

MOUNTAIN MAPS AS BACKGROUND FOR THE TOURIST MAP OF BUDESTI (ROMANIA)

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Working in an emerging tourism region of Romania (Maramures Land) has offered an excellent background to study a wide range of tourism mapping projects. In most cases mapping area is related to mountain resorts; less explored issues are related to mountain tracks starting from rural settlements, without a “resort” label. Rural tourism activities are often linked to mountaineering, as other activities are still emerging. This opportunity was rapidly taken into account by young organizations and translated in mapping projects.

The main objective of the paper is to explore the role of mountain related maps, developed along several projects, on the final tourist map of Budesti village. Activities related to this objective include studying the mountain mapping projects for areas that have as starting point rural areas, without any specific tourist infrastructure, in a tourist region, relatively far from major national and international flows. Relevant to a series of research findings (in the field of rural tourism), this work provides foundation to point-out the relationship between two forms of tourism: rural heritage and mountain tourism in Maramures Land. This approach also tries to answer the questions related to key influences encouraging participation in mapping projects and the paths of their outcomes.

As territory, it is a mountain area village, with the hearth in the valley and the majority of the land in Gutai Mountains (1443m) and Varatec (1337m), surrounding Maramures Land on the southern edge. The built environment has a very strong traditional imprint, with wooden architecture, nuclear structure, a well preserved cultural heritage. The mountain sector was once dominated by the mines’ area (gold, complex ores), that concentrated the activities, and the agriculture in the lower area. Also, it is divided by a county road (second as importance) linking the Maramures Land to Baia Mare, the administrative center of the Maramures County (fig.1 Budesti - background and location). The area was suitable for developing some concepts related to the Romanian traditional village, put into a system of tourist valorization project, integrated with mountain activities.



APPROACH AND METHODS

Budesti village was chosen as pilot area, since the local actors are innovative and they have a tourism development strategy stating this kind of interlinking. The goal was to produce a map of the village with accent on both the strong points: traditional built environment and a spectacular mountain view as background. For this reason there were used both methods of mountain mapping and visualization, classical and experimental for the background, and cultural- heritage mapping and visualization. “Mapometrical” (instead of “bibliometrical”) analysis is used as qualitative research, non- standardized data translated in a reflexive way for the existing maps. Related literature was examined from the two ends of the problem: works related to tourism research and tourism mapping projects’ abstracts. Tourism related studies were divided into separate concepts: destination image, brand/icons visualization, knowledge diffusion issues. Areas as legibility and wayfinding were also tackled. Tourism mapping projects were evaluated separately as case studies, combined with design and content analysis.

In practice, a tourism mapping project should follow steps from: identification, selection, organization and dissemination of spatial information that can be easily examined, refined and shared by non-expert map users. There is also a category of expert users, as tourists and as planners. Depending on the form of tourism, mountain tourist maps should take into consideration aspects of accessibility to the mountain region, promotion and information distribution, interesting attractions and strategies for different seasons, summer or winter (Pyo S., 2005). In addition, rural heritage areas should apply to connecting attractions, distinctive tourist products, events, festivals. Majority of issues are concerning information about destinations and access to the attractions.

Standardization process directed the research to the conclusion that every destination has its own needs and models, seen as good-practice examples that can only be adapted. That is why the result is a reflexive one. Examples of criteria will include:

- Destination image: size, shape of the map border, associated icons;
- Brand image: pictogram use, conventional signs, thumbnails of a photo for architectural objects or natural forms;
- Knowledge diffusion issues, following the KM (Knowledge Map for information and access, Pyo S., 2005);
- Tourist mapping projects: actors, funding source, educational background;
- Accessibility of final results (dissemination and availability).

Terms like destination image, brand identity and image, brand association, have been widely acknowledged in scientific literature (Qu H et al, 2011). Extending the significance of the terms, we considered that the shape of a displayed/printed tourist map (e.g. cut on the border or square) can provide advantages in developing a destination image. The consistency of a region's shape is often a must. That is why in the examination process the shape of the map has the first place.

Information about attractions is ranked by the "brand" criteria; international, national or local brand, often listed on UNESCO or other heritage database. Selection of the elements to be represented depends also on the tourism development strategy (if there is one available and applicable). The choice of symbolization is a matter of trend and skill of the author, rather than a scientific research on the tourists' needs. Nevertheless, research findings in the field of Social and Behavioral Sciences stress out the importance of qualitative inquiry regarding map design and map use, by different type of tourism activities and forms (Sarikanon C. and Sahachaisaeree N. 2010) and the importance of a guide for the tourist map authors.

