

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURIST PRODUCT IN ROMANIA- CASE STUDY GORJ COUNTY

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### **Abstract**

*Development of rural tourism as a tourism branch meets all requirements of sustainable development considering that can be touched all three pillars of this type of development: economic development, social development, environmental protection. In recent years rural tourism has benefited of sustainable development approaches, like other tourist product, unfortunately more in economically developed countries than in less developed countries such as Romania.*

*A balanced development can be ensured through planning and zoning land to allow adapted development for tourism to the capacity of ecosystems. Any equipment or infrastructure item that is done at community level is a potential incentive for local development. Natural and human environment will become more active, stimulating local people to conserve natural monuments, archaeological sites, historical buildings and remains as important resources for economic growth and social welfare of local communities.*

*The setting up of the tourist village typology is based on the highlighting of the specific of the rural localities, their classification within the tourist area of Romania, on a few fundamental types.*

*From the theoretical point of view, the issue of the tourist villages typology could be optionally approached, but its application represents a necessary solution for the determination of the tourist features to be applied.*

**Keywords:** sustainable development, rural tourism, typology, tourist village

**JEL Classification:** M1, M3, O1, O2, Q5, R5

### **1. Introduction**

Development of rural tourism as a tourism branch meets all requirements of sustainable development considering that can be touched all three pillars of this type of development: economic development, social development, environmental protection. In recent years rural tourism has benefited of sustainable development approaches, like other tourist product, unfortunately more in economically developed countries than in less developed countries such as Romania. Sustainable Rural Tourism Development aims to ensure efficacious coordination structures, integrated policies and functional/operational processes that take place without destroying or deplete resources, providing economic, social and environmental development. [14] Resources should be exploited at a rate identical to that of renewing their, giving up the exploitation when the resource is regenerated very slowly, to replace the one with greater power of regeneration.

With sustainable development of tourism can benefit all three planes. Economic and social advantages offered by tourism development planning are based on multiple quality of life changes in developed rural villages, continuing with development of social and community infrastructure and the opportunity to develop services and activities. [2] Environmental advantages and its protection are focused on balanced environment supporting a positive quality tourism.

Rural tourism allows understanding the effects of tourism on the natural, cultural and human environment, but also the importance of environmental sustainability for future development of tourism. [3] A balanced development can be ensured through planning and zoning land to allow adapted development for tourism to the capacity of ecosystems. Any equipment or infrastructure item that is done at community level is a potential incentive for local development. Natural and human environment will become more active, stimulating local people to conserve natural monuments, archaeological sites, historical buildings and remains as important resources for economic growth and social welfare of local communities.

The purpose to achieve a sustainable rural tourism plan should be subordinated to national plan of economic and social development. Actions can cover for economic (income growth, diversification and integration of activities, controlling, enhancement and development zoning) for social (poverty and improving income distribution inequality, socio-cultural indigenous heritage protection, participation and involvement of local communities) or ecological (protection functions of ecosystems, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity). [8] Some experts prefer to talk about sustainable development of tourism, rather than on sustainable tourism, the first referring to all aspects of development, and the second in some aspects and components of tourism - such as long distance air transportation who cannot be sustainable under current technology, even with the use of best practices. [7]

## 2. Evolution trends of the tourism

Specialized studies identify the main trends within the field of tourism, up to the present, and which will be amplify in the perspective of the years 2020, in what concerns the tourist demand and offer. [10] [11] [12] Among the most significant aspect, could be mentioned the following:

- an ever growing number of tourists desire to satisfy their hobbies and special interests, based on nature, historical places, economic activities and professional interests;
- the ethnical tourism, represented by those wishing to visit their or their forefathers' native places is in progress; a special side is represented by the religious tourism, made of the persons who, by pilgrimages, are visiting holy places, related to their religious convictions;
- the demand for new destinations is growing, with positive effects on the development of new areas or on the improvement and expansion of the existent ones;
- it is noticed a trend of increasing the number of shorter term holidays, allowing the development of more tourist destination, and for satisfying the demand, the occasion of offering facilities and activities for tourists, in all the seasons;
- the tourists become more experienced and sophisticated and wait for corresponding good quality attractions, utilities and services and tariffs/prices appropriate for the quality in their voyages;
- the number of the tourists concerned about the natural environment or social issues is growing and consequently, the searches for least polluted destinations and without environmental or social nature problems; as a result of these orientations, most of the destinations are interested in adopting some development programmes and wish to encourage the good quality tourism, which avoids the environmental or social nature problems, optimizing also the economic profits;
- the tourism uses to a large extent the modern technology in the fields such as booking or marketing services; lately, the Internet has become a very important instrument of information and marketing.

