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## SEMIOTIC FORAY INTO THE MOUNTAIN RURAL TOURISM

***Abstract:** Rural mountain tourism development occurs on the bases of skyrocketing complexity: tenderers increase competition, increase consumer requirement, intensify investment, increase professionalism, promotion is more aggressive and ingenious, etc.*

*It becomes increasingly obvious that the cultural development equation of a mountainous areas occupy extensive and consistent elements waiting to be harnessed.*

*Studies related to the creation of concepts and measurement and interpretation of their relevance and impact must generate new solutions and new forms of approach that includes all stakeholders. If we consider communication support between them, we find that the scope of the problem of rapidly expanding fields including cultural, commercial, educational, mobility, health, etc.*

*Justification attribute “smart” associated to tourism area include necessarily its integration and framing into semiotic area. It is what we propose in this paper: to draw attention and to provoke a debate on rural mountain tourism semiotics for a more complete interpretation of verbal and nonverbal language used between stakeholders and decision makers.*

*The topic opens new horizons that turns into new opportunities and new approaches to strategic and tactical considerations which will be finalized in cash and noncash balances in particular and overall balances.*

**Key words:** semiotics, rural tourism, mountain tourism, communication in tourism, culture.

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### 1. Introduction

Ensuring emerging tourism attributes mobilizes us to explore new solutions that meet customer demands/exigencies. Cultural support for tourism is a very delicate issue because contradictions arise as a result of the intensification of competitive approaches. The profit-driven move urges entrepreneurs and business model makers to innovative associations that go out of traditional patterns. These changes lead to manifestations of resistance but also to the activation of more or less aggressive attitudes regarding the “demolition” of myths.

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There is a fierce discussion about the division of Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC), economic activities into 7 categories that better cover today's area of scientific, educational, environmental concerns (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). Regional Biotechnology, (PwC) Luxembourg;

1. Creative industries;
2. Organic industries;
3. Experiences industries;
4. Maritime industries;
5. Mobile industries;
6. Mobility industries;
7. Personalized medicine;

Tourism falls in groups 3 and 6 for accommodation and food services and in groups 1 and 3 for entertainment, artistic creation and interpretation.

The main resistance is manifested by the coordinates of the transfer of science and culture from the cathedral type to the bazaar model (Eric S. Raymond, 1999).

It is clear that mountain rural tourism "is stuffed" of culture. Almost all elements of attraction are based on traditions, nostalgia, association with cultural services, generally on emotions. Under these circumstances, it would be expected that the mountain rural tourism would become thriving and take advantage of all the opportunities. This is not the case, and disappointments and frustrations are demanded by solid studies and interpretations that lead to viable solutions of social and economic recovery.

The topic addressed is a reorientation of the psycho-social and communication mechanisms, whereby the valorization of the tourism relates to the elements of reporting to the individual, group, community and the identification of the significance of the signals that bind the field of communication. There is a desire to interact with other communities either by welcoming guests to their home or community, or by visiting other homes and communities in learning, adopting and adapting lifestyles, defining comfort elements and status good.

All of this prepares the interference of semiotics with culture and the acquisition of benefits (both material and immaterial) on both sides in order to enrich and develop the working tools.

The association of semiotics with tourism takes place on the support of communication, the consistency of which is based on a complex process of attribution of meanings, so useful for combining emotions and predisposition to mental constructions generating well-being.

Tourism requires communication, knowledge, culture from which the body develops "bricks" for interior (psychological) and exterior (sociological) construction to delimit an environment of proximity in which to feel good and to have security secured.

## 2. Semiotic debate favoring the integration of tourism

Semiotics is an invasive science with imperialist ambitions that tends to capture the space of human activity and communication (Eco, Umberto, 1982). This trend is not new and is in line with previous manifestations of natural and then social sciences.

The development of the field began with Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) (Ferdinand de Saussure, 1998) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1939-1914) (Charles Sanders Peirce, 1990). Subsequently, other authors who have developed the subject and areas of application have been added.

