

The Traditional Wooden Gates of Maramureş (Romania) As a Part of the Place Legitimization Processes

MARIN ILIEŞ
GABRIELA ILIEŞ

Basic gate functionality is surpassed by the aesthetic and social function. It is not only a separator, a defensive structure, a property limit, but also a statement.

Marin Ilieş

Associate professor at the Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University, Extension of Sighetu Marmăţiei.

Gabriela Ilieş

Associate professor at the Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University, Extension of Sighetu Marmăţiei.

1. Introduction

1.1. Study Area

THE LAND of Maramureş is situated in the northwestern part of Romania. It is a relatively remote historical region referred to locally and in the regional studies as “Țara Maramureşului,” in translation Maramureş Land or Country (Cocean 1997; ICOMOS 1999; Dăncuş 2010). In Romania, there are twenty-one regions with land-features, usually located in and around the Carpathian lowlands, somehow similar to the French notion of ‘Pays’ described by Paul Claval (1993, 161). Moreover, they are matrixes preserving archaisms and an attachment to a traditional way of life, untainted customs etc., hence their obvious regional identity and social capital.

Traditional rural architectural heritage is important for the aesthetics of the built environment, but the combination with the contemporary elements makes the landscape interesting.

Almost every village has at least one wooden church, seven of which have been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1999 (ICOMOS 1999; Ilieș et al. 2016). Besides the wooden churches, the landscape is characterized by wooden dwellings and their monumental wooden gates. There are over 1,000 wooden gates in Maramureș, where old traditional gates coexist with the newer ones, in a specific dynamic based on the interaction between the artist, the patrons, the work of art and the art consumers, leading to continuous transformations.

Geographically, the natural setting of the area consists of hills and mountains, with 4,700 ha of virgin forests, a wide range of wood species occupying 48% of the region's surface. From this perspective, Maramureș is known as the "land of the wooden civilization," due to the vernacular architecture capitalizing on this locally available building material (Ilieș et al. 2018). Until the last decade of the 19th century, wooden architecture was the norm, a situation which determined its present status of cultural marker (Ilieș and Ilieș 2015).

1.2. Theoretical Background

CHANGES OBSERVED at multiple levels in the mountain rural landscape, or in social patterns and political discourse, raised the question of place legitimization. Furthermore, they explain the shift towards the artistic gate as a replacement for the heritage pieces in the traditional built environment. The goal of this empirical research is to focus on a number of phenomena related to the wooden gate, approached through the appropriate lenses. The relevant context analysis is based on historical, social, economic and political determinants.

First, the gates have a historically perpetuated symbolism. They used to mark the residences of the noble families who were allowed to have this kind of gate beginning with the Middle Ages (Popa 1997, 142). These noble families clustered in noble villages, hence the uneven distribution of the old heritage gates across the region. In time, the consciousness of the noble lineage changed into a rural tradition, fostering newer generations of gates, and ultimately became a social status symbol and an art form. Nevertheless, innovative locations were imagined for the artistic gates, mainly in the public space, not only within the village, but also in open spaces, in the natural landscape of the mountains, featuring an embedded discourse and representing metaphors of strength, stature and of dominance. This means that the gate is the metaphor for a gateway to the mountains and communities of Maramureș, a portal to empowerment and freedom.

Second, contemporary wooden gates are not heritage pieces, but artistic works at the boundary between art and craft. Moreover, materials, features and

innovations are combined to produce functional, unique and thought-provoking wooden structures. In this respect, the gates may appear as tangible output, but in fact they are coming out of the heart and soul of an artist. As architectural pieces, conceived by masters who call themselves “artists,” the present-day wooden gates are inspired by generations of mostly anonymous artists, both craftsmen with the knowledge of building high wooden structures and sculptors rendering inherited mystical symbols. The first renowned artist who performed re-interpretations of the traditional wooden gates was Traian Bîlțiu-Dăncuș, who in 1936 devised a gate on five pillars, heavily decorated and resembling a triumphal arch (Dăncuș 2010, 34). From this point forward, several artists experimented with gates on five, six or even eight pillars, re-defining the traditional three-pillar structure. The set of symbols decorating these gates suffered relatively little change until the 1980s due to their occult or sacred meaning, and partly to the influence of the Romanian traditionalist current in the area. Contemporary wooden gate artists do not visibly sign their masterpieces, although they are not anonymous. Furthermore, they are organized in artistic guilds and display artworks in exhibitions worldwide.

