Abstract: Expression of historicity and territorial identity, the traditional agricultural products comprise a wide range of items, from tourism products, with the supply comprising parks and natural reserves, cultural and ethnographic objectives, to agricultural products. The traditional tourism and agricultural products are the cultural and economic response to the modality of approaching rural biodiversity and the agricultural diversity of rural communities in particular, as these are strongly linked to their area of origin, they have particular soil and weather characteristics, have the technical and organizational specificity of the territory. They are based on certain rural-specific local resources, both material and immaterial, and cannot be replicated in other areas or territorial contexts. The studies carried out so far succeeded in quantifying the induced commercial desirability level on a market saturated by excessively processed food products; at the same time, they are carriers of the scientific messages of investigation of the economic and cultural competitiveness increase.

Key words: traditional product, traditional network

INTRODUCTION

The rural communities provide generous economic and social spaces for the emergence and development of traditional products. An example is represented by the rural area from Ţara Haţegului – Retezat, defined by the cultural and economic specificity of the production of special commodities and services, which benefits from its belonging to a large biodiversity area. The traditional tourism and agricultural products are the cultural and economic response to the biodiversity of the Haţeg rural area and, specifically, to the agricultural diversity of rural communities: “...they are closely linked to their area of origin, they have particular soil and climate characteristics, they have the technical and organizational specificity of the territory. They are based on certain rural-specific local resources, both material and non-material; they cannot be reproduced outside the local context......this implies the importance of nature as „patrimony of goods” of the typical products and the role of local community, culture, identity and contextual knowledge” (Marescotti, A., 2003: p. 2).

Traditionality can be described as an aggregate consisting of socio-economic traditionality (activity as occupation) and zonal traditionality (specific area of activity/occupation). The determining processes are concentrated both in the zonal area, with a strong radiation of traditional occupational structures generated by the geographic specificity, and in the area of rural micro-systems, the occupational structures specific to under-sized rural areas being promoted. As a consequence, the traditional product emerges, with a significant role in the protection of local culture, local tradition, in fostering rural dynamics, mainly in the hilly and mountain areas; it is a carrier of old rural traditions and customs, of work relations specific to the zone, of certain values characteristic to local biodiversity. Regardless of its materialization form, the traditional product represents the mark of a rural area well-defined by the characteristics of the geographic, ecological and occupational structures conditions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of the traditionality issue focused on the agricultural products from Ţara Haţegului area. In order to identify the existence and operation forms of traditional agriculture practice, in-depth interviews were used (10 peasants/farmers). The operation area of farms on which traditional activities are carried out describes agricultural
traditionality enclaves that overlap the high biodiversity areas. The areas of the communities Râu de Mori, Râchitova and Pui are rural areas that can also provide another type of traditional attractions due to their location in national or natural parks or which have museum-villages on their territory (the case of the village Mesteacăn, commune Râchitova).

The results of the in-depth interviews were processed by ATLAS software. The qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews on traditional agriculture from Țara Hațegului, conducted during the field surveys from the period August – October 2009, was based on ATLAS Ti 5.0 software, as a tool dedicated to the quantitative analyses (useful for the analysis for the multiple, large documents, as it is the case of in-depth interviews conducted during the field surveys in Țara Hațegului).

RESEARCH RESULTS

The strongest traditionality is perceived in the rural area from Hațeg for the animal raising activities, as main occupation for producing “ewe cheese”, which is conjugated with the radiation power of sheep raising occupation at zonal level; an obvious tradition also exists for the “bee honey” production, which has a more limited area, as it is generated by rural micro-systems (a community or neighbouring communities).

In the case of farmers who carry out traditional activities, the peasants’ existence plans were confused with the economic activity: “I got started a long time ago. Since I was born...we had sheep on the household since I was born” (Iovâneasa Pavel, “ewe cheese” producer, Râu de Mori), ”I was born with it. I inherited it from my parents. I have around 700-800 plum trees” (Sandu Septimiu, “plum brandy” producer, Râchitova). The activity tradition comes from the origin household endowment, and the continuation of the occupational pattern is in line with the rural family traditionality. There is a hierarchy of the time of livestock ownership overlapping the moment of own activity initiation, depending on the traditional product:

- for the product with the strongest traditionality, “ewe cheese”, it is the third generation that transmitted the activity: “from what my parents and the people from the village told me, I know that my grand-grandfather had sheep and 2 shepherds, two servants as they were called in those times. I do not exactly know the number of animals.” (Iovâneasa Pavel, “ewe cheese” producer, Râu de Mori);
- for the agricultural products with strong tradition, i.e. “goat cheese”, “bee honey” it is the second generation that transmitted the activity: “We have had goats since we were born. Our grandfather had.” (Dudău Dinu, “goat cheese” producer, Râu de Mori);
- regardless of the traditionality level, the family of origin is the carrier, the generator of present occupations: “Well, we started from 20 sheep. They were on our parents’ household” (Iovâneasa Pavel, “ewe cheese” producer, Râu de Mori); “Since my early childhood, I remember that my parents had cows, sheep, everything.” (Ciolea Ioana, “mixed cow and ewe cheese” producer, Pui).

