

## RURAL TOURISM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HUNGARY AND ROMANIA

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***Abstract:** Starting with the 70s, the tourism became one of the most important economic activities worldwide, in the same time rural tourism being also developed due to the increasing demand for spending free time in the rural area. Rural tourism is being practiced for a long time in many European countries, in an organized or spontaneous manner. This form of tourism has evolved in the last decades tending to become a mass phenomenon. In this article a brief study regarding tourism development in rural areas from Hungary and Romania is presented.*

***Key words:** rural tourism, ecotourism, green tourism, sustainable development, sustainable tourism, rural area*

### 1. Introduction

Tourism in rural area has always been practiced, but was increasingly contoured, appreciated and demanded along with the evolution of civilization, given the industrialization and urbanization phenomena which became harmful factors due to the emphasizing stress in the polluted urban area. World exit from this impasse has determined practice of tourism in a non-polluted environment, propitious to the tourism direct contact with nature, through which the latest temporarily reverses to origin, in the harmony of rural life.

There are several conceptual approaches unanimously accepted by all actors of tourism world like there also exist several sets of less conventional definitions based on characteristics applicable to certain areas where rural tourism is being practiced, this bringing in fore-plan activities that may be performed in the rural environment.

The rural tourism represents a method to preserve the natural and human qualities of a given geographic area. In the specialty literature, there are numerous definitions resulted from the way issues have been approached. The official definition launched by the World Tourism Organization in 1997, and other European bodies, which specifies that rural tourism is “a form of tourism which includes any tourism activity organized and conducted in the rural area by local population and which exploits the local tourism resources (natural, cultural-historical, human) as well as the tourism endowments and structures, including the pensions and agro-tourism farms. As a consequence, the rural tourism is

a form of tourism performed in the rural area referring to tourism activities organization inside the rural community, highlighting local history, day by day life of local population with its specific customs and traditions, along with the tourism endowments and equipment.

There has to be pointed out the fact that the diversity of natural and social-economic conditions worldwide leads to a diverse application of the rural area notion in relation with the density of population and endowments, the way of using the land, the type of households or the traditions of population.

In the Romanian literature, one of the rural tourism definitions presumes “that type of tourism activity, associated with the rural environment, which – when appropriately managed – ensures the perenniality of rural area and the convergence of economic and spiritual suppliers and customers, respectively, which relates through tourism product mediation”. In the opinion of authors Rodica Petre and Dan Petrea (2000, page 18), the rural tourism development is determined by the preservation of the rural infrastructure, way of life, traditions and maintaining the specific cultural identity.

The author F. Miu (2008, pages 65-66) considers that rural tourism includes a wide range of accommodation modalities, activities, events, festivities, sports and leisure, all being performed in a typical rural environment. As a consequence, the rural tourism is determined by the following aspects: the existence of rural localities, the preservation of rural functionality, the return to unaltered nature, the preservation of rural infrastructure, the desire to rest, air and fruit cure, fresh food consumption, preservation of the traditional way of life, preservation of the specific cultural identity, etc.

Based on above definitions, we can say that rural tourism includes all activities performed in this kind of environment, being represented by the rural localities placed in a non-polluted environment, significant from the ethno-folk and cultural values, keeper of village traditions or with a rich historical past, which – except own administrative, economic and cultural functions – also performs - during a season or the entire year - the function of reception and accommodation of tourists arrived for spending a holiday.

The rural tourism presents numerous interferences with other forms of tourism, such as: ecotourism, green tourism, agro-tourism, the last can be considered a form of rural tourism in the narrowest sense.

The ecotourism is a form of tourism practiced in the natural areas, its goal being represented by the knowledge and appreciation of nature and local culture, which presumes preservation measures and ensures an

active implication generating benefits for the local population (Nistoreanu and collaborators, 2003, page 76).