For tourism, in the interest of the subject, we mention a series of studies that have led to a diversity of approaches that, however, are far from exhausting the subject.

Thus, a series of works are based on categories of destinations and on the way of representation and characterization by inks, indices and symbols. Both static and dynamic aspects of the tourism phenomenon are taken into account (Jody W. Pennington & Robert C. Thomsen, 2010). In the cited paper, there is a review of some semiotic applications for a variety of applications: market research (Bitoun, 2006, Kessous & Elyette, 2008, Pinson, 1988, Valentine, 2002), advertising (Langrehr & 1995; Warlaumont, 1998), brand (Valentine, 2003), consumer behavior (Cherrier & Murray, 2004); Tourism research (Smith, 2005), etc.

Tourism takes place in a sign empire. Tourists consume signs and signifiers from the cultures they visit (Barthes, Roland, 1982). Those from urban agglomerations are looking for exotic, quiet places. Those who come in less crowded areas are looking for places with tumultuous life.

A semiotic tourism approach to postmodern society brings into discussion both techniques of approach (simulations, approaches to hyperreality) and highlighting the elements of authenticity and places tourism within consumer culture (Arthur Asa Berger, 2011). Investigational tools (Echtner, C., 1999) or iconographic (Sternberg, E., 1997) were used to research the tourism phenomenon.

Tourism does not have a favorable media support and has few defenders. Tourists are often accompanied by bad emotions and are considered deprived, docile, boring and ignorant. (Michal Kolcun, Sebastian Kot, Iwona Grabara, 2014).

In general, the destination is chosen based on pre-existing images available on the communication channels (media, internet, flyers, panels, sites, etc.). (Pearce, P., 1991). But this pre-experience is of intangible nature and can induce a false attitude due to deficiencies in the interpretation and understanding of tourism-related signs.

On the other hand, it is necessary to discern if the way of presentation of a tourist destination is to create an exaggerated image of the place in favor of the tourist, or if this is a reflection of the opinions of the previous tourists (MacCannell, D., 1999). This can cause confusion for both tourists and hosts. (Krippendorff, J., 1987).

Tourism has to highlight contrasts with everyday life (Boorstin, Daniel J. 1975).

Sensitivity to the impact of tourism on fragile host communities or tourist attractions is highlighted and the issue of tourism needs to be addressed so that its authenticity is not affected. The visitor of the post-modern society does not necessarily look authentic. Sometimes they prefer something ludic for pleasure or aesthetic joy (Wang, Ning, 2000).

Shopping made by tourists is not intended to make individual choices because it faces a lot of choices. A predominantly rational tourist is orientated by type of relationship with the cultural image of the society he is visiting. (Douglas, Mary, 1997). It seems that individual psychology of consumption and shopping is not decisive, but rather the intent to follow what differentiates it from other cultures.

The tourist interacts with the new places they visit on the basis of a negotiation. In fact, the behavior in everyday life is a permanent negotiation, but he created habit and entered the subconscious. That is why it is necessary to implement a set of negotiating repertoires for the places to be visited: re-review, re-learning, improvisation / Gottdiener, Mark. 1995).

A review of the tourism and semiotics tourism literature was highlighted, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and loopholes in this area of research, and finally put forward a series of research questions worthy of attention In the future, for both scientists and practitioners. (Ribeiro, N.F., 2009).

It is necessary to develop a semiotic world to highlight not only the tourist attractions, but also the tourists. The structured approach to these complex semiotic processes can lead to spectacular results in the tourism industry. The correct use of signs and markers in the tourism industry may be the difference between a dream holiday and a tourist nightmare (Michal Kolcun, Sebastian Kot, Iwona Grabara, 2014).

Tourism is a practice of considerable cultural and economic importance. But it did not enjoy the theoreticians' attention to ground a performance-oriented practice.

