

## CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND TOURISM POTENTIAL IN THE TRANSYLVANIAN PLAIN

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**ABSTRACT** - Contradicting the general belief that the Transylvanian Plain has a poor tourism potential, we bring proof that even in a non-tourist region there are many elements that can provide a generous support for a variety of tourism activities, such as: rural tourism, agro-tourism, recreational tourism, cultural and religious tourism, eco-tourism, and even the critical tourism may occur if the resources are not properly managed. Definitions, examples, two tables, and a map are offering additional information and data, in order to reveal a less known side of the Transylvanian Plain.

**Key words:** cultural landscape, tourism potential, the Transylvanian Plain.

Current concepts like rural tourism, eco-tourism, critical tourism, sustainable tourism etc., reflected in the landscape of the Transylvanian Plain, despite of its tern appearance, represent the non-conventional tourism. Increasing in quality of tourism act and decreasing its quantity, a well-known, worldwide supported phenomenon is an attribute of the new tourism concepts. Non-conventional tourism stresses the importance of interactivity, and the gradual transformation of the tourist from “spectator” to “actor” in tourism act.

From the tourism objectives perspective, these are no longer only “attraction points” but also “cognitive points”, with an active role in transforming tourists’ mentality and their instruction level.

**Rural tourism** represent “*that type of tourism activity associated with rural environment which (...) guaranty the continuity of the rural space and the convergence of tenderers and clients’ economic and spiritual interests via tourism product*” (Petrea and Petrea, 2000, p.25). There are some particular criteria of rural tourism:

- Tourism act should take place in the rural space; tourism activity is extended from the attractive place of the farms to the intrinsic knowledge of rural traditions, culture, history and its particular space;
- Rural functionality based on local decision-makers and local communities’ control over the rural tourism;
- “rural sizing” of infrastructure and architectonic style;
- A specific inhabitants’ way of life included in “rural way of life” (patriarchal).

Rural tourism is only at the beginning in the Transylvanian Plain, mostly because of the inhabitants’ standard of living – which is below the national average, and infrastructure state. The areas, situated next to marginal sectors of the Plain, are seen as initiators of this type of tourism. The paradox of the issue is that isolated areas, suited for rural tourism, coincide with aged, critical rural spaces (Map 1). Villages from the Fizeș Valley, the Pârâu de Câmpie Valley, that dispose of accessible communication networks, may easily practice this type of tourism.

**Agro-tourism.** Sometimes regarded as being rural tourism, agro-tourism exclusively refers to farms, with all their activities and products. Some features of agro-tourism’s particular offer are:

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- Activity areas: rural households;
- Social relationships: direct relationships, without intermediates, between guests and hosts; the atmosphere is typical for a rural household;
- Knowing and respecting tradition: traditional costumes, specific farm activities, local or regional culinary art.

We may describe agro-tourism as *a complex activity that runs within patriarchal frame of the farms and pensions, in a direct relationship with entrepreneurs, in which the tourism product is centred on accommodation, traditional and entertainment activities and culinary art, derived from the potential of that tourist point.*

There are common features that contribute to the persistence of the confusion between these two terms – rural tourism and agro-tourism (Petrea and Petrea, 2000):

- Development of rural specific activities – agricultural, pastoral, and forestry;
- Direct, personal relationships with the tourists;
- Amateur management;
- Traditional buildings;
- Typical, and for some, bucolic, atmosphere;
- A strong preservation attitude at the local level;
- Tourism products marketing through limited channels.

**Recreational tourism** makes use of nature's potential. Destination points are the system of lakes, Iain on the Fizeș Valley, the Pârâul de Câmpie Valey, and on the Eastern side of the Transylvanian Plain – the Șar and Meleș Valleys. Tourism activities are oriented mostly on fishery. The development of this type of tourism is restricted by a lack of proper communication networks.

