

## ***Rural Tourism in Romania***

**Daniel GHERASIM, Adrian GHERASIM**  
**George Bacovia University, Bacau, Romania**  
**daniel.gherasim@ugb.ro**  
**adrian.gherasim@ugb.ro**

**Abstract:** *Rural tourism has a strong affection because it is not an offer of any kind or consumption. As long as this element is not forgotten or neglected, there will be no danger of destroying the environment or culling negative factors in the culture of the village or area by overcoming ecological limits. Tradition and ambience of rural areas are the starting point for the development and sustainable implementation of rural tourism in our country.*

**Keywords:** *Rural tourism, village, tradition*

### **Introduction**

The legends, such as Count Dracula's or the authentic history of Romania, are all testimonies of a fascinating past. Such testimonies can be found in Transylvanian wooden churches with high roofs. The first signs of human life on the present Romanian territory were found in the Carpathian Mountains and date back to about 600,000 BC

### **1. The Concept of Rural Tourism**

Tourism puts into value and exploits economically the unique treasure made up of the richness created by nature and climate, or the legacy of history, folklore and civilization. Without the tourist movement, the natural, cultural, and historical wealth of a country will never be able to be the object of an economic activity capable of generating income. [1]

Of these branches of tourism, rural tourism is the point of interest, because tourists often feel best in the middle of nature, at a real pension, surrounded by hospitable people. Because there, in the middle of nature, they find their roots, they find their habits and traditions, they find their peace and relaxation, and especially in rural tourism all the other forms of combined tourism can be found.

The farm or guesthouse is a powerful symbol for the urban environment, it is part of a categorization of the particular frame in the rural space and represents the farmer's house, that person who experiences and knows the secrets of nature.

For the urban population, the village signifies social privacy, local animation, human dimension, evokes town hall, school, church, etc. Places that have marked human existence for centuries. Rural tourism is fundamentally integrated into the means of reception where the natural, cultural and human potential on which the tourism products are developed and promoted locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Between rural and other areas there are differences in terms of the natural environment, the existing socio-economic development, so we can see variations from one region to another, and more visible from one country to another, respectively from a continent to another. However, the real rural areas are generally characterized by: low population densities, variable number of households (usually spread - with great distances between them), and important agricultural or forest areas.

### **2. The Appearance of Rural Tourism in Europe**

In the European Union, rural tourism has old traditions that have grown in both organized and spontaneous form. Both the endurance and the expansion of this type of tourism are the result of the guidelines and measures taken for the development of rural areas and the diversification of forms of organization and practice of mass tourism. [2, 101]

Although the emergence of tourist trips occurred in antiquity, and tourism activities in rural areas began to be practiced empirically in the same period, the cradle of travel to rural areas was Europe. It is thus known the great participation of the Greeks in visiting holy places and the attendance of curative baths or periodically organized festive games.

During the Roman period the trips were mainly commercial, cultural or military, and their routes implicitly ran through the countryside. With the evolution of human society, the structure of the travellers was diversified, so traders, ambassadors, priests and pilgrims, scientists, artists, apprentices and students travelled in the Middle Ages. The inhabitants of the rural areas have provided "home and meal" to those who visit them, thus forming, preserving and preserving a form of "treatment" that has become traditional and labelled later as hospitality.

Over time, rural regions have participated in the formation of routes: to treatment areas - Roman baths or spa resorts; commercial ones- the famous roads of salt, wine, amber, silk, etc; to the holy places - Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostela, Mont Saint Michel, and others.

Europe is the one that registers the first forms of rural tourism awareness in the 16th-17th centuries; in those times the painters were interested in capitalizing in their works the constructions and the environment of rural space. The life of the village was immortalized in the works of French, Italian or Dutch painters. In the next century, with the affirmation of the great landscape architects, rural architecture occupies an increasingly important place in drawing and painting. French and Italian painters and artists impose themselves, to who there are then added the English ones.