There are a multitude of types of tourists, which produces segregation between distinct classes and creates a field for denigrating. (Jonathan Culler, 1989).

### **3. Elaboration of the concept**

We have proposed a semiotic tourism approach to a few elements that seemed relevant to us. We have taken into account the three fundamental semiotic coordinates and have gone through a series of steps in compatibility with mountain rural tourism. Thus, on the basis of previous experiences and own exploits, a syntactic picture was built as complex and complete as possible. The diagram in Figure 1, which delineated a square location on the coordinates of "material / immaterial", the "public / private"

action, the diagonal “culture / history” with the inclusion of a favorable place and for “nature”.

Included are the most representative of the specific human activities (individual, group and community) able to “bring the news” and attract a wide range of witnesses / viewers / actors to confirm the value of mobility and consumption of cultural act. We see how entrepreneurship and governance are separated. This leads to the identification of the direct and indirect benefits that result in the end. But the most important element is found in the perpetuation of manifestations through which cultural continuity is desired and succeeded.

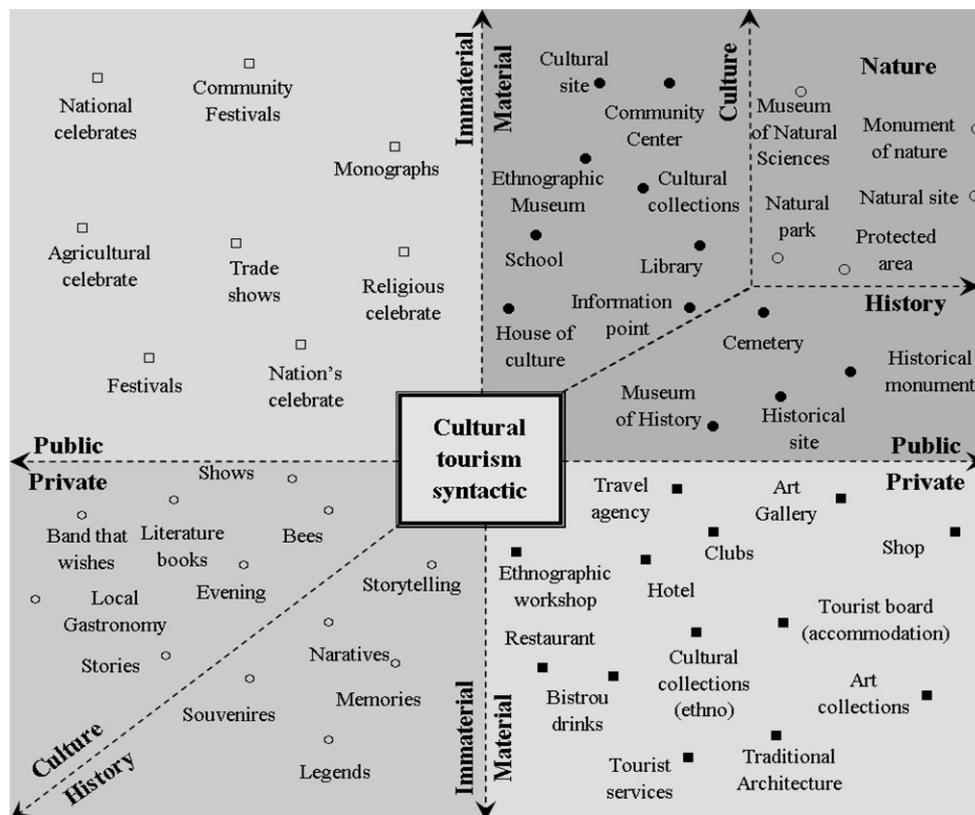


Fig. 1. The syntactic picture of the semiotics of mountain rural tourism (original, the authors).