Finally, the wooden gates tell stories about Maramureș. As a consequence, the storytelling drive created the need to translate the spatial text (Dovey 2002, 1). Ultimately, artists become storytellers forced to pass on the stories they were told as apprentices. This does not imply that a gate requires explaining in order to be understood, nor that tradition has overcome the art. It is about conveying emotions and expressions to an educated as well as a profane public. In this respect, newer wooden gates are indeed contemporary art as they re-interpret the sacred symbols, bridging innovation and tradition.

Because they are meant to function at the limit of the public space or on the public domain, the wooden gates structure the space both in a geographical and a sociological sense (Sennett 2010). Nevertheless, gates are also thresholds between public and private spaces, displayed in public, accessible to anyone willing to gaze at or admire them. Therefore, they trigger changes in the perception of the space they frame—in terms of depth, perspective, skyline etc., or transform an entryway into a portal to a special realm.

From a social perspective, the gate has social value, as it evolves and describes spatial patterns. There are villages renowned for their wood artists or for their interesting gates. Initially, the gate depicted the status of the owner, either directly (through size, large and massive) or indirectly (showcasing the richness of the carvings). However, new ideas originating in the countries of temporary migration for work, usually correlated with the acculturation described by Anghel (2013), do not include the wooden gate, outlining the preference for the usual type of gate (metal or concrete posts with wrought iron or wood panels). Some

families surpass this stage and continue with the so-called traditional gate, which is in fact a modern reinterpretation of the heritage gate. Although the wooden gate is largely accepted, only a few can afford the price of commissioning a new one, thus revealing a socio-economic pattern.

From a political vantage point the wooden gate is part of the identity reservoir exploited in the discourse of the region (the gate towards something...) with an impact on patrimony, tourism, and heritage protection policies. The wooden gates of Maramureș, along with the wooden churches, became metaphors for the Romanian culture and community, involving the artwork in a legitimization process. They represent the “semantic architecture” as defined by Egenter, used in the process of social control and centralization (Egenter 1984; Dăncuș 2010). As a result, the dual nature of the discursive processes determining the immaterial and material “production of the place” is well defined in this case (Saarinen 2004). During the last century, Maramureș was the gateway towards the authentic Romania, the first land-type region every Romanian thinks of. Therefore, graphic and heraldic values were attached to it: the silhouette of a wooden church seen through the gate, the sun framed by the gate, the gate as an emblem of several villages, and the logo of Maramureș, a place brand and tourist brand. This falls under Suchman’s concept of legitimacy as a generalized perception that “the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman 1995, 574). Moreover, it correlates with the results of research studies conducted on Romania’s iconic historical regions, showing the strength of the gateway metaphor, even in the 21st century (Stăncioiu et al. 2011; Ilieș and Ilieș 2015).

Regarding other Romanian regions such as Transylvania, the practice of installing wooden gates is also present, with minor aesthetic differences, but with the same discursive role. On the other hand, the number of gates built for Romanian communities worldwide in order to reinforce identity is continuously increasing (Ilieș 2007). Capitalizing on that aspect, local authorities erect monumental gates in front of institutions and at the main entrances, overusing the localism. Nevertheless, while the traditional gates are highly valued, heritage protection policies have never included them.

