

## IMPACT OF SECONDARY RESIDENCES ON THE RURAL SPACE OF THE GILĂU-MUNTELE MARE MOUNTAINS

MAGDALENA DRĂGAN<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT** – The increasing in the number of secondary residences is a phenomenon which has affected the rural space of Romania after 1990, especially in the mountain area. In order to emphasize its impact, the present paper studies the case of villages in the Gilău-Muntele Mare Mountains. By studying the bibliography and the statistical data we got the general picture of this case and by interviewing regional and local authorities the real extent of the matter revealed. It resulted that in this area, secondary residences phenomena led to spatial and functional impact upon rural space and to social and economic consequences on local communities: secondary residences transform rural space into one with tourist characteristics: implantation of a suite of secondary residences, the local councils collect more taxes but also deal with overwhelmed facilities and pollution, while the native people copy a different lifestyle. In some cases, ownership transfer towards city residents or the small villages taken over by non-resident people speak of the extreme transformation of the rural space.

**Key words:** secondary residences, administration, propriety, tourism, rural space

Holiday houses or secondary residences are special cases for the use of rural space by the city inhabitants. The present paper's objective is to analyze *the impact of the secondary residences upon the rural communities, the consequences of their implantation on the organization and function of the rural space*. In this respect, we present the evolution, the spatial distribution, and the impact of secondary residences implantation on seven communes from Cluj country, which have their territory in the Gilău-Muntele Mare Mountains (Băișoara, Beliș, Gilău, Măguri-Răcățau, Mărișel, Râșca and Valea Ierii). The study started with the analysis of the following statistical data from each local administration: number of resident and non-resident real estate owners, 1992-2007 annual number of construction permits issued, annual number of fully built residences. This information together with bibliographical study and terrain observation leads to the first ideas and conclusions that resulted into further details from interviews with local and regional authorities (interviews were taken between 10-20.10.2008 with: Ghib Liviu, Băișoara's vice-mayor; Dumitraș Răzvan, Gilău's architect; Vădan Maria, Râșca's secretary; Trifu Violeta, Beliș's secretary; Drânda Olimpia, Măguri-Răcățau's secretary; Mariș Nelia, Valea Ierii's secretary).

### 1. TEMPORAL EVOLUTION OF THE PHENOMENON

The start of the secondary residences phenomenon is due to the increase in living standard in the cities but also to the decreasing farming, weakening of rural communities and abandonment of houses in the villages. The decision to return to the rural areas can have more causes. The most common is getting refuge from the crowded and loud city; other causes are the inheritance of a rural house, the return to the "roots" by sentimental reasons but also more pragmatic reasons such real estate, or tourist investments. The most frequent criteria for choosing a location for buying or building a holiday house are the geographical proximity, the accessibility, and the surrounding recreational offer. The Gilău-Muntele Mare communes respond to all these demands by offering landscape and views, a lot of open space, traditional unpolluted products, the Someșul Cald reservoirs, Muntele