Although rural tourism has been practiced for centuries, it has been empirically made, and has left room for mass tourism development. But, after almost half a century of dominance of mass tourism (and consumption) towards the end of the twentieth century there were visible mutations through the growing manifestation of "new forms of tourism". The important changes that have occurred in tourism demands have been influenced by investment in tourism. This increased the interest for *cultural tourism*, for *historical tourism*, and especially for *rural tourism*. The period that has influenced the development of rural tourism is the one in which the development of the industry, as well as the mechanization in agriculture, have led to a massive migration of the rural population to the urban centres registering a dynamic evolution. When many of those who had to settle in the urban area were able to afford holidays, they returned to the countryside to visit the areas they had left. Visitors were accommodated - in the vast majority of cases - by relatives or friends, and spending time is limited to helping with the household or updating countryside life news.

With the passage of time we can see the more flexible specialization of the tourist offer, the range of products offered is higher, with the corresponding reduction of the life of these products (due to the rapid evolution of fashion). Consumers and their preferences have become more mobile and more specialized. One explanation is the influence of the rise of the new middle class, which essentially rejects mass tourism and prefers ecological tourism or green tourism (Germany, France, and Belgium).

Mass tourism and individualized forms of tourism are interdependent. The number of forms of tourism is increasing; the type of offer is constantly evolving, which makes mass tourism to decline as relative importance. This explains the rapid and short-term evolution of the theme parks, ecological tourism, the differentiation by tourism of cultural and sports activities

### **3. Rural Tourism forms on the Romanian Territory**

The forms of tourism generated by the national, natural and anthropogenic potential correspond to the specifics of tourism resources, the structure of tourists, the motivation of the trips and the active character of tourism, generating the basic forms: mountain tourism - rest, winter sports, hiking, speo-tourism, mountaineering , Hunting and fishing, scientific knowledge etc.; balnear - rest, climate, spa; Seaside - resting, balneal-medical, sports recreation; Cultural tourism - knowledge, education; Business, congresses; Sports and recreational tourism, etc. The variety of landscapes and favourable conditions for hiking in summer and winter sports in the cold season give the Carpathians a great tourist attraction for both Romanian and foreign tourists, adding to them the Black Sea seaside that attracts tourists by its qualities Natural and its objectives of cultural, religious interest etc. The Danube Delta is also a first objective for all categories of tourists, etc. [3, 90 - 91]

The tourist market occupies a special place, increasingly important in the domestic market of each country, being a distinct segment of the services market. It differs from the commodity market in that it is highly segmented and presents a high degree of diversification and complexity of tourism products, having as its main feature the displacement of potential consumers at the place of consumption (destination).

In recent years, Romanian tourism has undergone significant changes, and the importance of the seaside has decreased and obsolete infrastructure has prompted many tourists to move to other places. Major winners of these changes are agro-tourism, mountain areas and the Danube Delta. Specialists are of the opinion that new resorts with tourist potential could appear.

Rural tourism has gained ground. Tour operators, as well as other factors involved in this area, believe that agro-tourism will see significant growth in the coming years. In addition, accession funds will support this area.

Compared with the external market of rural tourism among the advantages of the Romanian offer, we can mention the high weight of the natural mountain, the virgin natural environment, the conservation of the old elements of rural civilization and their application in everyday life, the presence of representative ethno-folkloric traditions and values (folk architecture, crafts, folklore and folk port, folk celebrations and folk customs, etc.), the Romanian hospitality with Latin influences, the gastronomic customs of the great Orthodox Christian religious holidays, fruit and other forest products, the consumption of fresh, organic food at very low prices, the practice of occupational therapy and the initiation into the secrets of Romanian folk medicine and the integration into the life of the very old rural communities and the living of their specific atmosphere.

A particularly important role in capitalizing on the tourist offer of rural tourism was the intense promotion through participation in most of the domestic and international tourism fairs with their own stands.

#### **4. Romanian Rural Tourism**

Tourism has proved to be the most sensitive sector in terms of economic and social stimuli, a phenomenon felt both in the field of demand and in the supply of Romanian tourism products because Romania has faced in the last years the profound mutations imposed by the transition to the market economy. Thus, the Romanian rural tourism has been and resonates with the entire Romanian tourist movement, but by its pluses it tries to dominate its shortcomings and convincing.

For tourists, the quality of the product is particularly important. Taking this into account, it is known that the introduction into the tourist circuit of structures / equipment that provide - through its staff - poor quality services may compromise a product or destination in the long run. A quality rural tourism implies quality services and services so rural tourism must be equipped with modern sanitary equipment, comfortable conditions both for hosting and for public catering, accessible roads and civilized communication. Therefore, a particular importance should be given to the promotion of the rural tourism product, which requires: the publication of informative bulletins, setting up a newspaper or magazine, the annual editing of a catalogue at European standards, the development of media programs and the establishment of an information and dissemination office.