1.3. Materials and Methods

THE RURAL landscape of Maramureș has a great variety of wooden gates, a number of studies outlining related aesthetic and functional aspects. An in-depth analysis conducted after our preliminary field research directed us towards considering an interdisciplinary paradigm with ethnographic

insights. Therefore, the study combines the subfields of cultural studies on public art with geography (in social and political perspective).

In order to respond to the complex questions raised, the present research uses data drawn from a variety of sources: field observations and the subsequent database, unstructured interviews with artists, owners and a number of stakeholders, followed by discourse analysis on media content, both body text and image tags.

The ethnographical theories and views on the continuous changes of the traditional architecture directed the conceptualization towards a clear distinction between the gate as an architectural structure with embedded artistic elements and the traditional heritage in rural communities (Nistor 1977 and 1980; Rendell 2006; Dăncuș 2010; Bilțiu 2010). The theory around the relationship between art and public space, or public art as a conversation piece, has helped to outline the categories for the discourse analysis (Krause Knight 2008; Sennett 2010; Mitrache 2012; Zebracki 2014). In addition, studies on the effect of public art on features such as visual properties and the affective appraisals of landscapes clarified the attributes of the context of the investigated phenomena and the additional intervening conditions (Motoyama and Hanyu 2014).

2. Findings

2.1. The Perception of the Wooden Gates of Maramureș As a Source of Place Legitimization

DIFFERENT VIEWS on the features of a wooden gate have been highlighted more or less objectively by scholars, artists, patrons and the public, outlining what is called the Maramureș gate, distinguishing it from the wooden gates from other historical regions. Therefore, the first category is strongly related to the visual elements, those important features that shape the contemporary village-*scape*, including its intrinsic artistic value.

Interestingly, the timeline correlates with the evolution of the perception on wooden gates in the Land of Maramureș. Evidence about the features of the wooden gates before the 18th century is scarce, but documents on churches or dwellings list several masters using traditional knowledge in their work. In the 18th century (but not only) anonymous gate artists performed rituals while sculpting and erecting gates at property limits; beneficiaries, communities were part of this public act (Nistor 1977, 24). At community level, the educational role of the art was being perceived; it had the power to mold the spirit in a specific ritualistic and scripted manner. Thus, old symbols on the pillars are

preserved, their rank and order are well planned, although newer carving styles were developed.

Throughout the 19th century masters began to sign their work and a certain division appeared between them, based on skills and talent: self-trained masters (devising gates occasionally, mainly for family members) and real masters (inheriting the workshops from the forefathers and working as professionals). Towards the end of the century, wood became expensive, better regulated and reserved, and hence the status symbol function of the gate becomes obvious, for only selected social strata were allowed to have one (Dăncuș 2010, 35). Moreover, this was an important period for regional development, as significant steps forward were taken in urban areas which impacted the rural hinterland in terms of building material and style.

The 20th century saw the artistic reinterpretation of the traditional gate, beginning with the third decade. It is a complicated period for the mountain landscape, due to several deforestation/reforestation phases, doubled by political uncertainty. During the first important deforestation, around 1910, the upper limit of the forest changed its shape, along with the areas penetrated by narrow gauge railways (Ilieș 2007, 82). Nevertheless, the First World War changed the political situation of Maramureș, as the newly established border on the Tisza River isolated it from the main body of the country due to the lack of transport infrastructure southwards. It was isolated and insulated for 30 years in the interwar period, when its main town, Sighetu Marmăției, turned from a central economic hub into a distant periphery. Consequently, the region entered a self-preservation state, perpetuating the established values of the community, later defined as identity markers (churches, dwellings, culture, etc.).

Starting with the 1950s the access to a traditional wooden gate was no longer limited by social constraints; the communist period deleted the social strata and gave access to new beneficiaries in a pseudo-democratization process; the gate becomes an economic status symbol. In addition, scholars start to stress the need to protect the heritage (as remnants of a good old mountain aristocracy, now silenced) and shift the concept from in situ preservation of the most valuable artworks to the public museum which offers shelter and a good knowledge of aesthetic norms. Artists were encouraged to search for their style, used in propaganda, and were elevated to the rank of local VIPs. New entrance gates, for institutions and on the public domain, were commissioned, paving the way for today's shift—the identity discourse.

