more differentiated and imbued with symbolism. The two argue for a dialectical interplay of the cultural and the economic, "the economy is increasingly culturally inflected [while …] culture is more and more economically inflected"[8].

Ray considers that culture economy actually stands on three pillars, besides the post-modernist perspective the other two pillars (or as he calls it: "sources") are the trajectory of rural development policy in the EU and the growth of regionalism in Europe[9]. Ray is right when he links the upbringing of the concept of culture economy to the increasing growth of the interests of policy makers in the field of culture. Culture seen as a productive asset or as several times it appears in EU documents, a "creative industry" has given new dimensions to the appreciation of this concept, as well as to its relationship to economy, formerly being considered as dichotomic. This change of the approach between culture and economy has led to the raising among European stakeholders of new questions in the last few decades, like, "is cultural diversity a competitive asset for Europe? Are European creators and industries well positioned for global competition? Do they contribute to Europe's influence in the world? Is this influence measurable? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the European «cultural sector»? How does the sector compare with other industries? Does it create employment? Does it creates wealth or is it a drag on public spending – a bottomless pit for public expenditure with limited returns on investment? Does the sector deserve its place as a priority sector in the Lisbon strategy?"[10]

These questions are raised especially by those economists who think that culture cannot be considered to be an endogenous resource that can generate wealth and economic development as well as it cannot be quantified. It is true that Eurostat, the only pan-European source, relies on data provided by national States. The majority of the latter have an insufficient system to monitor the cultural sector and do not collect comprehensive data, they use different statistical systems, resulting in a lack of data harmonization in this field. In addition, the statistical frameworks used at European and national levels are not tailored for the cultural sector.

Culture has traditionally been considered by public authorities as a cost issue and not as an investment justified to tax payers by a proper business plan. Even so, we might see a slight shift from this perception of the culture as being the Cinderella of the national and local budgets; its contribution to the economy has gradually been acknowledged, in particular with the development of the cultural industries. In addition, long-term structural changes in our societies give more importance to culture as a product of consumption. The demand for an ever greater

[7] Scott Lash, J. Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space,* London, Sage, 1994.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 64.

[9] C. Ray, *Culture, Intellectual Property and Territorial Rural Development*, "Sociologia Ruralis", vol. 38 (1), 1998, p. 7.

[10] http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc873_en.htm

number of diverse cultural products is indicative of post-modern consumer behavior: consumers seek to differentiate themselves by appropriating the signs and values that mark specific products. The demand for culture includes the demand for different products, starting from products like films until objects of the built cultural heritage. Beyond a common interest in assessing the cultural sector from an economic standpoint, it shows the variety of methodologies. More importantly it shows the decisive impact of the economy of culture on the overall economy.

In the 1990s the social sciences (geography included) experienced what is now called a "cultural turn". Increasingly, culture was used to explain regional and (inter–)national differences in, for instance, wealth and economic growth. (Some twenty years earlier, in the 1970s, Marxist approaches in social science induced interest in the opposite relationship: the economic "mode of being" as an explanation for social and cultural difference.) The concepts of "culture" and "economy" have played a key role in (the development of) social science. In much of twentieth century discourse, "culture" and "economy" have been represented in juxtaposition, if not indeed as an outright contradiction of terms.

As Castree pointed out, especially in social scientific theorising "culture" and "economy" are (nearly) dichotomous concepts. Social reality tends to be divided into two mutually exclusive categories: culture and economy. This dichotomy co-determined the organization of social science itself: sociology studies society or culture, economics studies the economy. The concept dichotomization and the (conjectured) relationships between culture and economy stand for the *culture - economy dialectic* (abbreviated *CED*). This dialectic can be split up in two parts: 1) the influence of culture on economic development; and 2) the influence of the economy on culture. Both parts have been prey to conceptual contestation and confusion as illustrated below.

In the second part of this article I would like to present a short history of how local actors from a small Transylvanian town have managed to convert their cultural capital, defined here as being the local and national built heritage as well as their local history. The below presented case of a small town intends to show how the differentiated urbanization patterns that have led to the peripheralization of some urban centers, turning former important urban centers into peripheral urban municipalities could be after the nineties reconvert their backwardness into a local strength and an important element of their strategy of economic development.

In a former paper[11] I have compared the European model of urbanization of the nineties with the New Middle Age (*Le Nouveau Moyen Age*)[12]. At first this comparison might seem a shocking one, but as we will try to present below, actually this has been used by several academics especially from the second half of the nineties to describe the state of facts in Europe after the breakdown of socialism. The term has been "invented" by the French philosopher Alain Minc and

[11] Veress Enikö, *Uj középkor vagy varosfejlodes egy szekelyfoldi kisvarosban,* "Romániai Magyar Evkönyv", Diaspora, 2006.