The term of “green tourism” is used to make a distinction between white tourism (winter sports tourism), blue tourism (seaside holidays) and lights tourism (urban tourism); the green tourism may be understood as tourism activity practiced in the country side or the sparsely populated areas, where specific tourism is not developed; it may be characterized by the visitors willingness to integrate themselves in the natural and human surroundings and through the firm implication of the local population in ensuring services for tourists (Gh. Statie, 2009, page 15).

The agro-tourism, a relatively new concept, is a form of rural tourism related to agricultural activities, this form of tourism being conducted by farmers as a secondary activity, their main activity being the agricultural one. In some European countries (France, England) a distinction between agro-tourism and farm tourism is being attempted, the last representing the tourists accommodation in former farm buildings which lost their functionality or are no longer detained as farms. It is obvious that both forms are part of the rural tourism sphere (P. Nistoreanu, 2003, page 191).

From the numerous definitions given to the agro-tourism, a special relevance has the following one: “a form of tourism practiced in peasants’ households (farms/pensions), comprising both the main tourism activity (supplying the base and additional services) and the economic activity (agricultural) practiced by the tourists hosts (productive activities for processing agricultural products in the household and their commercialization to tourists or other commercial networks, as well as the way to spend the free time (Gh, Statie, 2009, page 14). From this definition, the base element is missing, that is the rural area, the village, this being the main reason for which tourists decide to spend their holidays in the country side. As a consequence, the agro-tourism is limited to the peasants’ households, by the exploitation of the natural environment, the accommodation offer and agro-tourism services, having a narrow coverage than rural tourism.

In conclusion, we may say rural tourism and agro-tourism are similar concepts up to a certain level. However, these containing elements leading to a separation, such as: the rural tourism is an alternative form to classic tourism, which is practiced in tourism centers and the agro-tourism is a specific form of rural tourism practiced in the country side by smallholders as a secondary activity, their main activity being the one made in own household, which also constitutes the main source of income.

Both the rural tourism and agro-tourism are based on three coordinates: space, people and products, thus, space without people's existence would not represent a support for cohabitation and space without products would not respond to the tourism consumers' needs. The rural tourism has developed by exploiting the favorable characteristics of the three base elements concurring to the accomplishment of tourism act (Cocean, 2002, page 215):

- rural space (village hearth and estate) as a support for life and development of specific activities;
- rural population as an element of continuity for centuries of folk customs and traditions of villages, transformation factor for natural environment and local resources;
- natural products (natural riches) satisfying both personal demands and the tourism offers designated to hosted persons.

The tourism village is a rural settlement, picturesque, well built, situated in a non-polluted natural environment, keeper of traditions with a rich historical past, which - apart of the political-administrative, economic, social and cultural functions – fulfills the temporary function of receiving and accommodating the tourist arrived to spend a holiday for an undetermined period of time.

The Romanian village and the one with a tourism vocation in particular represent an unprecedented tourism product not only for the national market but also for the worldwide one. On the other side, the Romanian tourism village may contribute to the discovery of our country as a possible tourism destination, creating an interest for Romania as a place where a wide range of experiences, quality holidays, and even business opportunities are being offered (Nistoreanu, 1999, page 97).

To motivate the rural tourism development, the authors Rodica Petrea and Dan Petrea (2000, pages 30-46) underline the following factors:

- increasing the level of education, which generates and amplifies motivations of social, cognitive and aesthetic order;
- increasing the time allocated for recreation;
- betterment of transportation and communications;
- increasing the request for quotation for “personalized” tourism offers against the “uniformed serial products” increasing the interest for maintaining health;
- improvement of sport and tourism equipment industry;
- authenticity more and more appreciated by tourists;
- tranquility and psychical comfort more and more demanded by tourists;
- individualism affirmation on the market;

- increasing the interest of administrative bodies on local and county level.