The 21st century is the age of publicly financed gates, new monumental and challenging structures (in terms of technical execution) in a mountainous environment, rising debates on their aesthetics and opportunity. The natural and the traditional heritages are important for the local development strategies, as

resources for a sustainable, resilient community. Therefore, UNESCO and Natura 2000 offered a set of guidelines for preservation policies, applied symbolic labels of uniqueness and value enhancing cultural and eco-tourism (Turnock 2002; Ilieş 2007). Moreover, a number of properties, wooden churches with obvious cultural value, monuments from the 18th and 19th centuries, were not included on the World Heritage List. As a result, serious issues emerged about the nature of cultural goods to be included “in UNESCO” and come under the potentially protective aura of this label.

2.2. Required Visual Elements Defining a Wooden Gate

THE ARTWORK’S *appearance* (dimensions, scale, material, color, and texture) defines the landscape by introducing the wood in its most refined aspect. Nowadays, the entirely wooden built landscape in rural areas is fading away slowly, only some landmarks remain: gates and churches. While the church is confined within strict rules, the metaphor of the gate is different, more creative. Krause Knight (2008, 115) suggests that there is a need for the education of artists in order to preserve aesthetic boundaries, quality assurance of a sort, but in the making of a traditional gate other instances set the limit: the sacred rules meant to protect the household. Therefore, the owners specifically demand them. However, when meaning is no longer acknowledged, artists have the possibility to innovate.

Nevertheless, the ongoing debate on the need to preserve the traditional wooden gates causes friction between ethnographers and artists. Ethnographers urge the artists to follow well-established aesthetic and architectural canons, to create as usual, without articulating the inventive aspects (Dăncuş 2010; Nistor 1977). The artists, on the other hand, believe that their role is to discover value, to nurture new metaphors or to “test the value of the old ones,” and to foster the experience and democratization of art. In conversations, the artists refer to the 21st century gate as traditional, because they abide by a specific aesthetics, in terms of height, richness of the motifs, and materials.

Traditional wooden gates feature visual elements which could determine their artistic nature: scale, skyline, symbols, and materials. From the perspective of *scale*, the gate seems oversized and in contrast with the space it guards or the house it frames. Usually, the gate is a large rectangular structure, measuring 4 m in width by 3 m in height, with a certain degree of monumentality. Stability is derived from the pillars connected by a shingled roof. Massive gates have three to six 50 cm-wide beams. Consequently, functionalists tend to correlate the size with the wealth of the family in a rather simple way: the larger the landed estate—the

bigger the gate, as one's harvest must fit below the gate when transported. In reality, the situation is more complex, as social and political factors are also involved.

Located along the road, the gate has little impact when seen from a distance; it reveals itself only when admired from a sufficiently close range. As result, the scale is combined with the skyline of the gate in order to create the commanding effect. From an aesthetic perspective, *the skyline* may be simple, linear, resembling the heritage gate, or combined with two lower smaller side roofs, turrets and crosses (fig. 1).