**Cultural and religious tourism** could be the tourism engine of the Transylvanian Plain. There is a considerable potential here (table 1), if we mention only the objectives listed in the national patrimony. The other *churches and historic monuments*, not included in “patrimonial” spectrum, represent potential important tourist objectives that create a special tourist landscape, a landscape that is far from being turned to a good account. The oldest churches in the Transylvanian Plain are the Reformed Churches, built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century – the Reformed Churches in Bozieș (Chiochiș), the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries; in Delureni (Urmeniș), the 15<sup>th</sup> century; Nireș (Mica), the 13<sup>th</sup> century; and the Reformed Church in Boteni (Mociu), the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Orthodox Churches were built much later, because of religious pressure from Hungarians. There are, still, some exceptions such as the stone-made Orthodox Church, in Mănăstirea, Mica commune, the 13<sup>th</sup> century, or Sf. Arhangheli Church in Cozma (the 14<sup>th</sup> century). Anyway, in the rest of the cases, Orthodox Churches were built after the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a feature, old Orthodox Churches were made of wood and used to have “Sf. Arhangheli” as titular saints. In Apatiu (Chiochiș), there is such a church, built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; others are placed in Strugureni (Chiochiș) – the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Fânațele Silvașului – the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Chesău (Mociu) – the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Roman-Catholic Churches, which were built later than the Reformed Churches, also belong to the Hungarians: e.g. the Roman-Catholic Church in Mociu (1784), or Cătina (1806).

Representative for this cult is the building of the churches in the commune's centre, revealing a strong relation with the confessional affiliation of the political and social leaders.

The Greek-Catholic churches were erected shortly after the Roman-Catholic ones, representing a mixed, Orthodox-Catholic cult, enforced by the occupying forces in order to reduce the religious cohesion of the Romanians. The Greek-Catholic churches were partially rehabilitated after 1989; one of the oldest (also a historic monument) is the church in Frata, erected in 1827. Characteristic for these churches are their patron saints, for example “Pogorârea Sf. Spirit” (*The Descent of the Holy Spirit*).

**Table 1.** *Cultural objectives listed in the national patrimony (after M. Ielenicz, 2000).*

<b>Tourism cultural or religious objective</b>	<b>Settlement</b>
The Banffy castle	Bonțida
The Kornis castle	Mănăstirea, Mica
The wooden church “Sf. Arhangheli”	Sic
The wooden church “Tăierea Capului Sf. Ioan Botezătorul” ( <i>Beheading of John the Baptist</i> )	Porumbeni, Ceuașu de Câmpie
The wooden church “Sf. Arhangheli”	Băița, Lunca
The wooden church “Sf. Arhangheli”	Pănet
The wooden church “Sf. Arhangheli”	Sărmășel
The Nicula monastery	Nicula

The German population in the Transylvanian Plain belonged mostly to the Lutheran cult. Very old churches are located in the north-western regions, inhabited by the Saxons: Teaca, Moruț (Matei commune), or Lechința. The issue here is the degradation of these churches because of *demographic abandon*. These churches were also declared historical monuments, especially because some of them still keep the well-known style of the fortified churches.

These are pointed out in the religious landscape by the massiveness and sobriety of the building and the building material (stone). Among the monuments of the other ethnical groups, “The monument and the graves of the 126 Jews” killed in the Second World War must be mentioned, located in Cămăraș. The existence and preservation of these churches are in a strong relation with four factors: the ethnic groups and their ancestral traditions; the preservation method and the social discipline of the members of the respective ethnic groups; the demographic changes; the amount of funds allocated by the responsible organizations.

This type of tourism, correlated with the agro-tourism, is capable of creating an efficient balance between the tourist resources, the tourists’ interests and the preservation of the natural fund.

**Eco-tourism** is defined as a tourism act to those destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage (“patrimonial” tourism – Violette Rey, 2003) are the mere attractions.

Héctor Ceballos-Lascuràin first used the term eco-tourism in 1983, and he referred to journeys in nature, to areas with no human interventions. A particular feature of this type of tourism was its educational side, understanding the need to preserve natural inheritance. Later, the concept was used to a scientific approach of planning, management and development of products and sustainable tourism activities (Centre for Ecotourism Documents). Natural reservations areas in The Transylvanian Plain (table 2) are suited for this type of tourism.

