

TOURISM IN RURAL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT - Rural tourism is now determined by limited economic opportunities, poor infrastructure, low motivation to possible offers, lack of proper service guarantees. Nearly 500 Romanian villages are already tourist locations, with certain characteristics determined by a heritage item, or complex ones when multiple components lead to various activities. This paper includes a typology of tourist villages in Romania according to the types of practiced tourist activities, insisting on the use of a more comprehensive terminology: tourism in rural environment, participative and creative tourism in rural areas. Tourism becomes a system accepted in the rural environment as a real opportunity for economic development with multiple social consequences. By multiplying tourism potential to meet tourists' demands, many villages will get tourism valences with various activities in this field, including environment protection.

Keywords: tourism, rural environment, types of tourism in rural areas, tourist villages

GENERALITIES

There are over 12,700 villages in Romania inhabited by 8.9 million people in 2011. They are located (Cucu, 2009) on all landforms (19.48% in the mountains, 58.47% in hilly areas and plateaus, and 22.13% on plains), with a particular concentration on valleys (terraces), contacts between geographical units, depressions, along communication routes and seaside.

The village is, through its various forms of organization, the type of human settlement with the longest evolution (since Neolithic); over millennia, the village was characterized by a continuity of habitation, expansion, population growing, depending on its vital resources, trade possibilities, economic, cultural, artistic elements, customs, religious traditions, human relations that led to stability and (territorially different) adaptations to the fundamental social and political changes. All these have facilitated historically the accumulation over time of a treasure of items that reflect mental development in rural areas. Together with the natural potential, they are revealing resources to know and achieve a complex of tourist activities and, thereby, a sure way to economic and social development. Concerns in this regard, but in simple shapes (hospitality, family reunions, various religious pilgrimages, participation in hunting, use of nature resources such as mineral springs, mud, etc.), are known from various accounts for many centuries, but the actual assembly of occupations that tourism requires is connected with recent decades. They were oriented in several directions - knowledge of natural elements and human creation that represent the potential for various tourist motivations, creating a proper infrastructure, easy access, suitable facilities for accommodation and food (the most common are hostels, inns and cottages), but also for practicing leisure or sport activities (skiing, sledding, horse riding, fishing, hunting, etc.), participation in religious events, cultural and traditional customs, treatments (connected with specific natural resources such as air, mofette, mud, salt water, etc.), and minimum guaranteed facilities.

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Although any rural settlement has a certain heritage that makes it a tourism destination, yet the number of villages practicing tourism activities is small. This situation is determined, on the one hand, by the limited economic opportunities (especially in small and medium-sized villages that represent more than 50% of the total villages), modest infrastructure to ensure an adequate traffic, reduced motivation in possible offer, lack of security for proper services. The quantification of these factors leads to the conclusion that less than 25% of villages could be named economic from tourism point of view. Nearly 500 Romanian villages are already tourist locations, with certain characteristics determined by a heritage item or complex ones when multiple components lead to various activities.

Although in early stages, tourism in the rural environment may be defined by several characteristics:

- the village and its surroundings represent the area of various specific activities;
- the tourism assembly is made up of different regional associations between the natural resources and traditional human creations (from the form and general structure of the village and ending with historical, artistic, architectural elements acquired over time) and all structures designed to provide the services and activities required by tourists;
- a human resource oriented to managerial and service occupations;
- a material basis (accommodation, meals, recreation, infrastructure, etc.) regionally differentiated, according to local people's economic power and interest;
- various motivations of tourists reflected in specific actions (relaxation, resting, hiking, healthcare, scientific knowledge, artistic, historical, naturalistic, organic eating, playing various sports, artistic and religious rite activities, or understanding and sharing traditional crafts, etc.).

All this leads to tourism directions that reflect a specific interest.

TYPES OF TOURISM IN RURAL ENVIRONMENT

There are various categories depending on tiebreaker criteria.