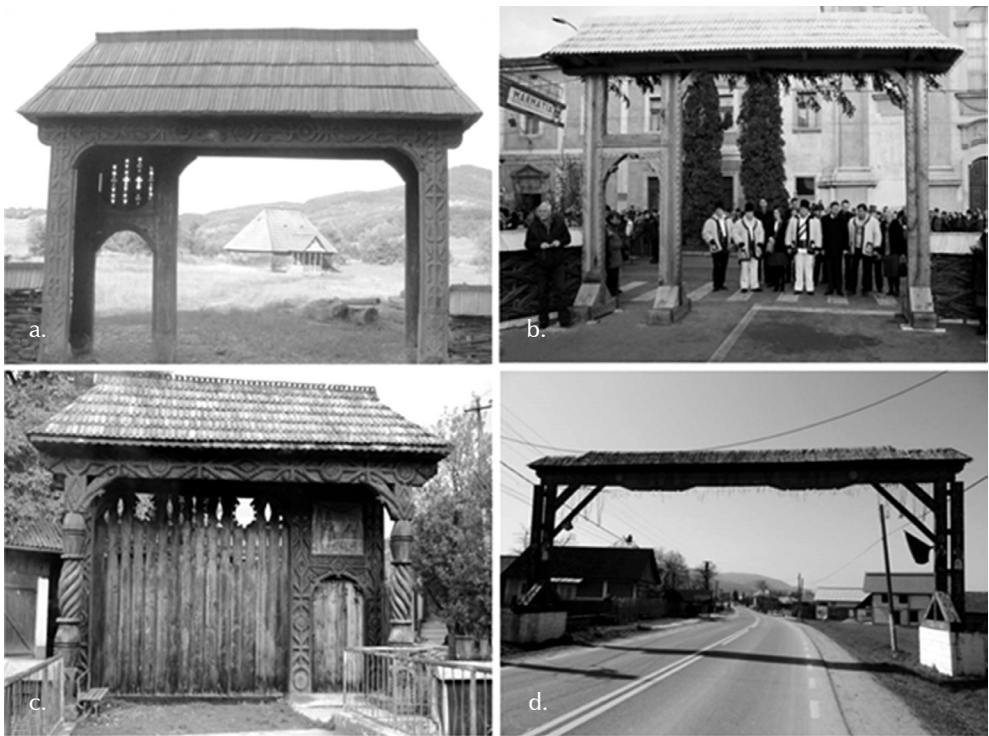


FIG. 1. The gate as frame and portal.

- a. Traditional wooden gate, situated in the Museum at Sighetu Marmăției (1906);
- b. New gate set for a winter traditional festival in Sighetu Marmăției (2013);
- c. New gate in front of a household in Glod (2005);
- d. Colorful entrance as a welcoming sign in Săpânța (2004).

Symbols and decorative elements draw the attention of the audience with their genuinely artistic features. The vertical pillars of the gate offer a narrow, elongated frame for sculptures, defining the people from Maramureș as “homo geometricus” (Bilțiu 2010, 36–38). Geometric, skeomorphic, symbolic and cosmomor-

phic motifs are dominant: solar symbols (a wide range of rosettes), the tree of life with rope (combined in themes following the life of a human being or as the structure of the Universe), wolf's teeth, water symbols (curves and zigzags), house guardians (snakes, sacred animals), tools (letters, forks, axes) etc. They are arranged from the bottom to the top of the pillars, only on the outer side, thus communicating with the public. The content of the message depends on the artist, and sometimes on the owner. Each gate has a set of compulsory symbols and several innovative ones. As result, artists have enriched the palette of sculpted symbols, from 40 in the seventies to 85 nowadays (Nistor 1980; Bilțiu 2010). The newer works integrate motifs from contemporary wooden art in a sort of symmetry or calligraphy.

Wood as material is ephemeral, but in Maramureș it is a symbol of continuity. When a part of the structure decays it is replaced by another similar piece. For example, dendrochronological analysis supports archive findings that the wooden church in Ieud, mentioned in documents since 1364, is still in place, with parts of different ages (Babos 2004, 99). Wood was the material of choice when solid brick or stone buildings were banned by the authorities in the 16–17th century, forcing the people to adapt and to master new techniques (Ardelean 2012, 354). Wood is the perfect material for delicate and durable decorations, substantiating the various nicknames of the region: “wooden civilization” or “the land of wood.”

2.3. Metaphors, Patterns and Themes

WOOD AS material, color and ecosystem communicates about the place, the mountains and the people. Along the centuries the wood offered sanctuary to the population of the mountain areas in complex ways: shelter, housing, identity support. The region is still recognizable for its wood artists and artwork. Plasticizing metaphors are revealed by the artistic gates, elevated, integrating the buildings behind them, imagining and framing the world of Maramureș. They often become conversation pieces for the audience, locals and tourists as well.