[12] Alain Minc, *Le Nouveau Moyen Age*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993.

reshaped by social scientists as an evaluation of the former European countries' urbanization. They have characterized the state of facts after 1989 as being similar to the general disorder that has existed after the fall of the Roman Empire and those that were in the feudalism. Western observers consider the actual stage of development of the European societies (including the Western Europeans) as being similar to what has existed after the fall of the Turkish and Habsburg Empire, the similarity being between the importance of the changes occurred in both time sequences. In spite of the fact that a great bulk of Western-European social scientists do not agree upon this point of view, they all have the same opinion that there is no such urbanization model that can apply to all post-socialist cities and towns[13]. Of course we have to analyze in a differentiated way the changes occurred in the cities from Central and Eastern Europe.

Some of the existing processes in the urban post-socialist societies, and so also in Romania – population decrease, the deindustrialization, the strengthening of the third and quaternary sector – have also been present in the developed European countries since the 80s, the demographical decrease being the "privilege" of the developed countries. In the meantime Eastern and Central Europe has gone through significant changes during passing through the urbanization process[14]. It is conspicuous in the greater cities that have gone through the change of regime the sudden expansion of the population decrease, which has proved that the processes of concentration and agglomeration from the previous periods were taken in turns by the process of suburbanization. The assessment of this situation has situated a hard task for professionals studying the urbanization process, who even until now were not able to provide a unique model for the European urban societies after 1989. Both in Western as in Eastern Europe the cities and towns have undergone at a certain moment a process of population decrease (The majority of the urban sociologists consider that this is one of the most important indicators of the level for urbanization tempo).

The bigger cities from the socialist countries have been characterized before 1989 by an overdued agglomeration phase, backed by an also overdued industrial revolution. The urbanization has been controlled during the 70s and 80s by the central planification office. The interests of the central authority were enforced by the vertically subordinated organs; this has also applied to the territorial and administrative system. This has led unfortunately to the ignoration of the local specific. As a result of this, the extensive industrialization and local development has led to a distorted regional development. During socialism one of Romania's main aims was to make up leeway in the processes of industrialization and urbanization and so to become from an overwhelmingly agrarian country [tzarə eminamente agrarə] a developed industrialized country. Modernization in that period could have been result of this *forced* industrialization and urbanization. But

[13] Christer Jönsson, Sven Tagil, Gunnar Törnqvist, *Organizing European Space*, London, Sage, 2002.

[14] Anne Raulin, *Anthropologie Urbaine*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2001.

urbanization from this period was rather quantitative than qualitative, so Romania's urbanization has been due rather to the increase of the urban population than the changes in the urban view and lifestyle[15], so when they have transformed certain rural settlements into urban ones they have taken into consideration mainly the quantitative indicators. As a result after the administrative reorganization from 1968 many unnatural towns and cities have appeared in the statistics that have not matched the basic urban standards, at best they had a minimal human and physical infrastructure. This was the case also in Transylvania, where after 1968 many towns were scenes of such over-expansion.

One of the consequences of the economical and political transformation after 1989 was the hang of the forced urbanization process that has started in the socialist period. The centralized authoritarian regime was transformed and the local governance has gained more power, especially after the Law of local governance reorganization (1992). The enforcement of local municipalities has also led in many cases to the decrease or even the lapse of the state investments and because of the scarcity of local sources many cities could not pull through at the economic structural changes. Of course Romania also has important regional disparities, hereinafter I would like to present the case of a small town from Eastern Transylvania that has undergone this several administrative torment from the 19th century until nowadays, and many times the local resources were left out.

Cristuru Secuiesc is the most important economical and cultural centre of the Cristuru basin. Its process of urbanization has been a special one. In the medieval ages it has been an important centre of the area. This role has been transferred from the 18th century to a nearby town, Odorheiu Secuiesc. During the times it has been a centre of the township of Cristuru, centre of the small region, but also in the second half of the 19th century a big rural ("bourgeois") settlement. In 1956 it has gained again urban status that has preserved from that time, being one of the small towns of the county of Harghita. The town is situated at the meeting point of the SubCarpathian hills from Odorheiu region and the Târnava Basin, in the valley of the river of Târnava Mare, at an elevation of 390–395 meters, on an extension of 4526 hectares. Close to the basin there are 600–750 meters high hills. Cristuru Secuiesc is situated at a distance of 64 kilometers from Târgu Mureş, 26 from Odorheiu Secuiesc, at 22 kms from Sighişoara, along the county road 137.

The first written mentioning of Cristuru Secuiesc comes from 1333, when in the papal documents it appeared as *Jacobus sacerdos de Sancta Cruce solvit XXIII banales*. The nearby villages paid parochial dues to the town, so it had an important Roman-Catholic vicarage. Its urban status of small town was mentioned in a document from 1459, then again in 1503. This urban rank has been preserved until 1886. In 1567, at the economic census in the town of "Oppidium Kereztwr" there were 15 households and in 1576-ban at the other economic census came out that the monarch had a parcel in the "Oppidium Keresztur". In 1602 in the registers of

[15] Rudolf Andorka, *Bevezetés a szociológiába*, Budapest, Osiris könyvkiadó, 2002.