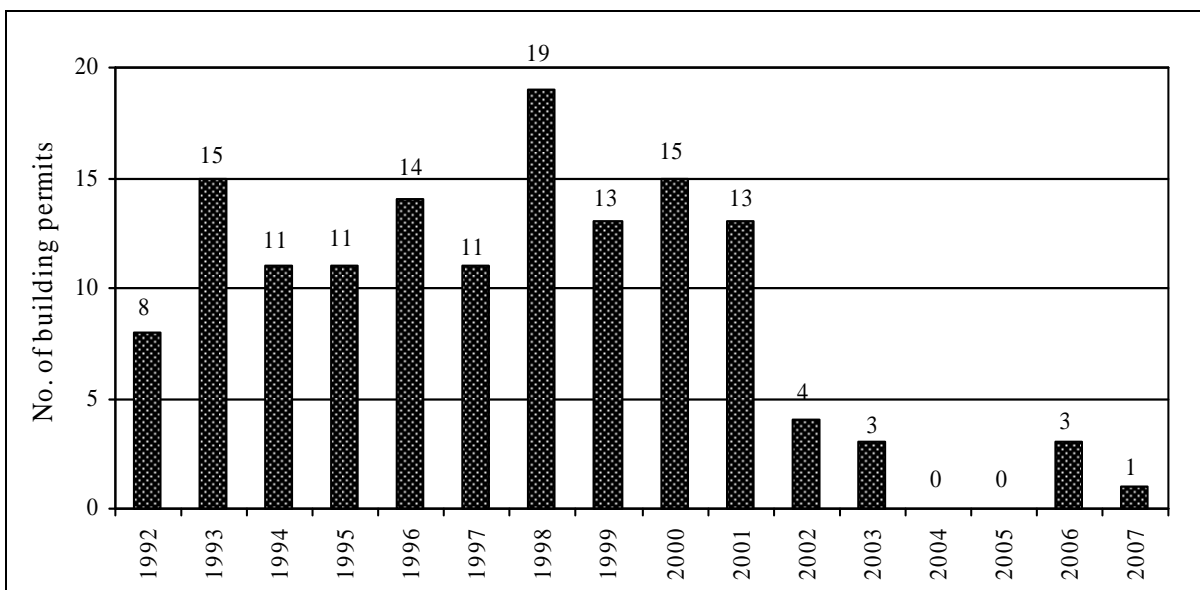
---

<sup>1</sup> PhD Student, Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, 5-7 Clinicilor Street, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.  
E-mail: magdalenadragan@yahoo.com

Băișoarii winter resort and the rough 20 - 70 kilometers distance from Cluj-Napoca and 30 - 100 km from Turda, respectively. In fact, the small distances between the two cities and the mountains explain why most secondary residence owners proceed from those two cities.

The secondary residences are very recent in Romania. In this area, there had been few such units until 1990, but the real start took place after this year. The evolution has never stopped since then, but it knew conjectural variations. Such variations were triggered by some events such as the land reform, the Caritas pyramidal scheme (1991-1994, bringing large amount of money to some people from Cluj-Napoca), numerous concessions of public land (in the early 1990's at Râșca) and new regulation in the building domain (from 2007, a cadastral certificate is required for a building permit, a document that the most villagers that sell their land do not have).

In some villages, shortage of building places appears, such as in Valea Ierii (Valea Ierii mayor's office - Mariș Nelia, secretary, personal communication, 15.10.2008).



**Figure 1.** Number of building permits issued in Valea Ierii commune

(Source: data from Valea Ierii mayor's office - Mariș Nelia, secretary, personal communication, 15.10.2008)

## 2. SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SECONDARY RESIDENCES

It is also very important to know that most of the secondary residences are new houses - the owner has bought or leased the land and built a house on it. Because of this, a spatial pattern is revealed. First, it is noticeable the grouping of those buildings. Very few secondary residences mix with the local houses and that happens only if a non-local person bought or inherited a traditional house. In the majority of cases, in villages, the areas with secondary residences and those with houses belonging to local people do not intertwine, mostly because of functional issues. While local people saved the best land for agriculture and preferred locations sheltered from winds and floods in order to build their houses, the city residents are looking for view and accessibility despite potential risks. This leads to the situation emphasized by the Cluj County Prefect's report: while none of the residents have their houses located in the flood risk zone of the Someș valleys, there are many secondary residences in this situation: almost one third of those built in Râșca commune and about 20% in Gilău and Mărișel communes<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> According to *Situația construcțiilor amplasate în zona inundabilă a albiei majore respectiv sau în zona de protecție* [The State of Buildings Situated in the Flood-Prone Major Riverbed or in the Protection Area, 2008].

## IMPACT OF SECONDARY RESIDENCES ON THE RURAL SPACE OF THE GILĂU-MUNTELE MARE MOUNTAINS

At regional level, we identified three areas with secondary residences, based on their accessibility and proximity.