The theme of the wooden gate as artwork is related to perspective, display location, the workshop and the artist. In Maramureș the number of artistic gates increased constantly. In an inventory carried out between 1934 and 1960, Francisc Nistor, a renowned ethnographer, counted 785 decorated wooden gates (Nistor 1977). This spatial pattern is given by the position of the workshops, old and new, triggering the development of innovative approaches, first

experimented in the villages around the workshop. Geographically, the map shows that in the 19th century, nine gate artists were mentioned as active. They were located along the Mara and Cosău Valleys, in the western part of the region. In contrast, other villages started to develop gates around the masters' workshops in the early 20th century, clustering in Bârsana, Vadu Izei and Valea Stejarului. In 2016, artist organizations in Maramureş County recorded 38 wood artists, with workshops in traditional villages. In addition, there are a number of small or medium-sized enterprises that employ wood artists in Sigheţu Marmaţiei, Bogdan-Vodă, Poienile Izei etc.

The scale of the phenomenon is also important, as masters originating from the entire territory of Maramureş work for beneficiaries in Transylvania, Bucharest and around the world. Ethnographical museums and exhibitions commissioned gates for their entrances: Bucharest, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Baia Mare, and the Smithsonian Institution's exhibition in 1999, without canonical constraints. Therefore, villages with artists specialized in gates feature a higher number of artistic gates (Bârsana 117, Vadu Izei 56, Deseşti, Hârniceşti and Mara 85).

3. Discussion

3.1. The Placement and Function of a Wooden Gate Play a Decisive Role in Place Legitimization

ARTISTIC WOODEN gates are placed according to their function in the public space, in at least eight instances (table 1). Field research in 2017 revealed that there is a strong connection between the location of a gate and the processes concerning the legitimization of the place. Basic gate functionality is surpassed by the aesthetic and social function. It is not only a separator, a defensive structure, a property limit, but also a statement.

TABLE 1. PLACEMENT AND FUNCTION OF A WOODEN GATE
IN MARAMUREŞ LAND (AUTHORS' FIELDWORK, 2017)

Placement/location	Function	Features
At the entrance of a household	Architectural/Separator Social status symbol Aesthetic	Decorated pillars Only one sided Originality depending on the owner and the master
In front of a church or monastery	Strong symbolism Portal Community wealth indicator	Sacred symbol richness Larger scale Both sides decorated

Placement/location	Function	Features
On a road, at the entrance of a settlement	Welcoming warmth Portal Identity marker	Scaled symbols, adapted to the speed of the viewer Large structure Text messages
In front of an institution (town hall, school, cultural facility, tourist info center, hospital)	Welcoming warmth Identity marker Community wealth indicator	One side decorated Usual scale Innovative elements
In front of a business (tourist facility, shops)	Place branding Identity marker	Both sides decorated Generalized semiology
At the entrance of a Romanian ethnographical museum	Identity marker	Resembling the church gates
Miniatures as signposting	Place branding Tourist signing	Small scale structures Generalized semiology Integrated info panel
Trailheads in mountain reserves	Place branding Tourist signing Portal/frame	Large and small scale structures Integrate info Generalized semiology

Traditional or innovative locations direct attention to the second phenomenon observed during research: the varied and dissociated discourse on the role of tradition and identity. Local authorities place high wooden gates at the entrance of the village or in front of several socially important institutions. The entrance gates are different from the usual ones, they have decorations on both sides, with courtesy messages, and the scale is suited to the needs of road traffic, higher and wider, with different structural challenges. These gates frame the rural landscape, effectively conveying legitimizing discourses, assimilated by the community and transferred to dwelling gates and tourist guesthouses. Moreover, legitimizing the place went beyond the limits of the region, when local authorities in Căvnic, a small town south of the region of Maramureș, commissioned a wooden gate at the entrance and posted a confusing welcome message.

