

# RUDĂRIEI GORGES – STEPS TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Cipriana SAVA  
Cornelia PETROMAN  
Mladjan MAKSIMOVIĆ

***Abstract:** Sustainable tourism is the chance to develop special, less-known, unpolluted areas. Rudăriei Gorges in Almăjului Mountains, Caraș-Severin County, are a natural protected area of national interest. Rudăria windmills complex enriches the area's image and makes it more attractive from a tourist point of view. Traditions, crafts and gastronomy are important elements for tourism development. The local community has grasped the advantages of tourism development and has begun, with small steps, to implement the principles of sustainable development.*

***Keywords:** tourism, tourist resources, protected area, sustainable development*

## **Introduction**

The development of sustainable tourism is a challenge for the economic agents in the field, all over the world.

Tourism is an economic branch that pollutes the environment through the various actions of tourists and economic agents involved. At present, the number of tourists worldwide has reached 1.32 billion persons<sup>1</sup>, which has led to increased road, air and rail traffic and an intensive development of specific infrastructure and tourism activities, which justifies the need for taking measures to protect the environment and the sustainable development.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) considers that “sustainable tourism meets the needs of the present tourists and tourism industry, while protecting the environment and future opportunities. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems<sup>2</sup>.”

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1 Journal UNWTO, Barometer, January, 15, 2018

2 \*\*\* WTO, WTTC, The Earth Council-Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development, 1995

From this definition, one can notice that the performances resulting from its application are economic, social and ecologic.

The sustainable development of tourism is based on the following ideas:

- “the environment is the main element supporting tourism, it must remain to future generations;
- by practicing tourism we should gain benefits for the environment, local communities and tourists;
- there should be a long-term environment-tourism relationship;
- preserving the characteristics of the destination;
- finding a balance between the needs of the participants (tourists, hosts and destination);
- respecting the principles by all those involved in the tourism activity and their liability”<sup>3</sup>

The UN declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Development for Tourism. In the Report of the sustainable tourism group of that year, the Commission of the European Communities presents and recommends a number of principles, namely:

- a global and integrated approach;
- long-term planning;
- finding a suitable pace for development;
- involvement of all parties;
- using the best knowledge available;
- reducing and managing risks;
- repercussions of effects on costs;
- establishment and compliance with the limits, where appropriate;
- continuous monitoring<sup>4</sup>

A sustainable tourism development can represent the future of an area with tourism potential, which is why development and mobilization plans must be drawn up in order to cooperate with economic agents in tourism, the resident population and environmental specialists.

Rural tourism can very well implement the principles of sustainable development, especially in areas where the degree of urbanization and intensive economic development is low.

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3 Sava, Cipriana, (2010), Tourism as part of sustainable regional development, Ed. Eurostampa, Timișoara, p.33

4 Report of the group on sustainable tourism “Actions towards a sustainable European tourism”, February 2007, pp. 3-4, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/com/com\\_com\(2007\)0621\\_/COM\\_COM\(2007\)062\\_ro.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/com/com_com(2007)0621_/COM_COM(2007)062_ro.pdf)

### **Rural tourism**

The beginnings of rural tourism include the movements of artists from the 16th and 17th centuries, especially plastic artists, in tranquil villages that offered special landscapes and images of the peasants' life that they immortalized. Housing and food were provided in the peasants' household and relied on their hospitality.

Rural tourism is the form of tourism that takes place in rural areas and is based on all existing natural and anthropogenic resources, as well as on accommodation facilities, public catering, and various events in the area. Therefore, the tourist benefits from accommodation, food and leisure, all in the countryside. Accommodation can be provided in peasants' houses, pensions, farms, camping sites, small hotels and motels.

The World Tourism Organization through the Executive Council (Malaga, Spain 9-11 May 2016) defined some forms of tourism, including rural tourism, as follows:

“Rural Tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle/culture, angling and sightseeing.