The oldest and the most important area, as far as the number of secondary residences is concerned, is *Băișoara-Valea Ierii*. The access in the area is from Băișoara village (42 km from Cluj-Napoca) to the valleys of Muntele Mare (18 km to Muntele Băișorii Resort, on Valea Ierța, 14 km to Valea Ierii, on Iara). Muntele Băișorii has become winter resort since the early 1980s, but “Frăția Munteană” NGO had already built a chalet there in 1934 (Luca, Minodora, Susana, 2007, p.83). At present, there are 650 secondary residences, and together with those on the Iara Valley, the regional group almost reached 1,000 (according to Băișoara mayor’s office – Ghib Liviu, vicemayor, personal communication, 17.10.2008).

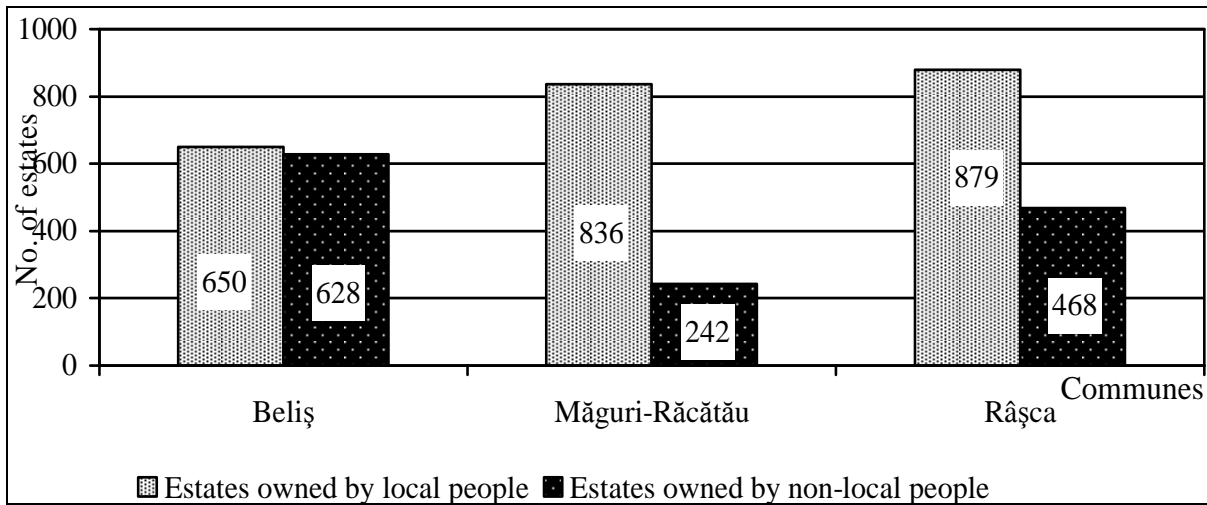
The *Fântânele Reservoir’s surroundings* form an area with about 850 secondary residences. Most of them are located in Beliș commune, which includes in its administrative territory almost all of the area of the Fântânele Reservoir. Beliș commune, with 548 units, (Șteiu, N., Trif, M. I., 2002, p.95) is the most “impregnated” with secondary residences from the entire Muntele Mare-Gilău Mountains region: holiday houses were built in every village. Mărișel is proud of its 182 non-resident house owners (Șteiu, N, Mariș, I., 2000, p.85), and Râșca commune has 122 secondary residences, half of them in Fântânele Resort (Râșca mayor’s office – Vadan Maria, secretary, personal communication, 15.10.2008). In this area, 70 km from Cluj-Napoca, there are also some facilities for tourism: bar, restaurant, sport terrains, sailing or skiing facilities.