On the territory of our country there is a wide variety of historical cultural values - folk art, ethnography, folklore, traditions, and historical vestiges - a harmoniously blended natural landscape with varied and picturesque landscape scenery. All these form a valuable tourist potential especially for Romanian rural tourism. They have evolved and developed on the most varied forms of relief and since the time of the Traco-Dacians, the Romanian rural settlements have preserved and still preserve the ancient customs and customs, a rich and varied folklore, original elements of ethnography and Handicrafts, which can be valorised in tourism within a strategy of organizing and developing rural tourism.

But all this is not enough to attract tourists, since they can only visit the beauties of Romania when they learn about it and this can only be done through a campaign of strong and continuous promotion of the rural regions and, implicitly, of the country .

In order to bring rural tourism in line with market requirements and at the level of European competitors, action is needed on the training of expert bodies in the professional associations to provide technical assistance. Organizing marketing courses, arranging and compartmenting reception areas, preparing and serving the meals (catering and meal rules), classification, approval, quality standards are also necessary. In addition there is also important to conduct training actions in hygiene and ecology, the realization of a competitive information system (operative evidence, reservation system) or even initiation in the behaviour and relations with the tourists (communication).

#### **5. The Romanian Village – a Tourist Project by Excellence**

At present, rural tourism in Romania is characterized by households or settlements that offer primary tourism benefits, while generously giving the wealth of Romanian village values. Thus, tourist villages are called inappropriate tourist villages. The revival of Romanian villages can also be translated into the fact that national

economies and local communities are forced to adapt to the economic restructuring process in order to maintain and increase their economic and social competitiveness through changes both in the structure of the rural environment and in the ways of using and capitalizing on it.

These changes, along with the latest news on how to spend leisure time, are the basic support of rural tourism development at a rapid pace. Technical progress in tourism equipment is another important factor contributing to the development of rural tourism areas.

In EU Member States, rural tourism varies from one country to another, although it is often based on similar policies and similar objectives.

As far as Romania is concerned, it has all the basic factors for intensifying the development of rural tourism, namely villages developed on different forms of relief from ancient times, which have preserved and still preserve traditional aspects and customs, ancient customs and customs, valuable elements of ethno-folklor of natural potential, of a large rural population rich traditions and attractive geographical positioning.

Taking into account the generous tourist patrimony that exists especially in rural areas and its minimal use - at the moment - we can say that the Romanian rural tourism product is not sufficiently capitalized.

Enthusiastic for the holidays of many of the world's tourists, rural tourism is no longer a novelty. For the vast majority of Europeans, Americans, New Zealanders, Australians, country holidays are increasingly preferred. The activity proved to be profitable - especially as a result of changing tourists' preferences and habits to individual tourism - to the detriment of mass tourism or of the "industrial" type.

On the other hand, migration to the city, the modernization of labor in the agricultural sector, the changes caused by the increase of competition in the rural world by widening the free market of the community, have a counterpart in the rural tourism. Activities in the tourism sphere can economically relaunch the villages, if the benevolent attitude of their inhabitants - to receive and accept in the midst of them the wave of wasting and demanding guests - is welcomed.

Inside Europe - whether it is recalled in the Central European region or is named as a group of Eastern countries - Romania has remained a less agrarian but surely rural country (more than 50% of the territory and the population being outside the city). The country in which rural civilization, with all that is related to it - positive and negative - has been amazingly preserved. The natural setting and the way of "living in the countryside" are the closest to the traditional image that could be preserved in Western Europe. In addition, human communities, though seemingly removed from the tabs of history books, are alive. Moreover, the village, regardless of its geographical location, is the expression of man's connection with nature, representing a multifunctional human settlement framework.

These aspects are also revealed from visiting the largest open-air museum in Europe, the Village Museum in Bucharest, or the e-books from: Dumbrava Sibiului, Ramnicu Valcea and Baia Mare. The same feelings we have when looking at the exhibits present in the unique museums of Câmpulung Moldovenesc (wood) and Sighetu Marmăției (masks and folk art). And these are just a few examples of the perpetuation of rural traditions in our country.