Responsible factors (organizers) in running ecotourism activities aim at minimizing adverse effects of traditional tourism over natural environment and at preserving the cultural integrity of the local communities (Sustainable Tourism Info-Sheets). Of course, such tourism lends itself to tourists’ understanding and educational levels, but it could also replace other types of tourism that may lead to more or less quantifiable ecologic lack of balances.

In this case, if the concept of sustainable tourism will be imposed, with its for now theoretical key factors, will lead to a balance between tourism activities and preservation of natural and atrophic tourism fund. Its importance and its particularity derive from taking into account the following criteria (W. Jamieson and A. Noble, 2000):

- Information criterion. The tourist did not learn only about his/her destination but also how to help support its character; so, the tourist will improve his/her experience while making the tourism act;



**Figure 1.** Type of rural areas in the Transylvanian Plain in 2002.  
(source: Violette Rey et al. 2002, with modifications)

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- Support for place integrity. Those involved in tourism industry will look for business opportunities that underline a particular place characteristics – architecture, patrimony, aesthetic, and ecological problems;
- Support for the inhabitants. Entrepreneurs hire and prepare members of local communities, and they invest in the local infrastructure;
- Resources preservation. Decision makers (on environment issues) favour those entrepreneurs that engage themselves in pollution reduction problems, waste management, and energy and water consumption. A new trend in sustainable tourism is the avoidance of disturbances in local wild life;
- Respect the tradition and local culture. The visitors will remember cultural “label” of the place, including through use of common words of the country they are visiting;
- Giving up quantity and favouring quality. Communities measure tourism success using criteria like accommodation time, money spent by tourists and the quality of that experience and not the number of the tourists;
- Avoiding abuse over tourism product. Entrepreneurs anticipate the dynamic of tourist pressure and apply some limits and management techniques for preventing “loved to death” syndrome (W. Jamieson and A Noble, 2000).

**Table 2.** *The nature reserves of the national patrimony in the Transylvanian Plain (after M. Ielenicz, 2000).*

Nature Reserve	Commune	Type	Area (ha)
Suatu I hayfields	Suatu	Floristic; xeric steppe vegetation (the endemism <i>Astragalus peterfii</i> )	9.2
Suatu II hayfields		Floristic; the xeric gymnosperm <i>Ephedra distachya</i>	
Știucilor (Pikes) Lake	Fizeșu Gherlii	Ornithological	26.0
Legiilor Valley	Geaca	Ornithological	13.5
The rushes from Sic	Sic	Ornithological	2.0
The Peony Reservation (two areas)	Zau de Câmpie	Floristic; preservation of the pratosteppe associations with <i>Paeonia tenuifolia</i>	3.1
The forest from Săbed/Bozed	Ceuașu de Câmpie	Forestry; anti-erosion plantation with 40 species (nowadays)	59.0
The Fărăgău I Lake	Fărăgău	Ornithological	35.0

**Critical tourism.** Despite the presence of the premises for the development of the green tourism as a “positive” one, the increasing pressure on the tourist objectives leads to their degradation. These are the preconditions for the occurrence of critical tourism. Mainly, this type is reflected by:

- *seasonality*, which induces inconstant *pressure* on the tourist fund;
- *trivialization* of the tourist relevance;
- *the insufficient tourist exploitation*.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Transylvanian Plain offers a generous frame for a variety of tourism types. The natural (hydrologic, forestry) and anthropic (settlements in a bucolic milieu and an archaic lifestyle) potential offers optimal premises for agro-tourism, rural tourism and ecotourism.

As we pointed out earlier, the tourism “engine” of the region could be the cultural and religious tourism, based on the highlighting of the elements of the cultural landscape. To all this we can add the presence of a polarization centre (Sărmașu) in the central part of the plain, which will direct the energetic flows of this region.

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