This development has both positive and negative implications in the rural areas. Among the positive effects, the authors identify: the population stability through work force stabilization, new work places creation, services promotion and development, farmers economical sustainment, folk art and local handcraft industry promotion and sustainment, attraction of new investments. The negative implications in the development of rural tourism emphasized by authors are: the pressure put on environment, social-cultural pressure, the limited character of accommodation capabilities, passivity to external entrepreneurs pressure, planning problems, local supervision, public participation and partnership, territorial differentiation of the rural tourism potential, the lack or insufficiency of farmers tourism competency, deficient complementarity of businesses and the lack of co-operation structures.

## **2. Rural tourism in Hungary and Romania**

The country side tourism has a long history on the European continent, over time the European space has been crossed by numerous roads used by travelers, as well as merchants, pilgrims or crusaders knights in their way to different destinations. These travelers had their own traditions and customs as well as a spoken language different to the one of their hosts, this characterizing even today the rural tourism. The rural tourism has evolved differently in each country. The most differences refer to endowments and services, each country having its own potential and strengths. The rural tourism organization – EUROGÎTES, established in 1990 in Portugal, had an important role in the development of the European rural tourism. It is an organization covering entire geographic Europe, presently having 22 members in 12 European countries. Romania is a EUROGÎTES member since 1993.

### **Hungary**

Crossed by the Danube River, Hungary detains a varied landscape, including medium altitude mountains, classic regions like the Balaton Lake, the wine region of Tokay and the Hortobágy National Reservation, which is one of the Europe's best preserved plains. An important role in the tourism in Hungary is played by the form of rural tourism which emphasizes multi-century traditions of some well preserved rural regions. The rural tourism in Hungary is divided in seven main areas (Nistoreanu, 2010, page 3):

- West Transdanubia located at the foot of Sopron and Kozseg mountains, here also been located the Fertő Lake which has a national park where numerous protected birds and animals live.
- Central Transdanubia, famous due to the wine culture tradition. In the Gerecs and Vertes mountains there is located the longest chain of defense strongholds in Hungary;
- South Transdanubia, located at the foot of Mecsek and Villány mountains, is characterized by the sub-Mediterranean vegetation;
- The North of Hungary, considered the Land of Strongholds, here been located the Eger, Sarospatak, Füzes strongholds;
- Central Hungary, called “The Encounter Land”, here is the place where mountains meet the Hungarian plains, and here is the hiding place from the stressful Budapest life, in the tranquility and peace of Godollo and Visegrád hills.
- The Northern Plateau, famous for the culinary tradition of Hungarian plains, where traditions are respected and transmitted from generation to generation. The cooking recipe for mutton stew is a secret well guarded by generations of shepherds. It is said that here one may feel “the taste of Hungarian plains”.
- The Southern Plateau, called “The Land of Golden Sands”. The vegetables, onion, peppers, paprika and garlic made here are famous around the world. In this part of Hungary, manufacturing camps are organized where interested tourists are initiated in the secrets of pottery and leather articles manufacturing.

Before the World War II, the country holidays in Hungary represented a percentage of 35-45% from the total of travels and after 1945 that form of tourism completely disappeared due to obstacles met in the market organization, the lack of an appropriate institutionalized frame, the precarious financial situation and the relative underdevelopment of the attractive areas from the tourism point of view, the low interest of the professional tourism organizations, the lack of business management aptitudes from peasants and the rural population aging.

Starting with the year 1960, the rural tourism development has been included in the regional development plans, not very successfully, however, due to the fact that a large part of the urban population had relatives living at the country side and, therefore, the reason for the vacations was more to visit relatives and less to see rural traditions and customs and staying over night was free of charge, thus not contributing

to the income increase of the rural tourism. We have to mention that the majority of the Hungarian middle class detains houses or villas in the rural area, few of the members of said class having agriculture exploitations, and their children were going to the schools in the urban area, thus, favoring the development of infrastructure and certain services.