All these manifestations transmit signals and claim to be received and distributed over a broad spectrum with a significant degree of subtlety. Thus, a complex semantic array is constructed because each of the elements in the syntactic array acquires several meanings. To these are added combined (branched) or

chained meanings. For simplicity, we have proposed to assign only one meaning to each syntactic element and to construct the simplified semantic pannel of Figure 2

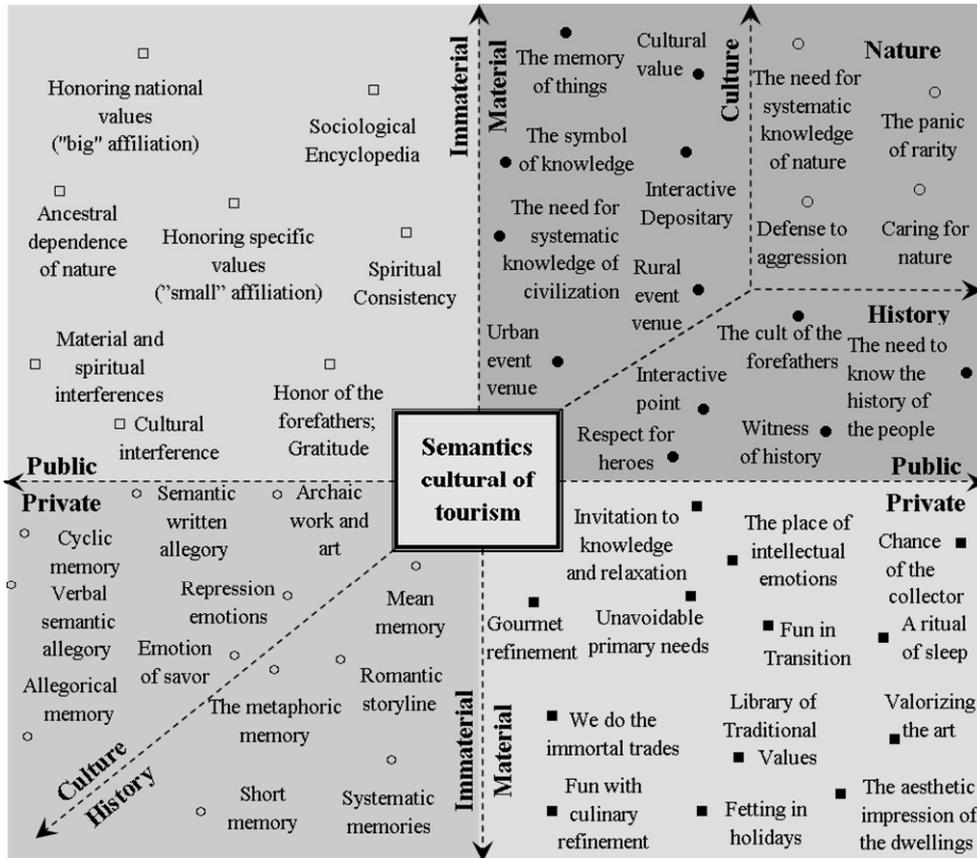


Fig. 2. The semantic map of semiotics of mountain rural tourism (original, the authors) (Read in correlation to Figure 1).

In this table, the relevance of added value generated by tourism becomes more concrete as it expresses messages that involve both hosts and guests. Investing policy is relevant to this picture. Add specific elements to attract tourists on specific human topics: curiosity, information and images promoted with high specificity targets, emotional and attractive messages, brands, logos, etc. All this will be remembered by the actors and the figures of the tourist painting. The mode of assigning messages in the shift from syntactic to semantics is in the semiotic processes themselves.

Based on the representations of Umberto Eco (Eco, Umberto, 1982), we constructed a kind of semiotic algorithm applicable to mountain rural tourism as a support for the transmission of cultural messages (Figure 3).