Basta (Grigore Basta was the military leader of the army that has occupied Transylvania in 1602 after the death of Mihai Viteazul) it is mentioned as the town of "Keresztúr".

The structure and landscape of the small town have changed significantly with transformations in the local economy, trade and different crafts being important activities of Cristuru Secuiesc. The local importance of the town is reflected by the fact that many councils from the region took place here: in 1477 and in 1503. Cristuru Secuiesc has been transpired as the centre of the Cristuru region during the 15th century. There are no particular data on how the small region near Cristur has become an autonomous unit, but the first data relates from 1505. But there are no concrete data of the fact when the town has earned the right to organize fairs. Because there are documents that name on the day of the Saint Cross from 1590 the existence of such a fair, we can presume that this has a history.

I have presented these significant premises that were maybe for some of you boring just to note the curve of the urban evolution of this town. This positive evolution has been refracted during the 16th and 17th centuries in the umbrage of the more dynamic Odorheiu Secuiesc which is very close to Cristuru. We can just presume that this process has been the result of the decrease of the basin of Cristuru Secuiesc which has become subordinated to the region of Odorheiu Secuiesc. Cristuru Secuiesc was one of those Szekler towns that were exempted from all dues by Queen Isabella, but after the town has lost its urban status, being degraded a "bourgeois village" has led to many negative consequences in the local development strategies. Presumably the town has an own legislative forum that has existed until 1764. The present-day town of Cristuru Secuiesc has evolved from Cristur, village of Cristur and Timafalva, united in1848–1850 and parted in 1861. They were re-united in 1886.

After the administrative reform from the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1876) the traditional medieval structures have ceased, their place was taken over by new counties, smaller townships. In this period Cristuru Secuiesc has become the centre of such a township. During the first administrative reform of the socialist regime, after the coming into being of the Hungarian Autonomous Territory Cristuru Secuiesc has become the regional centre of the township of Cristuru Secuiesc, by this regaining its former urban status: the regional council has gave forth Cristuru the rank of town, with 12 subordinated rural municipalities. But this situation has ended with the ceasing of the region at 31 December 1960. After a total collectivization the market place was transformed and the place where the former fairs were held disappeared, this being one of the elements of the transformation of one of the traditional spaces that has ensured a certain local identity to the town.

After this moment, even if it was the centre of the small township Cristuru Secuiesc has not aroused the level of the nearby Odorheiu Secuiesc which has become the urban growth pole of the central zone of Harghita county, with emerging growing cultural, economical and social functions. The only positive

outcome of the administrative reorganization from 1968 was that Cristuru Secuiesc has managed to preserve its urban status. During the seventies and eighties the town has undergone the same forced industrialization, as all the other urban areas from the region did. This has led to the increase of urbanization as a quantitative process by the growth of the population. New industrial plants were established, the Factory of Steel (from 1977), the Shoe-factory (very famous, in 1985 they made 50000 pair shoes/month). With all this industrialization Cristuru Secuiesc did not reach the frontline of the towns from the county of Harghita.

In 1990 the economic plants were reorganized, they became corporations. Most of them did not manage to work out well in the new conditions of the market-economy; with very little help from the state they have ceased their activity. The city so had to look for other resources than the "classical" economic ones. During the past few centuries the city has managed to preserve part of its interesting architecture that has combined the feudal, modern and contemporary styles (We are not talking about the flats' residence areas built in the time of Ceausescu, wiping the local specific architecture of each town from Romania). This built heritage has been of the "products" the local government has decided after 1998 to capitalize. The local government has been among the first ones which has made up an association for regional development (in 1998 the Association of the microregion of Cristuru Secuiesc came into being) and its strategy for local and regional development stated that the cultural and historical heritage should be those endogenous resources which could be more valuable as a product for consumption as well as for the formation of a local and regional identity.

Urban cultural heritage has been taken as a form of capital and as a basis for cultural tourism. Tourism has become an increasingly important asset for small and medium-sized cities in all over the world, mainly in the cases of cities with a larger amount of non-industrial local economies. However, tourism is a vulnerable basis for the local economy of towns and cities as it depends on far-reaching, mobile and unstable networks of visitors, cultural industries and attractions, local authorities, voluntary associations, buildings, objects and so forth directing flows of people, money, information and images. These networks produce new cultural economies and policies, contingently committed to the projects of producing "tourist places". The questions we might raise are on the sustainability of culture economy in the case of Cristuru Secuiesc. Here the local authorities did not manage fully to diversify conventional understandings of territorial learning, and applying the Butler's curve model on the evolution of tourism. We might doubt that only by the existing cultural products (We mean here by cultural heritage as we have mentioned before mainly the local urban architecture as well as the historical sites from the surroundings of the town.) we can speak of a sustainable local economy and cultural tourism if it is not diversified will be able to be the backbone of a local economy.