*The area formed by the Someșul Cald and the Someșul Rece Valleys* is the nearest in terms of proximity to Cluj-Napoca, and the most frequented one, having about 700 secondary residences (in Gilău and Măguri-Răcățâu communes). Most units are located on the banks of the Gilău, Someșu Cald and Tarnița Reservoirs; only 150 of them are dispersed on the banks of the Someșul Rece Valley, from the village of Someșul Rece to Măguri-Răcățâu (Șteiu, N., Someșan, Cl., Sfârlea, D., 2004, p.23). Because of the fact that the Tarnița Reservoir has become one of the water sources for Cluj-Napoca City, some activities such the use of motorboats or some types of fishing are restricted (Șteiu, N., Someșan, Cl., Sfârlea, D., 2004, p.30), but the short distance from the city made the area very attractive for spending weekends or holidays.

### 3. IMPACT UPON RURAL COMMUNITIES

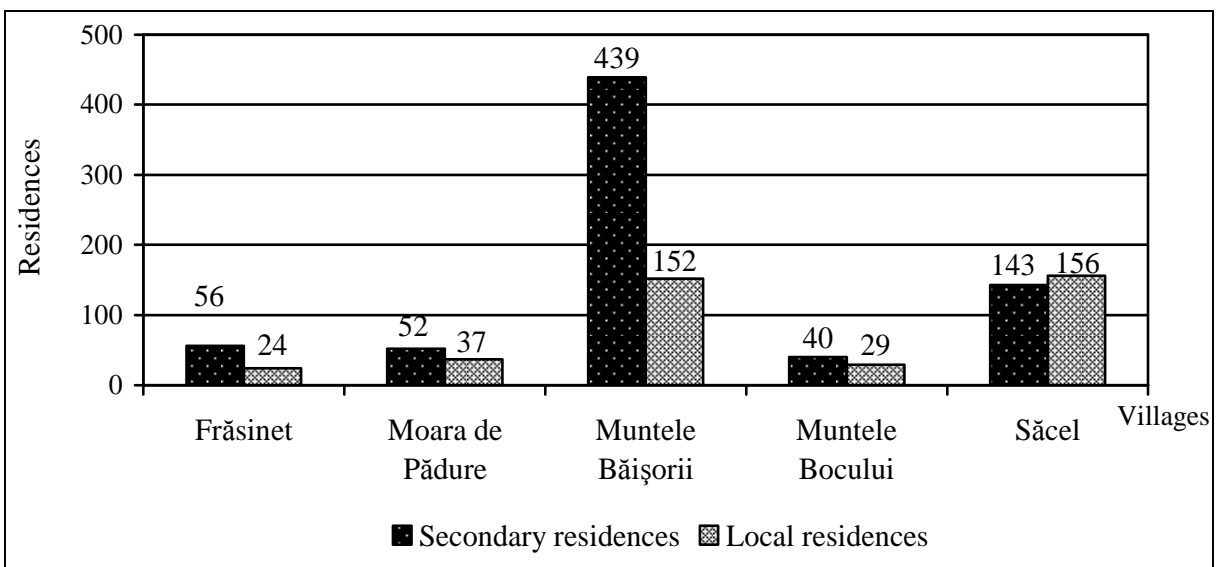
The presence of secondary residences in the rural space has led to social, economic, and functional consequences on rural communities, as analyzed in the next paragraphs.

*Ownership transfer.* As a rule, the number of land plots owned by non-residents is even higher than the secondary residences already built. As the Agricultural Registry shows, in Beliș and Băișoara communes, the number of non-resident owners is almost equivalent with the native ones, in Valea Ierii, Râșca and Mărișel the ratio is around 1:2, and in Măguri-Răcățâu is 1:4 (Figure 2) (data from Beliș, Băișoara, Măguri-Răcățâu, Mărișel, Râșca, Valea Ierii mayor’s offices). The rush towards rural spaces has taken to the rise of estate prices up to three or five times. The small earnings of native people and the much higher prices offered by the city residents opened up the real estate but made it inaccessible to the villagers. This trend could eventually produce alienation of local people and community dissolution.