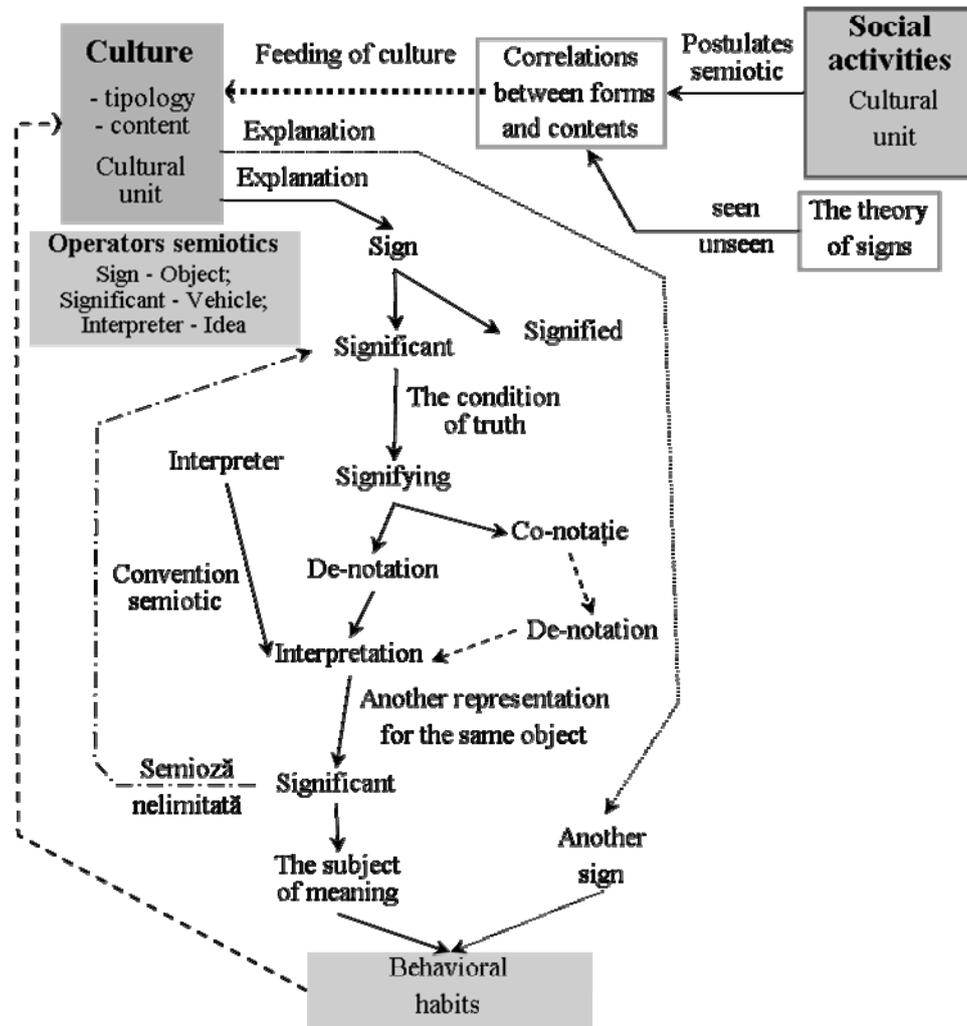


Fig. 3. Semiotic mechanisms of cultural semantics favorable to mountainous rural tourism (originals, the authors).

Culture is a depository of social experiences that have been refined by semiotic postulates or correlated with signs theory (seen and unseen). From these correlations between forms and content a complex of typologies emerges. Significant operators are of three ways: “the sign” is the object (it is the place for something), the meaning is the vehicle (the concept, the representation), and the “interpreter” is the generated idea (the mental, visual, auditory image). The process can go through several iterations resulting in semantic diversity. Its role is not to complicate our lives, but to express in various ways the impact of interactions. In fact, passing these iterations leads to behavioral habits, intellectual knowledge, experiences, etc.