Starting with 1980, measures were taken to revitalize the rural area, these leading to an increase number of foreign visitors interested in the tourism offer due to the low prices and, on the other side, the attraction to the folk programs and horseback riding programs specific to the Central and Eastern plateau areas. Nowadays, the horse shows are organized in the Balaton Lake area, nicely arranged to attract tourists. Hungary fights for counteracting the „low price-low quality” image.

The rural tourism promotion in Hungary is realized through organizations, associations, foundations, among which we mention: Association for Rural Tourism, Pecs, Ormasag Regional Development Association, Association for Rural Tourism in South Danubian German Ethnic Region, Association for Tourism and Ornithology, Country Tours Travel Agency etc.

It is to be remarked the upmost care to present the regions in the agro-tourism offers catalogue, thus, each house is accompanied by a picture, description of the endowments and leisure possibilities. For instance, under the pictures of some agro-tourism pensions, one may read: tennis field, horseback riding courses, carriage rides, swimming pool, hunting and fishing programs, etc. The prices vary from 500 to 1200 HUF per night per person. The special attention in presenting the advantages and leisure facilities explains the advance that Hungary has compared to Romania in the field of organizing and promoting the agro-tourism (Nistoreanu, 2010, page 4).

### **Romania**

The Romanian rural tourism proves to be one of the modalities to promote Romania’s tourism potential. Year by year, the statistics demonstrate that rural tourism has made more and more adepts.

If in countries like France, Germany or Austria, rural tourism already numbers some decades, in Romania this holiday in the peasants’ household formula is being practiced for a short time in an organized manner.

The rural tourism is practiced in Romania since 20s – 30s, but only between 1973 - 1974 an attempt for revitalization was done by identifying a number of 33 “tourism villages” from all ethnographic areas and the homologation of peasants’ households, however, the

action was stopped from political reasons. Subsequently, 13 villages were homologated from which only two functioned: Lerești (Argeș County) and Sibiel (Sibiu County). After 1989, the rural tourism and agro-tourism started to develop in Romania, encouraged and sustained by domestic regulations, with a high concentration in the country's mountain area, the core being represented by the Moeciu – Bran area then, step by step, the phenomena spreading throughout the country. Among the opportunities for the development of rural tourism in our country, we have to emphasize the following aspects that characterize the Romanian rural area: approximately 90% from the total surface of our country is under rural administration, nearly half of the population lives in villages, the land for agriculture represents 62% from the total surface of the country and the forestry fund represents 26.7% from the surface of national territory; in our country, there are 13 thousands villages administratively integrated in communes.

After 1990, rural tourism promotion actions were initiated at organization, legislation, research formation and international co-operation level. Thus, in 1990 the Mountain Area Commission was established, reorganized in 1993 under the name of Romanian Federation for Mountain Area Development, which focused its actions especially on the mountain area development, being responsible for the organization and promotion of tourism in the rural area. The establishment in 1994 of the National Association of Rural, Ecologic and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC), an NGO member of the European Federation of Rural Tourism – EUROGITÉS, responsible for the development and promotion of the Romanian rural tourism, as well as the professional formation of the persons interested in this field, gave an impulse to this new form of tourism. The European Union, through PHARE Program, has granted ANTREC back in 1996 a consistent financing to create the National Network for Reservations and Promotion of Romanian Rural Tourism, the project aiming to ensure the mechanisms for a computerized system for reservations which to be connected to the EUROGITÉS European Reservations Operator. Starting with 1992, Romania benefited from the PHARE Program for Tourism, which activated up to 1997, having allocated funding for: institutional development, staff training, development strategies elaboration, tourism grants and co-financing for development projects. In 1999, the European Union launched the SAPARD Program, conceived for the rural development in the EU candidate countries, which activated for a period of seven years starting with the year 2000. This program financed the following actions: agricultural farms investments, improvement of agricultural products processing and