**Figure 2.** The residents and non-residents' estates ratio for some communes  
(Source: data from Beliș, Măguri-Răcățău and Râșca mayor's offices)

*Functional changes.* The mountainous rural spaces have been in demographic crisis since the 1970's. The aging of population, the migrations towards cities, and the lost facilities (especially school) determined a de-vitalization of some villages. In these cases, the presence of secondary residences brings back to life those villages, but also produces a functional change. Important effects are reported in some small villages where the number of secondary residences exceeds the number of local houses: Dealu Botii and Smida from Beliș commune, Lăpuștești from Râșca, and four out of nine villages of Băișoara commune (according to Băișoara, Beliș and Râșca mayors' offices) (Figure 3). These villages offer now special tourist structures and function on other basis and rhythms. All week long, these places remain almost empty while their population rises suddenly on weekends and holidays. The landscape becomes wild and the farming vanishes slowly.



**Figure 3.** Residents/non-residents ratio in some villages from Băișoara commune  
Source: PUG și Regulamentul Local de Urbanism Comuna Băișoara [General Urban Plan and the Local Urban Regulations of Băișoara Commune], 1998

## IMPACT OF SECONDARY RESIDENCES ON THE RURAL SPACE OF THE GILĂU-MUNTELE MARE MOUNTAINS

*Renewal of living areas.* A change in the look of the villages accompanies this population replacement. As written above, most of the secondary residences are new buildings. This is a good thing as the new houses are more comfortable, but also a bad thing, because of the village de-personalization that results. Therefore, most of the new houses have nothing in common with traditional architecture or building materials. Even if they are wooden houses, their look is often foreign. The patrimony protection is almost invisible in our villages, and the local people change their houses to modern ones, imitating the new residents.

*Relationship between “actors”.* In the studied area, the separation between two main “actors” takes place not only spatially but also socially. As a rule, the new “villagers” do not participate in the community social life (scarce, if any), do not interact very much with the rural neighbours, and the local people’s response is reciprocal. The two main actors do not form a community, but two separated worlds, overlapping occasionally, but usually not interacting. The relationships often resume to the commercial transaction resulting from buying/selling the land or the wood for construction works. Occasionally, the farmers sell agricultural products to the tourists, or local people are involved in construction work or housekeeping as day-workers, but this does not become a permanent source of income. Another relationship, more subtle, but very powerful, is the mimic of city lifestyle by the rural people: “the city people’s secondary residences gave a last hit to the traditional way of living, their presence, by mimetic way, triggered changes in peasants’ lifestyle, interior house and thinking” (Șteiu, N., Trif, M. I., 2002, p.11). The mountain people do not learn how to develop tourism from this situation and the urban people do not really understand the village. It is remarkable that in that area, very few country inns appeared, and no initiative to develop entertainment infrastructure. In Băișoara, a commune with the highest number of secondary residences, as well as with the statute of winter resort, there are only four country inns, two of them owned by non-local people! (Luca, Minodora Susana, 2007, p.80).

On the other hand, for the secondary residents, rural space is only a recreational space, almost tourist-like, and not a living one. Generally speaking, secondary residence owners do not get involved in the way of life or issues of the local communities. There are also exceptions: “Muntele Băișoarii Resort Association” (whose members are secondary residents only) has got involved in the development of the area by accessing funds in order to build facilities; some “sons of the village” made money donations in Râșca, or local and secondary residents built together a church in Dealu Botii (Beliș) (according to Băișoara, Beliș and Râșca mayor’ offices).

*Administrative issues.* According to Government Ordinance No. 27/1996, the persons that reside in the Apuseni Mountains benefit from a reduction of the local taxes by half. In general, despite helping individual people, this law has reduced the local budget, making the communities poorer. But in the communes with numerous non-resident houses and land owners to whom these regulation do not apply (as Beliș or Băișoara) the taxes paid by those people became an important income to the local administration, usually relying to the regional budget (Beliș mayor’s office - Trifu Violeta, secretary, personal communication, 16.10.2008).