Knowledge diffusion in the mapmakers' world is difficult to define, since the economical outcomes have influence upon the team management. The term "competition" fits better than "cluster" concerning factual diffusion and procedures. Information about access, tourist "industry" and other database are often translated from former works. Special status of topomaps leads sometimes at the feeling that the geoinformation retrieved is outdated, even on new channel products (GPS maps, online interactive). Knowledge management in this respect is related to coherent geodatabase for access, infrastructure, topography, basic elements of a tourist map, constantly evolving information about the enterprises (accommodation, restaurants, newly marked paths). Detailed destination information, including map design and display, are operated in projects concerning visitor centers and at county level, with a high degree of independence. Discussions with the representatives in this area helped to draw a knowledge management sketch.

Tourist mapping in Romania is developed by actors with various backgrounds: academic, planning enterprises, NGOs, local authorities and accommodation facilities trying to advertise their location. Funding source is 90% international grants, mostly cross-border co-operation programs, 10% national via county council financing.

RESULTS

The mountains at the south of the commune were subject of a project concerning Gutai-Ignis map. Gutai Mountains were approached in the tourist Atlas of Maramures Land, a series of views and perspectives were drawn out from a former project with Gutai-Ignis Mountains. The core of the village was subject of another project, SISAT, with geospatial analysis on ten traditional villages in Romania and stressing out the tourist related features. The territorial planning related mountain maps formed a good base line for issues connected with the image of the territory perceived by ordinary map readers.

Design and content analysis of the previous map products has been focused upon five basic elements, important for a good tourist map:

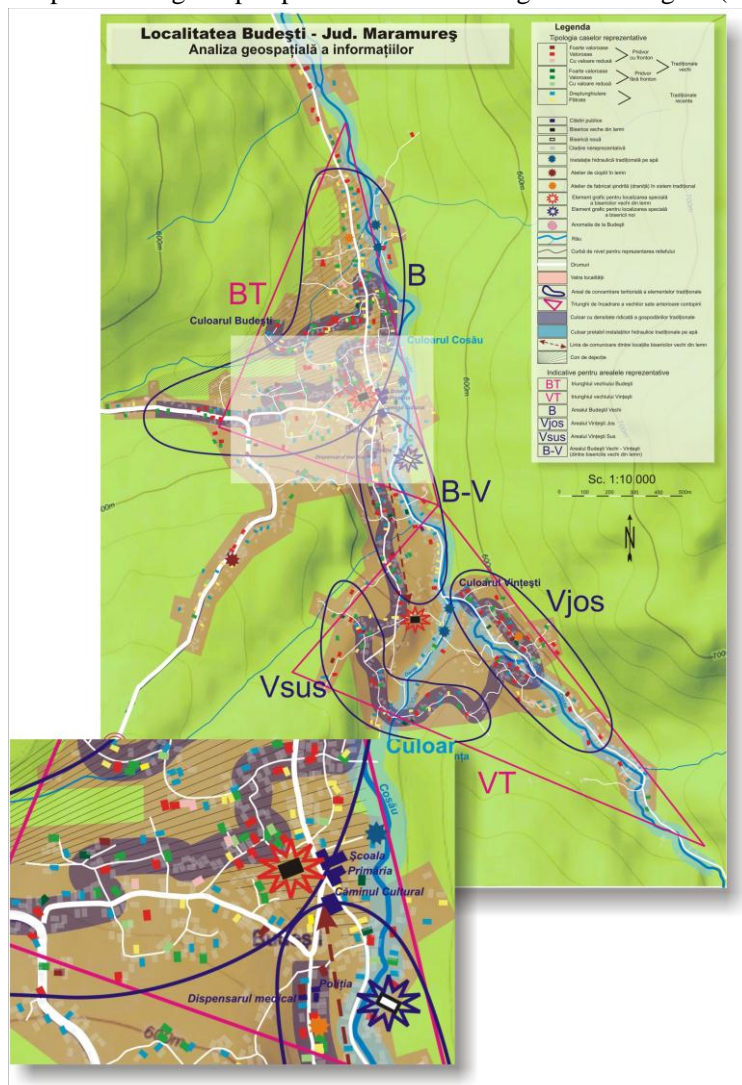
- tourism industry – facilities: number, type, form of representation, location
- general infrastructure – (roads, railways, with rank, description, other attributes),