3.2. Private Art on the Public Domain

WHEN THE wooden gate is placed in front of a household or a business, it is privately owned artwork on public domain. The gate is considered mostly private even when commissioned by the local authorities, because in terms of decision and maintenance it is associated with a person

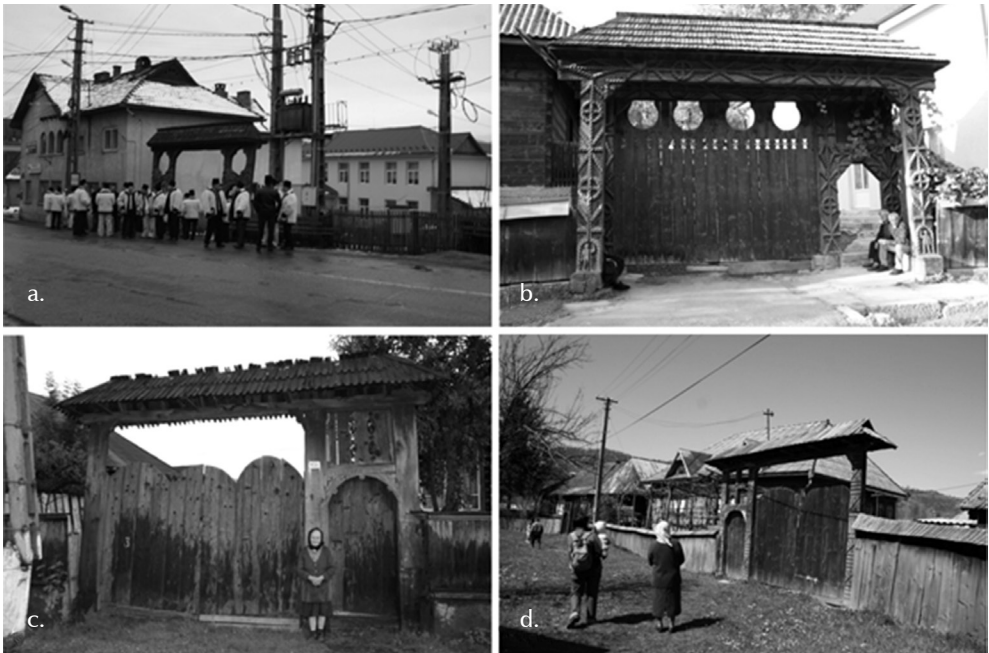


FIG. 2. The social role of the wooden gate as artwork.

- a. New gate in front of a cultural establishment and school in Bârsana (2010);
- b. Sunday meeting and socialization place;
- c. Waiting for the family;
- d. Old village streetfront, today a secondary transportation option used by tourists (see the grass on the road) Rona de Jos (2007).

from among the local stakeholders or with the mayor. Therefore, displaying it in certain positions enhances the access of the viewer, reflects the relationship of the artist with the beneficiary and with the public, being conversely a discourse about social status, economic or another kind of power. Articulating these, the art in the public realm refers to the forum where artists with divergent views on traditional gates meet.

Currently, wood artists follow two main trends: traditionalists, without a modern media communication interface (18 individual artists), and the new trend, with portfolios and social media coverage (four enterprises with employees). The more traditional artists present their work in situ, driving every potential beneficiary through the village and showcasing the gates in order to synthesize the requirements of the client. The concept is rarely altered by the client, the artist making the final decision.

In order to increase the value of the gate, some artists carve both sides, especially in areas where the public has access beyond the gate (fig. 2). The local

authorities have an important role in marking each significant achievement (see community infrastructure elements such as roads, the water/sanitation system and the rebuilt school) with a wooden gate. The public reacts positively, appreciates the effort of installing an identity marker in the village, and comments on the improper choice of spending are only seldom seen in the social media. Prices depend on dimensions, the number of pillars, and style. A simple three-post gate, 4 m in width, ranges between 2,000 and 5,000 euros. Bigger gates are more expensive, around 10,000 euros for the locals, 12,000–20,000 euros for businesses, churches, and institutions. Compared to other assets in the rural area of the region, a new wooden gate is worth 10% to 15% of a brick house of 100 m², 20–50% of a 1,000 m² agricultural plot next to the village.