1. The village position against the main landforms - the tourist objectives reflect a certain lifestyle and culture achieved over centuries: the urban influences are still limited. Categories:

- *tourism in mountain villages*, where the traditions are preserved most clearly, with some degree of association with external influences and opportunities for service delivery, resulting in various tourism activities and receipts. It is practiced in villages located far away from towns or at high altitude, where old characteristics are preserved almost completely, but they are not sufficient to ensure significant and permanent tourist flows (there are more foreigners than Romanians), due to poor accessibility and services, though providing the highest level of hospitality. On the opposite side, there are the villages located along the valleys with modern communication means, in depressions, or at the contact with hills and near large cities. In these villages, the traditional is restricted and maintained in a large area where modernization is amplified by the income from tourism activities (mansions, accommodation and meal facilities, entertainment, recreation, fields and halls for practicing various sports), but almost all with urban influences. Most tourists direct towards these villages, being more connected with daily than traditional activities. They are content with authenticity understanding, through popular festivals and various "revived" celebrations, sometimes altered by crafted objects, food or wine products. Here the highest revenues are recorded, the most significant number of villages in rural tourism association networks, and high human pressure on the natural environment (pollution, deforestation for various activities and constructions, etc.).
- *tourism in hilly and plateau villages*, where the original features are in minority, linked to household type, village structure and texture (e.g. the villages located at the contact with mountains, the villages famous for fruit crops, wines or high quality alcoholic drinks, the villages known for pottery, wickerwork, weaving and stitching, etc.), some historical or cultural monuments (castles, old churches, mansions, etc.), natural resources (mineral springs that generated local spas, unique landscapes and so on). Some of these generated annual

festivals (of wine, plum brandy, strawberries, etc.), doubling the patronage and pilgrimage tourism importance, village days, especially in autumn and spring.

- *tourism in plain villages* - these villages hardly preserve traditions, since the natural landscape and socioeconomic life has been transformed under urban influence. They became main suppliers of agri-food and labour (commuters) for cities. Tourism characteristics have occurred during the last decades, along with commuting weakening (especially in villages near cities, with good roads and economic power). The first one results from townspeople' increasing interest in building houses for relaxation, rest, leisure, and the second would be the concern of local people to provide them with local agricultural products. In addition, in some villages, there are fisheries, mud and salt water bathing facilities, weekend beach perimeters near large rivers or groves, all of them designed for the purpose of sustainable profit.

2. The interest in mental traditional products resulted from a long evolution, divided into historical provinces, ethno-folkloric regions, diverse landforms, led to significant socioeconomic and cultural variations, with the following types:

- villages with tourist activities assigned in units of "country" type (Oaş, Maramureş, Năsăud, Lăpuş, Dornelor, Făgăraş, Beiuş, Moşilor, Loviştei, Vrancei, Almăjului, etc.) or lands (Pădureni, Lunca, Secuilor, Mărginimea Sibiului, etc.); their natural potential is valuable, especially the popular culture elements are extremely diverse, though these villages are valued differently, yet modestly; many foreign and Romanian tourists are interested in them.
- villages located in large valleys, in depressions near mountains (the contact between mountains and hills); for example, the villages of North Oltenia depressions, Timiş-Cerna Corridor, Sovata-Odorheiu Secuiesc Corridor, circum-Transylvanian depressions, etc.).
- villages included in tours with complex tourist destinations, characterized by one or two directions of activities and services (the tour of Northern Bucovina or Oltenia monasteries, the tour of peasant citadels in Transylvania, the Danube Delta or seaside villages and so on).

3. The motivation for certain tourist activities that define some rural settlements. There are different groups of villages in this category, depending on their tourism potential, services and facilities that attract tourists.

They are concentrated in mountains, hills, on seaside and near cities, but most of them do not have the necessary structures for high quality tourist activities, and, therefore, the services do not meet tourists' requirements; consequently, there are obvious regional differences of attractiveness, reflected in tourism flows, profit and development possibilities. There are seasonal variations in tourism flows: in winter (during the winter holidays), in summer (vacations, weekends), in spring (Easter), in autumn (holidays, vacations, various popular festivals).