The whole rural area, as an economic and cultural aggregate generated a strong traditionality owing to natural factors, materialized into the production of certain ecological products: “We considered that we cannot leave sheep herding disappear from Țara Hațegului..... This was an ambition of ours, not to let disappear an elite from Hațeg area, because thousands of sheep used to be here. At least in our village for instance, there were more than 2,000 sheep, say the people who lived in those times. Now we have only a little more than 200. There are localities where there is no sheep any longer. We said that it is a pity, Hațeg area was known for sheep raising, and it still is.” (Iovâneasa Pavel, “ewe cheese” producer, Râu de Mori).

Another zonal traditionality aspect is materialized into its proliferation at the level of close/neighbouring community entities: “...friend from another village, Peștenița, from the
I began to like it, as I helped him in his work. I began to like this activity. I got started together with him. He multiplied them, they died, he multiplied them again, and they died again. ...slowly, slowly, they got multiplied. Now we have 53 families......This guy - Balta Unirii - General Berthelot – who gave me the honey collector, has been collecting for a long time. There is another guy who does this. We said that we might get a better price”. (Avramescu Miuțu, “bee honey” producer, Râchitova).

The strongest process that influences the tradition of an activity and consequently the production of traditional ecological agricultural products is the “actional contagion”; the social efficiency is proved by the large number of answers referring to the influence existing at village level, of social imitation of the activities of neighbours, of people from the community they belong to: “In our area, these plum trees, a local variety, are not grown under intensive system. These are plum-trees grown from the side shoot. Hence they are not planted...The shoots grown from the trees, after 2-3 years, are moved and planted into suitable places to develop...it is a local variety...a semi-wild variety. I think that it is the only variety of genuine plum-brandy (“tzuica”)...It exists in the commune Râchitova, in its component villages: Ciula Mică, Vâlioara, Ciula Mare, Boița. ...it is a round-shaped plum, medium-sized, bluish in colour. It is not the summer variety! When you eat it, it tastes harsh. It has a particular sweetness in it when it is ripe, but you feel its strength when you eat it.”(Sandu Septimiu, “tzuica” producer, Râchitova).

The development of the traditional activity implies the existence of a motivational complex structured by economic reasons – financial benefits – or by personal reasons – passion, behavioural habits acquired in the family of origin. In the case of traditional livestock raising activities, the motivational complex is amplified, from the production of traditional agricultural products is the “actional contagion”; the social efficiency is proved by the large number of answers referring to the influence existing at village level, of social imitation of the activities of neighbours, of people from the community they belong to: “In our area, these plum trees, a local variety, are not grown under intensive system. These are plum-trees grown from the side shoot. Hence they are not planted...The shoots grown from the trees, after 2-3 years, are moved and planted into suitable places to develop...it is a local variety...a semi-wild variety. I think that it is the only variety of genuine plum-brandy (“tzuica”)...It exists in the commune Râchitova, in its component villages: Ciula Mică, Vâlioara, Ciula Mare, Boița. ...it is a round-shaped plum, medium-sized, bluish in colour. It is not the summer variety! When you eat it, it tastes harsh. It has a particular sweetness in it when it is ripe, but you feel its strength when you eat it.”(Sandu Septimiu, “tzuica” producer, Râchitova).

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The selling modality of traditional products is influenced by the “archetypal” pattern of the traditional product, on one hand; on the other hand, it has a series of attributes pertaining to commercial modernity. In general, the marketing channels are based on traditional relations, materialized into modern forms. Regardless of the product type, crop, livestock, or its quality generated by the ecological sustainability level, there are the same traditional paths and/or a faithful clientele.

Traditionally, it is the producer’s professional prestige that counts in the commercial act; many times it is the product that defines the producer, it is as an agnomen of the person who sells it: “...people say: look, the beekeeper came with the honey”. (Avramescu Miuțu, “bee honey” producer, Răchitova)

In the selling of the vegetable products, the personal histories are marked by the precarious means of transport and low price: “I go to the market place in Hunedoara. They have a price good for nothing. 1 RON, even 0.80 or 0.70. If I go by car and carry 7 bags, 7x4, thus about 300 kg, 250-300 RON is the gasoline, I have to pay for the stall at the market, the weighing scale and everything. I remain with 0.50 Ron profit. It is very difficult”. (Sandu Septimiu, “potatoe” producer, Răchitova)

For the animal products there is a faithful, flexible network of customers, adapted to the consumers’ needs; furthermore, in the case of the “goat cheese” product, the supply, backed up by an information process, almost invented the demand, introducing new food habits:

“Then I have my own customers, like you. They taste the cheese, like it and say: „Mister Dinu, bring me 5 kg of cheese on Monday”. I bring the cheese when the people need it. I have my own customers; I go to their homes with the cheese. In the Jiului Valley area: Petroșani, Vulcan, Lupeni, Aninoasa, throughout the valley, but not on the agri-food markets. Thus, I do not go on the authorized market in town with this product. [How many years did it take to create this clientele?] About 5 years. [How did people learn about you?] From word of mouth. At the beginning I went in Vulcan and Aninoasa. A man came, bought cheese, then he recommended it to an acquaintance of his, to a relative, and from person-to-person communication I am now in the situation when the demand is greater than the supply. Well, the demand is greater than I am able to produce...by my own car, once a week. People tried to understand that I cannot travel 60 km for each in part. Then we established a day in the week...on Friday at the beginning of the week-end. From Friday to Friday, everybody who wants cheese call me up: “I want this amount, I want this amount”. (Dudău Dinu, “goat cheese” producer, Râu de Mori).

As the rural system from Țara Hațegului – Retezat is characterized by multiple socio-economic potentialities, the trade with traditional products is strongly favoured by other types of activities: tourism is one of the factors with direct impact upon the increase in the sales of traditional products. In reality, the production of this type of agricultural commodity is generated by the local natural specificity, material and non-material; this specificity is defined by the fact that nature includes a “patrimony of goods”. The patrimonial development of local communities presupposes an endogeneity dimension, in which tourism, among other economic activities, stimulates the modernization of rural structures and processes. Putting together the two elements, the production of traditional goods and rural tourism is part of the individual farmers’ strategy:

“In summer time, I have the pasture in the Râuşor area, at 1050-1100 meters. There is a tourism area there. In this way, a small trade area was created. Tourists come directly to the sheepfold. They eat right at the sheepfold. This is another reason why we still have the “Țurcană” and dairy sheep breeds..... As it is a tourism zone, there is a serious clientele among those who have chalets in that area, in the mountains. Each year they buy the cheese. Then there are the tourists. There are tourists who come in the area each year...
and they know about the cheese and they buy it. There are also tourists in transit, they pass by, taste and buy. I never saw somebody coming and not buying anything, this never happened to me. (Iovăneasa Pavel, “ewe cheese producer”, Râu de Mori).

The sale of traditional products coupled with the rural tourism forms is a new modality of recomposing the local economic spaces by putting into value the local opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

The opportunities of traditional product competitiveness depend on the way a farmer can support, can reproduce the “archetypal” model of the product and sell it.

It could be noticed that each investigated person has his/her own network that made it possible, up to the present moment, to obtain a traditional product and impose/promote it on the market; the attributes of traditionality, of the “archetypal” pattern of the rural area Țara Hategului – Retezat reveal the accentuation of certain dimensions, the specific materialization of others, depending on the product type, in the category of the producer’s rural household and on the rural sub-area in which the investigated producer operates economically and socially. The analysis identified the direct relation between competitiveness and nature, the size of the relational system generated by the traditional producer; these economic players can be the following:

- **Subsistence households with commercial functions for the vegetable products** – the “potatoe” producers belong to the same rural subsystem – described by the village Ciula Mică, commune Râchitova – and promote the same morphologic type of network as there are essential attributes, determined by “traditionality”, “motivation and social type of activity”, “product valorization”, “technological traditionality” and attributes that describe the characteristics of “roles distribution”, of “commercial traditionality”; both categories of attributes morphologically describe a producer’s own network. Structurally the network is characterized by the producer’s actional, valoric relations, fundamental for the entire production and sale process. The two economic players have a network defined for certain values of the fundamental attributes; structurally, the network is built up upon specific differentiations: in the case of a producer, the “technological traditionality”, the “specific treatments” are much stronger, the approach being much more technical, which generates a much more noticeable involvement. The reference to the traditionality of sale and the nature of perception of resources on own household confer the network specific characteristics of each producer: there is a net differentiation between the strong perception of resources, on a global basis – land, agricultural, human resources – and the perception focusing on certain resources – mainly agricultural and human;

- **Subsistence households with commercial functions for the animal products** – the networks generated by the economic players get more complicated, depending on the demo-economic specificity of the households involved in the production of traditional ecological agricultural products. The two producers, representative for this category, have much more ample networks, compared to the producers of vegetable products:

  - traditionality – local and zonal, motivation and social type of activity, (strongly influenced by the demo-social characteristics of the economic player and the resources – land, agricultural, human resources – of the household), morphologically and structurally describe two types: a type of simplified network and a larger network, in which the motivational attributes are much more explicit, more comprehensive;

  - the technical traditionality of the product is strongly differentiated by the personal characteristics of the social players: a relational scheme based on a lower educational level, on the existence of the farmer status that implies an insecure and minimum income, creates the premises for a simple morphology of the network. In the conditions in which the economic player is characterized by a high educational level, a double social status and
relatively high income, the relational scheme specific to the technical product traditionality is amplified.

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