Rural Tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics:

- low population density,
- landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry;
- traditional social structure and lifestyle.”<sup>5</sup>

The authenticity of rural space is an essential element in the development of tourism and tourists’ preferences. The motivations of tourists who like spending their free time in rural areas are diverse and start from the desire to relax in a less polluted and crowded environment, to connect with nature, to know rural culture, to participate in activities and traditional events.

Possible activities in rural tourism are also very varied, being closely related to the natural environment and the specificity of the rural area. Among them, we distinguish:

- hiking;
- visiting the anthropogenic attractions of the area;
- knowledge of local architecture;
- horse carts rides;
- cycling;

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<sup>5</sup>[http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/ce106\\_03\\_implementation\\_of\\_the\\_general\\_programme\\_of\\_work\\_2016-2017\\_en.pdf](http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/ce106_03_implementation_of_the_general_programme_of_work_2016-2017_en.pdf) , OMTAnnex I: Report of the Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness (CTC), pag 11

- boat rides;
- participation in household/farm works;
- enrolling in various workshops to learn traditional crafts;
- photography;
- animals or wild birds watching;
- fishing and hunting;
- participation in events, village holidays;
- tasting products from local gastronomy.

It can be said that the tourist chooses both educational and entertaining activities, but all must be authentic and take place in an unpolluted rural environment.

Rural tourism can be:

- rural tourism;
- agritourism.

Agritourism also takes place in rural areas, it is a form of rural tourism but tourists will benefit from accommodation in peasants' houses, pensions, farms, will receive traditional dishes prepared from local produce and will be able to participate in at least one activity in the household, on the farm.

The emergence and development of rural tourism comes from people's desire to spend their free time outside urban settlements, to get in touch with nature and the traditional, to interact with the locals.

In order to develop rural tourism and promote it at international level, it is beneficial for us to be active in associations that support these activities, to participate in various tourism events such as those in Europe:

- Agriterra, a non-profit international agro-industrial agency - supports farmers' organizations in developing countries, for example in rural tourism development;
- ECTAA - national associations of travel agents and tour operators for each European country;
- The European Alliance for Responsible Tourism and Hospitality (EARTH) - European network of member and partner organizations in responsible tourism;
- ITB - the annual tourism trade fair (March) taking place in Berlin;
- International Ecotourism Society (TIES) - the global network of ecotourism professionals and travels organizing the Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference;
- World Travel Market - the annual tourist trade event (November) in London<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/rural-tourism/rural-tourism-europe>

Romanian rural tourism is supported by ANTREC (National Ecological and Cultural Rural Tourism Association) both nationally and internationally. This association was established in 1994, currently having 3500 members from 32 counties of the country, trying to preserve the traditional Romanian culture and the natural environment and to develop rural tourism.

### **Cheile Rudăriei**

Within the Banat Mountains (Western Carpathians) there is a mountain group known as Almăj Mountains. These mountains in south-western Romania are encompassed between the Danube Gorge (Orșova-Sichevița), the Liubcova-Șopotul Corridor, the Almăjului Depression, the Mehadica Depression, the Cerna Corridor and the Orșova Depression, and have the appearance of highly branched peaks. Their highest peak, Svinecea Mare, has a height of 1224m, and the most spectacular gorges are Putna, Rudăria and Sirina.