- tourist designed infrastructure – trails, ski slopes, cable
- attractions - number, type, form of representation, location
- relief depiction – scale, technique, perspective

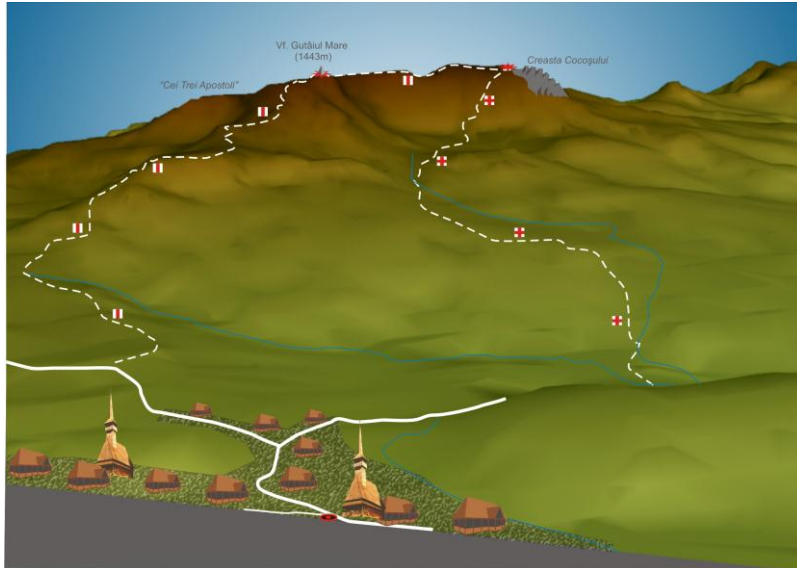
Since legibility or other evaluation studies are not available for this space we tried to keep the scientific (see, theoretical) line, available in materials designated for better map-design, geovisualisation, and legibility of large displayed graphics. Infographics regarding the type and number of tourism facilities are simple, as points differentiated as symbols, the main concern being their approximate location. This is considered as unacceptable on a map at this scale, therefore we considered pictograms accurately located, slightly exaggerated in respect with other buildings. Traditional style buildings are priority so facilities located in traditional buildings are more iconic than others.

General infrastructure as well as tourist designed infrastructure (trails, ski slopes) are depicted in contrast with the general view of the relief, in summer vegetation cover. Romanian law regarding the safety of the tourists on mountain trails was also our main concern. The area of Budesti has well marked trails on most 2D maps and in territory, two of them refreshed on 2010. Signs are visible; it is only a matter of orientation on field. Tourist agencies offer a few packages for tourist guided mountaineering and the tourists are experienced map readers. Inexperienced mountaineers follow short paths in the village's surroundings. This is mainly the reason why the project tries to form a general view on the area, triggering the tourist flows to increase.

Strategic maps were produced in order to identify the appropriate trajectories in the hearth of the village, articulating them with the mountain trails, organized on difficulty levels (fig.2 Strategic work map for identifying the best options for trails within the village). Human origin attractions were depicted in an iconic way, with high pictorial effect. Natural attractions were drawn as symbols, with special mention to the point with good perspective over the village and the region (to the North or South).



After studying several options for depicting the relief, we decided on a 2.5D with a perspective feeling of depths and horizon line. The layout of the front permitted to place the human elements, iconic and legible; the secondary plan offered background for tourist trails general overview. Since the front plan is rather homogenous, the features of the relief can be blurred by the representation of buildings, tourist facilities, attractions. Main relief landmarks are visible facing south-west from the commune center and from the main access road, we have considered this direction for the general map.



CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PLANS

The final product is a tourist map meant to be displayed in the center of the commune as trailhead. This map is a combination between a mountain map and a cultural-heritage trail map, using a perspective view over the northern ridge of the mountains, only the part included in Budesti's territory. The features recommend it for information about destination and access to the attractions, as well as promotion of traditional ethnographic values of the built environment, one of the UNESCO wooden churches and wooden architecture (active houses, gates and households) connected to an attractive volcanic mountain area. Local authorities try to support the display of the map. They also have a tourism development strategy which states the improvement of tourist flows by building a good destination image.

In the future we would develop an evaluation tool for the displayed map, in order to make steps forward and strengthen the relationship with the academic environment, as source of innovation in the area. We also would like to acknowledge a part of this map as work on the project SISAT, 91-032/2007.

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