4. Differentiation of villages by tourists' motivation, awareness and involvement in a specific main tourist activity. They can be divided into more groups, but the most important includes the agritourism villages where the dominant motivation is rest, relaxation, countryside knowledge, sometimes combined with visits to historical and architectural evidence, folk art and traditional folklore, or to natural parks and preserves. They are associated with accommodation (hostels) and meal (organic products) facilities, traditional services and sometimes resting places (parks, tennis courts, horse riding fields, swimming pools, etc.). Such villages are located near large cities, or along modern roads (especially in mountain area, in regions with famous folk, history or religion). The most important villages in terms of potential, facilities and tourist flows are those in Maramureş, Bucovina, Mărginimea Sibiului, Northern Oltenia, Moldavian and Curvature Subcarpathians, Rucăr-Bran-Braşov axis, etc.

Table 1. *Types of tourism activities frequent in rural environment*

Types of tourism activities	Important locations	Relevant elements of tourism potential	Structures for tourism services	Collateral tourism activities	Participation
Recreation, leisure	villages located near the Carpathians, on the shores of dam lakes, on the seaside	- forests, meadows, beaches, etc.	- camping grounds, mansions, sport fields, horse riding, fishing, etc.	- hiking, leisure, board sports	- highest tourist flows, especially during weekends
Balneology, marine therapy, rest	local spas (Amara, Lacul Sărat, Bălătești, Bala, Săcelu, Homoroadele, Praid, Vâlcele, Ocna Șugatag, Felix, 1 Mai, Tinca, Moneasa, Vața, Techirghiol, Nuntași, etc.)	- mineral and thermal springs, mud, moffetes, clean air, forests	- camping grounds, mansions, hotels, motels, facilities and personnel for treatment; medium infrastructure; facilities for other activities	- aquatic sports, hiking, cultural activities	- higher tourist flows between March and October, Romanian tourists, also foreign tourists in some resorts
Hiking	especially in the Carpathians, with starting points in the villages bordering them, itinerant routes to the huts managed by these villages	- various landscapes, specific alpine landforms, waterfalls, peculiar landforms, forests	- national roads, country roads, marked trails, limited meal services; mountain rescue services in main massifs	-ecologic education -training -alpinism - extreme sports - orienteering	- usually tourists younger than 50 years, higher tourist flows in April-November (maxim June-September) and in weekends; only areas with facilities in winter

Cultural-historical and religious	Historical	ancient cities (Histria, Sarmizegetusa in the Orăștie Mountains, etc.) and medieval fortresses (Enisala, Transylvanian peasant fortresses etc.); monuments, museums	- sites in varying degrees of preservation, with visiting hours	- infrastructure with varying degrees of modernization; - some facilities for accommodation and meals in villages, not necessary near important religious buildings -low tourist information, rare commemorations	- training - education - photo-safari	- occasional tourist flows, during commemorations or festivities
	Architectonic	mansions, palaces, etc. made in various styles in 14 th -19 th centuries	- human and natural landscapes			
	Museums and collections art monuments, architecture	memorial houses (V.Alecsandri, E.Racoviță, N.Iorga, G.Enescu, G.Coșbuc, I.Rebreanu, N.Labiș etc.)	- original or copied constructions or documentations			
	Patrons, pilgrimages and tours	wooden churches in Transylvania, Maramureș, Sălaj, Bihor; cave churches (in the Subcarpathian Hills), churches and monasteries (14 th -19 th centuries) in Bucovina, Oltenia,	- buildings, artistic and symbolic value, museums and collections of religious objects, events, special sceneries	- good infrastructure; - some facilities for accommodation and meal in villages, not especially to the important religious buildings - rich information materials	- education - knowledge - rest	- permanent flows of believers or foreign tourists in monasteries and churches' dedicated days