The Romanian village, especially the tourist destination, is a unique tourist product for both the national and the world market. On the other hand, the Romanian tourist village can contribute to the discovery of our country - as a possible tourist destination, creating the interest for Romania as a place that offers a wide range of experiences, quality holidays and even business opportunities. This is based on the wide range of natural and cultural resources, the various tourist facilities and experiences, the specificities and uniqueness of our country, history (buildings, events, legends), culture (written, art, costumes, music, theater, crafts, cuisine, special skills), geography and topography (Black Sea coastal areas, wildlife in the Danube Delta, mountain areas etc.) existing within the Romanian village, within our natural heritage).

At the same time the Romanian village brings together important picturesque, mountainous, riparian places, invaluable religious and cultural heritage, mineral and thermal waters, unprecedented flora and fauna, old traditions, appreciated and respected internationally: art and crafts (theater, music, poetry, dance, painting, sculpture) and a varied range of good quality attractions and facilities.

The world of tourist products, reunified in the tourist market, is much wider and with a degree of diversity difficult to specify. What we call a rural tourist product or tourist village - a tourist product, is a forced and abstract reduction to unity. Given the wide diversity of possible components of a tourism product in general and rural tourism products in particular, the party-to-whole reduction can only be used to create an easier exposure.

As you can see, the tourist village possesses and can offer various tourist products that use simultaneously the same technical and material base and the same tourist attractions (folklore, scenery, beach, mountain, balneological resources, historical monuments, dendrological parks etc.). Is not well enough to meet the needs of European tourists. The village as a tourist product is not sufficiently developed from the point of view of receiving international tourists and especially from the competition point of view in the European Union.

The rural area offers an infinite number of profitable possibilities: boarding houses, camps and accommodation in farmhouses can support a wide range of activities such as pedestrian walks, cultural tourism, river tourism, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, winter sports, cycling, etc. Each type of rural settlement offers particular opportunities and raises specific problems. That is why the tourist product offered must be elaborated precisely depending on the presence of the different components, in relation to the individualized character of the settlement. [4, 79]

The Romanian rural area is the preserve and conservator of an inestimable treasure of historical monuments, of architecture or art, historical vestiges, as well as a genuine ethnofolcloric heritage of unmatched value and purity.

Romania is the country where the atmosphere and the flavor of rural life are still close to its traditional image, which is why tourists have an increasing interest in rural tourism. The mystery of the Romanian village is revealed to tourists in different areas: mountain peaks, valleys, the Danube Delta, the Black Sea coast. Regardless of the area and the level of culture, the hospitality of the inhabitants remains unchanged.

Romanians women from the villages still wring torches, weave blouses and carpets and cook traditional dishes. Tourists can take part in farm activities, collecting berries, preparing jams and wine, horseback riding or bicycle rides, horseback riding and carriages with samarized donkeys. For holidays, tourists can witness the specific customs and dances. [5]

Historical cultural components of the countryside are archaeological vestiges, historical monuments of architecture and art, museums, collections, memorial houses and testimonies of folk culture and civilization.

The archaeological remains related to the genesis of the Romanian people and its continuity in the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic space are the Dacian fortresses (Costești, Blidaru, Grădiștea Muncelului), the Greek castles (Histria, Enisala, Callatis, Tomis), the Roman castles (Hateg, Sarmizegetusa) (Târgu Neamț, Poenari, Suceava, Târgoviște, Sighișoara, Alba Iulia, Oradea, Timișoara etc.).

The historical monuments of architecture and art are represented by the painted churches in Northern Moldova (Vroneț, Sucevita, Moldovița, Humor etc.), Middle Moldova (Neamț, Agapia, Secu, Sihastria), Maramures wooden churches (Ieud, Rozavlea, Bogdan (Mogoșoiaia, Hurezi, Polovragi), the medieval fortresses (Făgăraș, Bran, Harman, Sighișoara, Rupea etc.), the peasant fortresses and the fortified churches of Transylvania (Hărman, Cislădie, Daia, Prejmar).