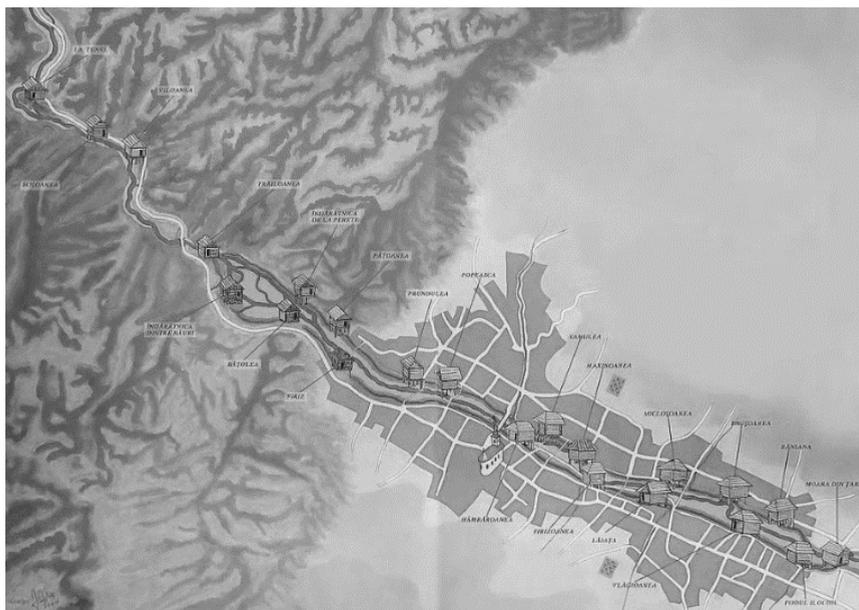


**Figure 1.** Landscape from Rudăria  
Source: Sava, Cipriana *own photo album*

Rudăria's gorges are crossed by the Rudăria River, a tributary of Nera, in crystalline shales, and are 7 km long. Due to the wild beauty of the place, the gorges, the steep peaks and waterfalls, the vegetation and the fauna, in the year 2000 this area was declared protected area (Law No. 5 of March 6, 2000, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, no.152 of 12 April 2000, on the approval of the the National Territory Planning Plan - Section III - Protected Areas).

The mixed protected natural area is located on the Rudăria valley, at an altitude ranging from 350 to 900 m, and covers an area of 250 hectares on the administrative territory of Eftimie Murgu commune, formerly Rudăria until 1970. It falls within the IUCN IV category (active habitat/species management area) and is also included in the European ecological network Natura 2000 (community interest).

The unique and remarkable attraction is the Rudăria Water Mills Complex, a group of 22 water mills stretched along 3 km.



**Figure 2.** Map of Rudăria Water Mills Complex

Source: <http://drumliber.ro/cel-mai-mare-parc-cu-mori-de-apa-din-se-europei-rudaria-eftimie-murgu/>

These wooden water mills were rehabilitated with the support of the ASTRA National Museum Sibiu between 2000-2001, financed by the Euroart programme (the European cultural fund for Romania, funded by the EU). Most of the water mills are functional and are part of the UNESCO heritage.

The names of the water mills are inspired by the names of the families who built them or of some toponyms such as the Mill of Țarina, the Mill of the Ilochii Bridge, Băniana, Vlăgioanea, Brușoanea, Lăiața, Micloșoanea, Maxinoanea, Firizoanea, Hămbăroanea, Vamulea, Popeasca, Prundulea, Firiz, Pâtoanea, Bățolea, Îndărătnica de la Perete, Îndărătnica dintre Râuri (Figure 3), Trăiloanea, Viloanea, Roșoane, Moara de la Tunel.



**Figure 3** „Îndărătnica dintre Râuri” Water Mill  
Source: Sava, Cipriana own photo album

These water mills feature a horizontal hydraulic wheel-rim system - close to the Kapllan system. They are traditional, area-specific, small-sized wooden constructions.



**Figure 4** Interior of a water mill and pipe  
Source: Sava, Cipriana own photo album

Access roads to this area are accessible and modern, namely:

- Reșița - Anina (DN58) - Bozovici (DJ 578) - Eftimie Murgu (Rudaria) DJ 571F;
- Moldova Nouă - Cărbunari (DJ 571) - Dalboșeț- (DJ 571B) Eftimie Murgu (Rudaria) DJ 571F

The area preserves alongside natural beauty a series of traditions and customs. Ruga, the "nigeia" in Banat is organized annually on the The Feast of the Ascension of Jesus Christ (celebrated 40 days after Easter), the patronage of the local church.