The second correspondence in the semiotic process is the transition to pragmatics. For authors it was a challenge to signify the process. The bell model was used as a way of ordering the elements and their meaningful and interpretive role of resonance amplification for the enrichment of the values (Figure 4). At the top were the material elements with the role of anchoring in real life. Production for meeting needs (materials) is based on experience and know-how accumulation. At the lower end there is imaterial amplification involving intellectual effort and generating knowledge transfer for cultural, spiritual, intellectual benefit. The whole ensemble relates to the procedural mode of spatial-temporal integration of continuity by transmission from one generation to another of dowry and inheritance.

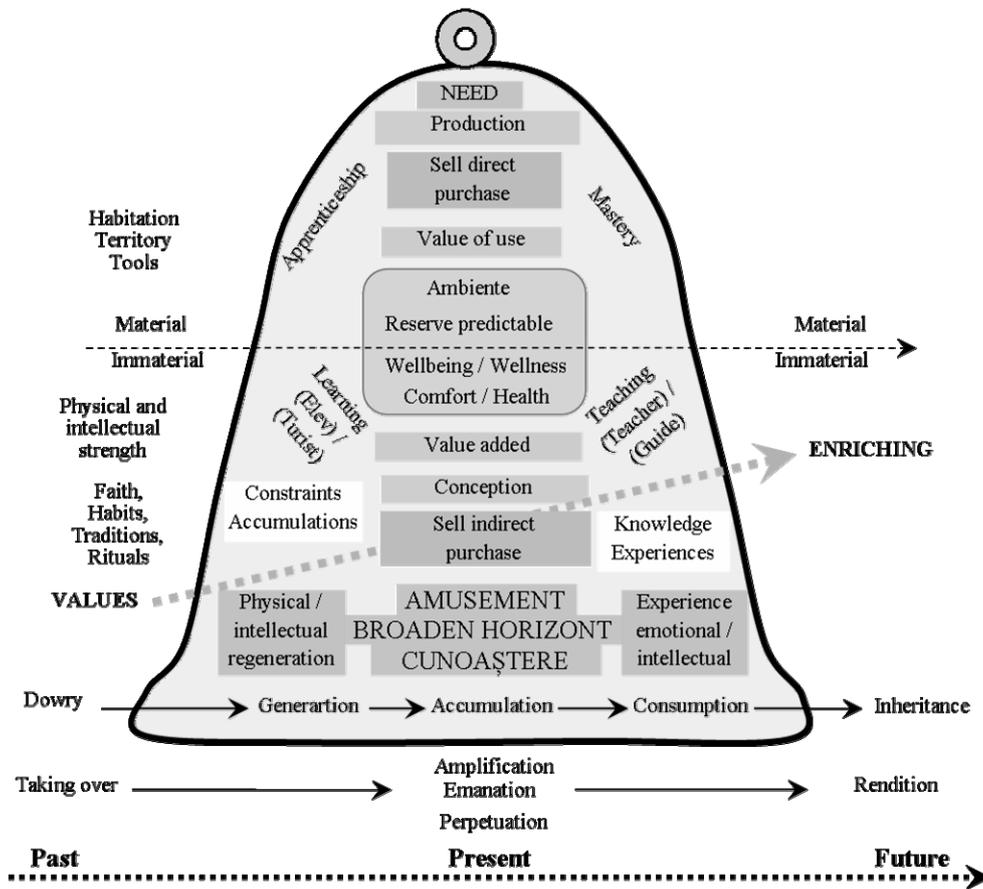


Fig. 4. The pragmatic bell in the context of semiotics of mountainous rural tourism (original, the authors).

In fact, from the complex and complete approach it follows that tourism acquires the significance of a tool / vehicle of cultural continuity in the post-modern

society. This sophisticated form of exchange (material / immaterial) is manifested by the presence of the two categories of actors (hosts and visitors) on social, economic flows on motivational and emotional support of fun / knowledge.