commercialization, the development and diversification of economic activities to ensure additional or alternative incomes, development and improvement of rural infrastructure. In 1994, it has been approved the Romanian Government Emergency Ordinance #62/1994, subsequently promulgated by the Law #145/1994 regarding the establishment of facilities to develop the rural tourism system in the mountain area, the Danube Delta and Black Sea seaside. According to this law, the tourism pensions are structures for receiving, hosting and serving food with a capacity comprised between 3 and 20 rooms, functioning in the households or independent buildings, ensuring specially created spaces for tourists accommodation and food serving services; the agro-tourism farm is a structure for receiving, accommodating and food-serving with a capacity between 3 and 20 rooms, functioning in the peasants' households which ensure tourists' alimentation with fresh products from own or local sources.

Main component for the performance of rural tourism in our country, the tourism villages are rural settlements located in a picturesque and pollution free environment, in the most various landforms, from the Black Sea seaside and the Danube Delta to the mountain area. Grouped on basis of their specific, the following types of tourism villages are identified: landscaping and climacteric villages; spa villages; tourism for winter sports; fishing and hunting villages; pastoral villages; villages with objectives of scientific interest; villages with historical, art, and architectural monuments; tourism ethno-folk villages; tourism villages for artistic and handcraft creation; fruit-wine tourism villages (Cocean and collaborators, 2002, pages 221-222).

The villages in our country included in such kind of tourism form present a specific character from the cultural patrimony and architecture point of view, based on their location region, these being homologated according to the following tourism criteria: pollution free rural and picturesque landscape; cultural traditions (literature, musical, folk art, handcraft, customs, etc), various tourism potential; accessibility; appropriate local services; good level of life; good cultural level and well qualified work force to be involved in tourism activities (E. Matei, 200-, page 47).

The Romanian tourism villages, through their ethno-cultural and ethnographic specific, originality and richness of geographically-related own resources, constitute an unprecedented tourism product and may contribute to the discovery of our country as a possible tourism destination.

The main regions, counties and settlements involved in the practice of rural tourism in our country are: Maramureşul - settlements:

Sălișteea de Sus, Bogdan Vodă, Săpânța, Botiza etc.; Transilvania, Alba county - settlements: Albac, Arieșeni etc.; Bistrița-Năsăud county - settlements: Prundul Bârgăului, Telciu etc.; Cluj county- settlements: Băișoara, Poieni, Ciucea , Sighișoara etc.; in the central area of Romania: Brașov county – settlements: Bran, Fundata, Moeciu, Săcele etc., Covasna county – Balvanios; Harghita county – settlements: Izvorul Mureșului, Tușnad, Praid etc.; Sibiu county – settlements: Sibiel, Săliște, Tălmăcel etc.; Prahova county – settlements: Ciucaș, Bucegi, Breaza, Bușteni etc; Argeș county – settlements: Brăduleț, Brădetu, Domnești, Lerești, Rucăr, Sălătrucu; Buzău county – settlement: Gura Văii; Dâmbovița county – settlement: Pietroșița; Vrancea county – settlements: Campuri, Lepșa, Focșani, Naruja, Soveja; Moldova, județul Neamț – Agapia, Târgu Neamț, Văratec, Filioara, Fărcașa, Ceahlău-Durău; Suceava county - settlements: Vama, Vatra Moldoviței; Oltenia, Dolj county – settlements: Podari, Breasta, Perișor; Gorj county – settlements: Novaci, Stănești, Tismana, Vladimir; Vâlcea county – settlement: Vaideeni; Mehedinți county – settlements: Ponoare, Dubova etc, Hunedoara county – settlements: Hațeg, Bucium etc; Caraș-Severin county – settlements: Marga, Turnu-Ruieni. (E. Matei 200-, page 48).

The beauty of the nature in our county, along with the historical monuments of national and international value, creates the premises to obtain an important economic contribution to the rural tourism sphere.

### **3. Sustainable development of rural tourism**

As regards the tourism, the sustainable development implies “the development of all forms of tourism, management, tourism marketing, which to observe the natural, economic, and social integrity and to ensure the exploitation of natural and cultural resources for the generations to come.