		Muntenia and Subcarpathian Moldavia, Dobruja, Hațeg, Ardeal.				
	Ethno-folk through visits and participations in creative activities	Bucovina, Maramureș, Oaș, Sălaj, Secuime, Neamț, Mărginime, Făgăraș, Hațeg, Banat etc.	- weaving, sewing, pottery, egg painting, wood, stone carving etc. -feasts, festivals and celebrations; -ethnographic collections - participative tourism (mainly pottery and original crafts)	- there are hostels and different services in larger villages; during festivals and celebrations there are various services provided usually by outsiders	-rest -training -skiing or sliding in winter	- high areas included in tours; higher flows during holidays and festivals; both Romanian and foreign tourists
Environmental information and education	-in mountain areas (especially in alpine and subalpine area), in national parks, natural parks, dendrological parks, landscaped gardens -historical sites, architectural monuments, distinct buildings, traditional villages -karst areas	-landforms, fossils points with a certain petrographic composition, mineral springs, hot springs, lakes, flora, fauna preserves, architectural ensembles (castles, fortresses), artistic products, monuments and so on; caves, potholes, karst springs	- modest tourism facilities, concentrated near large or strictly protected areas - some have rangers and promotional materials	-recreation -hiking -festivals as those of wild lilac, parti-coloured tulip, peony, daffodil, etc., but having negative impact on natural ecosystems	- reduced in scientific preserves, only with approval and accompaniment; -high in parks, botanical gardens, dendrological parks, unattended preserves, large caves and areas with original landscape	- environmental information and education

Practicing different sports and extreme sports	Carpathians (Rodnei, Maramureș, Harghita, Apuseni, Banat, Bucegi, Făgăraș, Parâng, Vâlcan, Ceahlău etc.), dam lakes on Olt, Cerna, Argeș, Danube, seaside lakes, Danube Delta, gorges (Mureș, Vișeu, Jiu, Someș), caves (Scărișoara, Meziad, Urșilor, Râșnoavei, Muierilor, Polovragi, Comarnic, Topolnița, Cloșani, Ialomiței, etc.)	- winter sports (skiing, tobogganing, bobsleigh, skating)	- accommodation, ski slopes and facilities with varying degrees of modernization, skating etc. - many are included in tourist resorts	-leisure -rest -hiking -training -environmental education	- mass activities (easily accessible) of higher tourist flows, but differentiated by season; -for activities with high difficulty (especially extreme sports), the number of participants is limited; -tourists are mainly townspeople -few local people focused on service activities.
		- water sports (swimming, canoeing, various boat swinging on lakes, skijet on the sea and larger lakes)	-pools, specific gear, competition swimming pools		
		- sport-fishing on mountain rivers and landscaped areas in other regions	- sectors delimited for the organization of competitions		
		- sport-hunting in parks and special areas (deer, ducks, pheasants, etc.)	- well-arranged and well defined facilities; huts		
		- gliding traditional well defined areas	- delimited areas of practice; eventually equipment storage structures, campsites		
		- mountaineering and various types of climbing; canyoning, rafting, paragliding etc., in delimited areas in mountains and gorges			
		- speleology in larger caves in the Apuseni Mountains, Banat Mountains, Mehedinți Plateau, etc.	- travelling through caves -specific equipment		

The second group relates to the term rural tourism, which is misused. Its meaning involves two aspects – the activity is carried out in rural areas and is the main tourists' motivation to enjoy the rural life (knowledge and understanding through participation). An early form, starting to gain importance (especially for foreign tourists) is the involvement in the specific, traditional activities of a village (e.g. pottery, egg painting, furriers, fabrics, wood, stone carving, etc.) or knowing the creation and lifestyle of rural communities (e.g. gypsies, Lipovean groups, shepherds and so on). This is the participative rural tourism, which involves living for a time the same activities, but providing decent accommodation and food conditions (in extreme cases, there is a total involvement in the respective environment). Therefore, the term participative tourism (in rural environment) is more natural than the one used (agritourism is rural tourism, too).

Regardless of groupings based on various criteria, two aspects are important: the fact that tourism becomes a system accepted in the rural environment as a real opportunity for economic development with multiple social consequences; by multiplying the tourism potential to meet tourists' demands, many villages will get tourism valences with various activities in this field, including environment protection.

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