#### 4. Valorisation of the concept

The development of conceptual elements of application of semiotics in tourism provides a flow of solutions capable of satisfying a wide range of exigencies of visitors and hosts. Indeed, many elements of tourism in general are subject to pressure from the flow of communication between the two categories and their semantic content. They are manifested in 3 plans:

- The host role implies an initiation and investment in hospitality science. There is a certain kind of pride of the hosts to get the best out of the guests. This is inferior to visits occasionally made in a household: family members who live far away, relatives, family members, weds, other occasions. The upper mark is given by hosting a consecrated hostel where the host role is supported by a graduate education. Among other things, there is a standard in facilities and investments that mobilizes the host to declare himself fit to receive guests.

Host status requires the use of a code of manners at reception, departure and during the stay. The host must have knowledge of the surroundings and have a “bag of stories” about the region they are in.

- The role of a visitor is also important because it involves an initiation in the consumption of the hospitality service. Prior information requires verification of the compatibility between the potential service offered and the attributes of its personality. This avoids many animosities that can arise in reciprocal messages.

And visitor status requires using a code of manners throughout the stay, appreciating the host and his efforts. It is important for the atmosphere of temporary coexistence and for the well-being that motivated tourism.

- The host – visitor relationship highlights the empire of signs (Barthes, Roland, 1982) and has the ultimate satisfaction of doing well for both sides. Of course, if the visit is repeated, it turns out that the visitor left his first visit. But it forces the host to add extra effort to that novelty element that will still surprise the visitor.

There is a threshold of sensitivity in the host’s status, related to the visitor’s appreciation of the effort made. On the other hand, even if the saying “our client-our master” is enshrined in no way does not force the limits of protecting the dignity of the host who is very emotionally exposed (the hosted host remains in its receiving space, while the rude visitor can Just walk away).

In the public space, the host status is professionalized (organizing cultural events, museums, fairs, festivals, etc.) (Figure 1). The visitor is also aware of more accessible prior documentation.

Forms of communication between the host and the visitor are reported in the pragmatic plan to the forms of consumption that generate satisfaction. Here we identify:

- Physiological consumption: gastro, sleep;
- Psychic consumption: experiences, emotions;
- Cultural (intellectual, spiritual) consumption: information, knowledge, “storytelling”;
- Physical consumption: trips, hiking, sports, laziness;

All of this turns into messages on a wide range of emotional reactions. This is why a discussion about mountain rural tourism in a semiotic context is important.

- What values exist: cultural, historical, community, group, individual;
- What form of presentation they have: materials (sites, objects, artifacts), immaterial (customs, customs, rituals, messages);
- How they are received by the client: curiosity, satisfaction, respect, participation, invitation to be emotionally lived and shared;
- How we build the “story”: it is the most complex message because it involves both the host (the user) and the visitor (naive, cult, documented, initiated ...);
- What we communicate: ancestral messages, symbols, old and / or recent events, parables that need to be deciphered;
- How we communicate: verbal, nonverbal, addressing to the senses, intellect, spirit, general culture;

Perhaps the most complex element in this semiotics on cultural background is empathy. The tourism act is a specific human concern (addressing Maslow’s (Maslow, web) Maslow’s top stepping stones.) The main concern in preparing for the work is the successful completion. The thoughts of the two actors focus on the following questions:

- a. The ratio between supply and demand at primary level:
  - Host: What do I provide / What do I think of what I offer / How do I adjust the offer (minimize costs, maximize benefits);
  - Guest: What do I expect / What do I think about host services / What realistic variants can accept (delight, pleasant surprises);
- b. The ratio between semiotic demand and demand:
  - Host: What kind of personality is the guest / How do I build the offer to surprise him / What would I expect if I were a client / What alternatives do I have to compensate for any shortcomings (anticipation of expectations, self-sufficiency); Will he return (was he pleased)?
  - Guest: What kind of man is the host / What do I think about the host’s efforts to please / How will I behave towards her to reward her effort (expectations, exigencies); I have to say that I am delighted, even if it was not perfect;