A habit that is practiced every year on the Monday of the beginning of Easter fasting is known as „Lunea Cornilor”. On this occasion, the participants wear popular masks and costumes and re-enact the moments specific to a wedding (engagement, wedding, the gift and the wedding procession).

The measurement of sheep or milk is another spring habit that takes place after the first week the sheep go up to the mountain, which is around April 23 (St. George).

The popular costume of Eftimie Murgu commune is specific to the Almăjului Valley sub-area, generally with black stitches, and is still worn at various celebrations.

Legends of the place are linked to the Adam and Eve rocks, the place known as Cracul Fetii, to the water mills such as the Moara de la Tunel, Îndărătnica de la Perete, Îndărătnica dintre Râuri and Roșoane. In the village mills people used to arrange weddings, sitting, spells, and incantations.

In 2003, a museum housing objects from the Almăj household, popular costumes and a dismantled wooden mill to highlight its specific elements was set up within the school in Eftimie Murgu.

This area can be visited all year round, but with equipment suitable for the mountain area, free of charge.

To support the development of tourism, three guesthouses have been built - Danieli, Valea Morilor House and "La Moara din Grădină" House - which offer accommodation and a restaurant, Deo, where you can try culinary specialties of the area.

Efforts have been made and are still being made to include the plum vinegar, the plum brandy, the chicken cheese, but especially the corn and wheat flour, all from Rudăria, on the list of internationally recognized traditional products.

Tourists arriving in the area can purchase wheat and corn flour, plum brandy in bottles containing miniaturized agricultural objects, wool magnets, traditional woven satchels, woven socks, cheese, fruits and syrups. They can taste donuts with cheese and cornmeal, dishes prepared by local people.

Thus, maintaining the local culture and the environment as clean as possible attracts more and more tourists from the country and abroad every year.

Since 2016, local authorities have developed a strategy to promote the area and attract a larger number of Romanian tourists, but also foreign tourists to transform the village into a great holiday destination. Thus, in 2017 the commune participated with a delegation of five people and a stand at the International Tourism Fair in Berlin (ITB), where interested people could taste the local treats and could read the leaflets made for this event.

## Conclusions

Rudăriei Gorges located in the south-eastern part of Caraș-Severin County are recognized as a protected natural area, where natural elements (relief, flora, fauna) and anthropogenic species are protected. Their richness and variety is a great tourist potential and a significant value. The water mills complex is the largest in Southeast Europe, it is a testimony of the skill and ingenuity of the local people.

The locals have understood that through sustained efforts and preserving their cultural identity, the unpolluted environment can develop a profitable business. Sustainable tourism can raise their living standards without changing their habits and the natural environment. At present, the first steps towards the development of sustainable tourism in the area of Rudăriei Valley, namely in Eftimie Murgu commune, have been achieved.

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## NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

**Cipriana SAVA** is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Management in Tourism and Commerce Timișoara, „Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University. She holds a PhD. in Management and is the author of a large number of books, articles and studies in the field of tourism, regional and rural development. Cipriana Sava

is also a member in „Asociația Română de Științe Regionale” (ARSR), in the „European Regional Science Association” (E.R.S.A.), in the „Science Association International” (RSAI) and in the “Romanian Association of Tourism Journalists” (AJIR). At present she is the director of the research center of the Timisoara Faculty of Business and Tourism Management. E-mail: cipriana.sava@gmail.com

**Cornelia PETROMAN**, Professor at the Banat’s University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Agricultural Management, Calea Aradului, 119, Timisoara, Romania.

**Mladjan MAKSIMOVIĆ, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Management, Economics and Finance, University Business Academy in Novi Sad, Faculty of Applied Management, Economics and Finance in Belgrade, Jevrejska 24, 11000 Belgrade, E-mail: mladjan.maksimovic@mef.edu.rs.