Museums, collections and memorial houses are the Romanian Peasant Museum, the Mina Minovici Folk Art Museum, the Bucharest Village Museum, the Dumbrava Sibiului Folk Art Museum, the Golesti Museum Complex, the Bujoreni (Vâlcea) Ethnographic Museum, the Ethnography and Folk Art Museum Dealul Florilor (Maramureș - Negrești-Oaș) etc. The enumeration presents only a few of the most well-defined museums, most of them included among the international tourist attractions. Apart from these, in the rural areas practicing rural tourism appeared in the last years small museums of local, regional or national interest.

Among the testimonies of the folk culture and folk culture of the elements of ethnography and folklore can be remembered folk technique and traditional architecture, folk artistic creation (folk port, folklore: musical, literary and choreographic, crafts, ceramics, handicrafts); Traditional folk manifestations (fairs, festivals, fairs, competitions). These elements will be found in the main ethnographic areas of the country: Moldova, Oaș, Bucovina, Mărginimea Sibiului, Oltenia Sub Munte, Bihor, Banat, etc.

The Romanian rural tourism has been and still has direct connection with the entire Romanian tourist movement, but it is rare to see the desire to convince the tourists by its pluses.

The traits that help distinguish rural tourism from the traditional one are the environment in which tourism consumption takes place, the nature of the farm, the affective side of this type of tourism, the tradition and the environment of the rural areas and, last but not least, the village - the psychological entity.

Another feature is that it should be emphasized that rural tourism is an activity complementary to the agricultural holding and not an alternative or a substitute for it.

The potential of rural tourism (the natural potential) should be placed in the hands of municipalities and not at the expense of traders or tourists in order to achieve the development of the whole village (not just a portion) and thus to activate a genuine, stimulating tourist offer in its diversity, differentiated for both tourists and villagers.

Rural tourism has a strong affection because it is not an offer of any kind or consumption. As long as this element is not forgotten or neglected, there will be no danger of destroying the environment or culling negative factors in the culture of the village or area by overcoming ecological limits.

Tradition and ambience of rural areas are the starting point for the development and sustainable implementation of rural tourism in our country.

The village - the rural environment on which to act is to be seen as a complex psychological entity, an entity characterized by simplicity and hospitality, in fact lacking in urban education, but in the absence of culture and inundation of intuition and common sense. The nature of hospitality offered by the countryside removes a certain category of tourists and makes it accessible only to those attracted by the harmony of the activity in the household, the recovery of simple and natural life.

The development of rural tourism is manifested through permanent economic growth and improvement of the structures of this type of tourism. New forms of tourism in rural areas such as agrotourism, religious pilgrimage, cults, an increase in the visits of foreign tourists who have lived in Romania and want to revisit the localities where they have spent previous periods of life . [6, 33]

The problems faced by the rural tourism service provider are related to the need to know the tastes and needs of tourists in advance, along with the need to constantly adapt to these requirements (with particular reference to the comfort requirements in accommodation, Fresh produce unpolluted, knowledge of local traditions specific to the area, etc.) and studying promotional actions that are in line with the seasonal functions of rural tourism. These problems exist irrespective of the reception structure of tourists in rural areas.

In parallel with the development process of rural tourism, the tourist impulses, elements of infrastructure, cultural elements, as well as those related to traditional occupations (including artisan), which have become factors of attraction in the countryside, have been amplified. [7, 81]

It can be noticed at present that the supply of rural and urban sites is very similar, although local and rural specific traditions should become signs of emblematic nature.

Objectively, rural tourism should not and can not be broken by the tourist village as a space element. The central part of rural tourism is precisely the tourist village. So the tourist village is the place where rural tourism is practiced and it is a tourist destination. Thus, there is a close interdependence between the typology of the tourist villages and the typology of the forms of tourism.

### **Conclusions**

From the point of view of rural tourism, our country has all the conditions for its practice. This type of tourism can be an important revenue-generating activity if it is carried out in accordance with European Union rules. In order for the Romanian village to develop and thus to provide a solid basis for rural tourism, a few conditions must be fulfilled, such as the natural environment being as attractive as possible, with different monuments of nature and low pollution; To have anthropic objectives (museum points, statues, historical monuments, ruins or fortresses, castles, old houses, folk architecture monuments, etc.); To preserve cultural, folk and traditional customs; To have

a minimum infrastructure in order to facilitate the tourists access, to provide adequate accommodation, and also to offer leisure activities.

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