On the part of public actors, the most important semiotic elements come from organizing events (celebrations, celebrations, fairs, festivals, special days, fairs)

or setting up special areas: museums, sites, protected areas. The message is a universe of cultural, spiritual, economic values, represented and / or displayed;

We would like to point out that one of the major deficiencies of cultural tourism activities in our area is the lack of pride of the locals. Pride is one of the most important ways of manifesting national affiliation (Kati Dlaske, 2014). Cultural values are permanent. They do not manifest themselves only on occasion or in a festive setting. This involves a belief, a conviction, an enthusiastic participation and, above all, a message full of emotional content to the guests. It is a condition of maintaining an active workout for moments when the host qualities are manifested.

### **5. Model validation**

Validation elements are found in semiotic pragmatism. The following practical and applicative aspects are considered:

1. Success model must have dynamic attributes; The concern for novelty becomes an obligation for the host and a pleasant surprise for the guest. Also, the enrichment in significance increases the value of the host itself (whether public or private) and through the specific iterations in Figure 2, leads to the habit of attendance and thus to the sustainability of the cultural approach;
2. Building the hospitality package can turn into a semiotic performance-generating challenge:
  - The hard part (the support material) and the soft part (the intellectual support) are combined to support the associated signs;
  - The fixed part and the flexible part reflect the adaptation characteristics of the package of tourist services that can be personalized;
  - Consumption: goods and services, translates into the emotion of the first contact and emergence components;
  - Knowledge: information and “stories” form the part of knowledge;
  - Culture: traditions and history, form the part that leads to the awareness of belonging and identity;
3. The study of the guest (consumer) turns into an appropriate attitude and package compatible with cohabitation duration. Differ:
  - Current tastes resulting from the need for occasional “plunging” into the mountainous rural universe;
  - Traditional tastes that turn into permanent forms of “mountain rural tourism”;
4. Accessibility is determined by the capacity to consume mountain rural tourism in authenticated forms (Soica, Simona, 2016). It is, in fact, the place where the reality of places and objectives is confronted with the

image induced by means of promotion at the time of the decision. Various events are organized in which the sequences of the offered packages are accessed:

- Exhibition of samples and photos that include consumer attractions;
  - Tasting ceremonies for gourmet cuisine, drinks, vegetables or preserved fruits, honey etc .;
5. Building “stories” (combinations of elements). These may be about:
- Places (geographically): Surroundings; Landscapes, geography, history, traditions;
  - People: personalities, honesty, trust, earnestness, worthiness;
  - Family: genealogy, history, traditions, worthiness, continuity mission;
  - Society (community): village, monographic information, history, traditions, spirituality, cohesion, strengths;
  - Products with local specifics: wealth, history, emotion, work value, value of the intelligence invested;
6. The book of hospitality: this is a very complex tool to confirm the semiotic pragmatics. Invites you to appreciation and scoring. It is a mirror of the host’s position: institutional, functional, representative, messenger, bearer of traditions, brand, image among consumers, confirming the impact of services, etc.

## 6. Conclusions

The paper is intended to be a tool of analysis and useful first of all for the small mountain rural tourism providers as well as for the marketing of the tourist products by the established operators.

Mountain rural tourism can fully benefit from the semiotic approach to strengthen emerging characteristics;

The most significant impact element is the dynamic attribute of permanent diversification of the package to maintain customer interest;

The public/private partnership puts forward a single semiotic one that confirms the complementarity of actions and the convergence of benefits;

Tourism marketing mechanisms are supported by solid arguments from the semiotic approach;

Semiotic processes that go through the “syntactic – semantic – pragmatic” stages detail the picture of the substantiation of consistent strategies of tourism initiatives both on the coordinates of private initiatives and public support policies.

Tourism development strategies take into account the conclusions of the semiotic approach, but the implementation plan can be fragmented and diversified progressively to quantify the impact translates into benefits and profitability.

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