In the specialty literature, the notion of sustainable tourism is known also under other denominations, such as: responsible tourism, post-industrial tourism, alternative tourism, green tourism, etc. The notion of sustainable tourism has been regarded as a long-term planning system for tourism, which takes into account both the interest of the community and its inhabitants and of the visitors and tourism industry. For the long-term success of rural tourism, the perspectives are showing this is closely related to the sustainable development - this being a complex concept - and the rural tourism integrates in this development but performances are to be obtained on the following three levels:

- economical, by increasing the level of exploitation and capitalization of tourism resources;

- ecological, by avoiding environment degradation;
- social, by improving the population level of life (E. Matei, 200-page 55).

For the rural tourism and agro-tourism, this strategy presumes preservation of bio-eco-systems, their bio-diversity, maintaining the soil sustainment capacity, reducing the exploitation of exhausting resources, changing the individual's attitude in favor of sustainable development, increasing the rural habitats level of life, establishment of a global alliance among many rural settlements in view of promoting a unitary development policy, etc. Thus, the sustainable development aims to guarantee that economic development is comprised within the social-cultural and environment limits, continuing to be an influence factor in an increasingly higher measure in the rural area.

Starting from the definition of sustainable tourism, one may identify it has seven dimensions: all resources management, economic satisfaction, social and aesthetic satisfaction, preservation of cultural integrity, biologic diversity and life support systems. In such a context, the sustainable development principles have been established. These principles have been chosen in view of their application to the development lines in the future and, subsequently, they built the basis for the accomplishment of sustainable tourism. From these, in the case of rural tourism and agro-tourism, we can mention: the principle of establishing the ecological and standards limits, the principle of economic growth, the principle of resources control for the population, the principle of basic resources preservation, the foresight principle, the principle of eco-systems efficient loading, the principle of the existence of a reservoir for resources, the principle of minimizing the impact of the agro-tourism activities on eco-systems integrity, the principle of economic viability, the principle of control integration on rural community level.

The rural tourism represents a way for sustainable development which contributes to the environment and eco-systems protection and preservation, the exploitation of local, regional and national patrimony, the preservation of agrarian activities and services in the villages, the professional formation and new work places generation, establishment of services and tourism micro-businesses. It is to understanding why rural tourism is promoted and supported by local and national governments, by European Union and the European Council (Nistoreanu, 1999, page 186).

#### **4. Conclusions**

The rural environment presently represents the most important human life and culture reserve and the European rural space is

considered to be an important force of the entire continental area, its development being in the interest of the entire Union. A chance to develop the rural environment stays in the organized extension of the rural tourism, which is the most efficient modality to highly capitalize the material and human resources.

The issue of rural development presumes the achievement of the equilibrium between the tendency to modernize the rural life, on one side, and the demand for sustainable development in all the three fields: economical, ecological and social, on the other side. The sustainable rural development comprises a sum of actions directed to the life improvement of the population living in the rural area, preservation of natural and cultural scenery, in a full agreement with the specific of the land.

In our country, after 1990, a tendency to promote and encourage rural tourism has been recorded, both from local and national authorities and professional associations in the tourism field. Although the growing rhythm of this form of tourism is rather slow, however, there is an obvious development process in the last decades.

The activities in the rural tourism sphere may economically re-launch the villages, contribute to infrastructure modernization, attract various investors, should inhabitants in the rural areas adopted a favorable attitude to be correctly received by the tourists preferring this type of tourism and should local authorities got sufficiently involved in the development of this economically profitable activity.

The tourism needs to coexist in harmony with the multitude of consumers, needs and demands which characterize the rural areas. Their analysis in the process of launching and expansion of rural tourism needs to take into consideration the economic, social and environmental compatibility of tourism, with the existent relations and connections to ensure the development objectives are accomplished.

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