On the other hand, because of the rhythmic growth in population, infrastructure and facilities (where they exist) are often overwhelmed. It is the case of Beliș, where water supply issues appear on every winter holiday (Beliș mayor’s office, Trifu Violeta, secretary, personal communication, 15.10.2008), or of Râșca, where waste collection problems occur every weekend (Râșca mayor’s office, Vadan Maria, secretary, personal communication, 15.10.2009). In addition, the increasing pollution (water, air, soil, and noise pollution) is an issue to deal with in all the secondary residence areas. However, these facility problems have a good effect too: they have forced local administration to make projects and apply for European funds. All communes have at present such type of projects in progress and some of local administrations have worked together to solve issues of that kind. This is the case of the Gilău Micro-region’s project for waste collection (Gilău, Măguri-Răcătău, Căpușu Mare communes), of the sewage project in Muntele Băișorii, of the water supply project in Beliș, (Gilău mayor’s office, Dumitraș Răzvan, architect, personal communication, 17.10.2008), etc.

## CONCLUSIONS

Secondary residences are the expression of important changes in the function, perception, and value of rural areas, which reflect a transition of the rural space from a production space (agriculture and forestry) to a tourist space. The secondary residences phenomenon affects the rural space and the local authorities and communities in many ways.

The spatial implantation of holiday houses follows a special pattern: because of their different functions, secondary residence areas and the areas with the native houses overlap only partially or not at all. The patterns of rural impregnation with secondary residences ranges from patterns consisting in some traditional houses inherited by the city inhabitants displayed inside the village itself to patterns of secondary residence agglomerations within the village or next to it (Măguri-Răcătau, Gilău, Beliș) or from small villages taken over by the secondary residents (Smida from Beliș Commune, Lăpuștești from Râșca Commune, etc.) to real tourist resorts (Muntele Băișorii, Fântânele).

In social field, minimum relationships between the two main actors (local people and secondary residents) are generally the rule, but there are few cases when they act as a community (Smida, Muntele Băișorii).

The pressure of this tourist transformation of the rural over the local communities and authorities takes many faces. Positive effects consist in new financial resources for the local budgets, in bringing back to live almost extinct villages, in the renewal of the living domain and in a drive of local administrations for accessing European funds. Inadequate architecture, building development in areas with natural risks, overwhelmed facilities are some negative aspects observed in the studied region as well.

## REFERENCES

- LUCA, MINODORA SUSANA (2007), *Băișoara – locul sufletului nostru* [*Băișoara –the Place of Our Heart*], Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca.
- ȘTEIU, N, MARIȘ, I. (2000), *Mărișel. File de geografie, istorie și folclor* [*Mărișel. Pages of Geography, History and Folklore*], Editura Etape, Sibiu.
- ȘTEIU, N., SOMEȘAN, CL., SFÂRLEA, D-TRU. (2004), *Splendoarea Gilăului. Prezentare monografică* [*The Splendour of Gilău. Monographic Presentation*], Oradea.
- ȘTEIU, N., TRIF, M. I. (2002), *Beliș vatră străbună, studiu monografic* [*Beliș Ancestral Hearth, Monographic Study*], Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca.
- \*\*\* (2006), *Planul de management al Parcului Natural Apuseni* [Management Plan of the Apuseni Natural Park], unpublished.
- \*\*\* (1998), *PUG și Regulamentul Local de Urbanism Comuna Băișoara* [General Urban Plan and the Local Urban Regulations of Băișoara Commune] unpublished.
- \*\*\* (2008), *Situația construcțiilor amplasate în zona inundabilă a albiei majore respectiv sau în zona de protecție* [The State of Buildings Situated in the Flood-Prone Major Riverbed or in the Protection Area], Instituția Prefectului Județului Cluj, Cluj Country Prefect Institution, unpublished.
- [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.htp\\_act\\_text?id=10049](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?id=10049) (accessed on 20.10.2008)