The mountain landscape is continuously transforming under human pressure, and Maramureş is no exception. The analysis of the body text and image tags regarding the wooden gates branded as traditional revealed connections to additional intervening conditions, including tourism. The gate is a part of the regional tourism logo. It is presented as specific, authentic, and as the main attraction for the sightseeing tourism products; therefore tourists expect them on public display, to admire and to live thought-provoking experiences.

Although locals tend to label some of the gates as “exaggerated” or “kitsch,” tourists do not acknowledge this; they focus more on the artistic side, the carving style, scale and perspective. Content analysis on social media shares concerning gates shows that the public associates the image of the wooden gate with tradition and the cultural heritage (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013; Ilieş and Ilieş 2015).

From the perspective of tourism, the villages with a greater number of wooden gates are heritage conscious even if the number of old gates is significantly low. Nevertheless, on the official website of the Maramureş destination management organization, the chapter dedicated to gates features an innovative artistic gate (<http://www.cjmaramures.ro>). With the venues being branded as “traditional villages” for cultural tourism, the infrastructure and the tourist services tend to develop and change the mountain, both from an economic and an aesthetic point of view. The artwork is admired, acknowledged, evaluated, not only by the members of the community but by the entire world, and owners often brag about the diverse geographical origins of the visitors. International migration for work and tourism have triggered the 21st century shift in the mountain rural landscape, towards wood artworks and carefully located identity markers, as well as a significant but neglected agricultural land (Schwartz et al. 2011; Anghel 2013).

Conclusions

ARTISTIC WOODEN gates have shaped the landscape of Maramureș for centuries. Although the visual features of the gates draw on the experience of a continuous lineage of masters, innovation and creativity are well represented and position them within the artistic realm, rather than in the fields of crafting or architecture. Besides their artistic value, they are the result of social and political discourse, structuring the space according to several patterns, linking the artists, the patrons and the public.

Basic gate functionality is surpassed by the aesthetic and social function. It is not only a separator, a defensive structure, a property limit, but also a statement. In this respect, tradition overcomes art in legitimizing a place. Two main functions derive from their position as private art in the public space: the frame and the portal, both static and dynamic roles of the same wooden structure. Legitimization and accessibility reflect the relationship of the artist with the beneficiary and with the public, conversely being a discourse about social status, economic or another kind of power.

Mountains serve as inspiration for the metaphor of the gate: the wood as a perishable material, the posts as columns bearing the shelter roofing, the protective and gating properties, and the almost mystical significance of the carvings, etc. Hence the different dissociated discourses on the role of tradition and identity within place branding.



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Abstract

The Traditional Wooden Gates of Maramureș (Romania)
As a Part of the Place Legitimization Processes

Maramureș is renowned for its vernacular architecture, with over one thousand wooden gates of different ages, old traditional gates and newer ones. They are important not only from an anthropological perspective, but within a larger heritage consumption process, in cultural tourism and political discourse. Therefore, the paper examines the relationship between the wooden gates and the land, revealing new ways of place legitimization and community resilience through ethnographic insights. Consequently, the study focuses on several main categories: the visual elements, metaphors, patterns and themes linked to identity place-branding processes, and heritage tourism. Initially placed at the limit of properties, the gate has played the function of architectural structure and of social status symbol. The new gates are erected in a separate paradigm, and two main functions derive from their position as private art in the public space—the frame and the portal, both static and dynamic roles of the same wooden structure, mediating between the artist, the patrons, the work of art, and the art consumers.

Keywords

Maramureș, wooden gates, place legitimization