## 3. Integrated development pattern of a diversified rural tourist product

Implementation of tourism policies and plans for rural areas is a responsibility both of the authorities and the private sector. [6] Public sector is responsible for: setting planning and implementation of basic infrastructure; development of certain landmarks; establishing and administering rules regarding facilities and services quality; establish measures for management and recovery of the territory and environmental protection; setting standards for training in tourism, maintenance of public health and safety. The private sector is responsible for development of accommodation, the operations of travel agencies, commercial enterprises with tourism activity, and is based on superstructure, the development of tourist attractions and promoting them through specific marketing activities.

Sustainable development of rural tourism requires long-term effort enforcing complex implementation techniques: establishing an integrated strategy serving to identification of business portfolio (tourist activities); approval of tourism development policies for rural areas at national level and at each regional level; **planning and development programming** for about five years period, containing programs and development projects with the necessary actions (generally known as tourism action programs).

The structure of the rural localities in Romania is generally characterized by a large process of qualitative transformation, keeping the traditional specific along with the diversification of the economic functions, the achieving of an important investments volume, in order to valorify the tourist potential and the specific of the region, as well as the increase of the life quality and of the general infrastructure.

Specific elements have determined a new way of thinking in the development of the touristic villages network since 1970 and have enforced actions to ensure the concentration of some regional tourist centers, like Rucăr, Bran, Șirnea, Tismana, to favor the appearance of the tourist infrastructure elements and the development of the rural tourist services. [9]

The territorial centers of A.N.T.R.E.C. took care the development of the holiday village concept, by attracting new members and the creation in the area of an opinion flow, favorable to the rural tourism, the promotion of the local offer through specific marketing actions, the insurance of the introduction into the national catalogue of all the classified rural tourist structures, the organization, with the support of the National Association's group of experts, of some professional training courses for the owners of rural tourist structures, the providing with technical assistance for the elaboration of the documentation concerning the classification and participation in the technical commissions' activity of classification of the rural tourist.

In the future, by the ANTREC support and participation could also implicate EUROGITES, in view of the implementation of some service quality assessment, of information and booking system for the rural tourism, created in order to integrate the rural tourism of the area into the European system and of correlation of the national classification system with the one of the other European states.

The setting up of the tourist village typology is based on the highlighting of the specific of the rural localities, their classification within the tourist area of Romania, on a few fundamental types. [4]

This classification is necessary on the purpose of the promotion in each region of the most adequate forms of tourism, considering both the tourist potential and the local specific vocation and the main reasons and options of the tourist categories visiting that specific locality.

The implementation of the specialization principle into the field of the organization and functioning of the tourist village is as necessary as every rural locality represents an entity with its own features and activities, which must be highlighted, catalogued and valorified as efficient as possible, from the tourist point of view. [2]

The tourist orientation and the tourists' satisfaction could be made only by this selection and orientation, by means of informative brochures, on the quality of every area and on the insurance with accommodation utilities and catering, the tourists making a previous group, for one village or the other, according to their main tourist options and motivations. This allows a better command and operation of the demand-offer mechanism, in view of the correlation between the "tourist consumption" and "the production" of services following an organization of the spaces and accommodation and food services, in compliance with the cultural, socio-demographical and psychographical features of the tourist clientele. The promotion and marketing programmes shall be also possible to become efficient by making a concrete advertising, specific for every locality.

From the theoretical point of view, the issue of the tourist villages typology could be optionally approached, but its application represents a necessary solution for the determination of the tourist features to be applied.

To declare a tourist village, besides the planners' desire and intention, it is necessary for it to meet a quantum of natural and historical conditions, but also of objective socio-economic development and certain specific features with an unique regional offer feature.

**The ethnographical, folklore tourist villages** are part of the sub mountainous region of the Western half of the county, but villages such Polovragi, Rasovița, Hobița are integrated into classified offers.

The classification of the tourist villages into this category is based on the traditional costumes, architecture, furniture and interior decoration, folk music and choreography, considered as main features of these localities. In these localities could be offered to the tourists original services not included into other categories: furniture, scenery, folk equipment, menus specific to the area, served in original pots, specific to the area, predominating the pottery and the wood.

It does not exclude the possibility of an alternative, modern offer, if they are requested by the tourists.

In these villages could be organized permanent selling handicraft exhibitions, for the tourists passing through the locality.

**The tourist villages of artistic and handicraft creation** are considered as rural tourist product in the county of Gorj ever since 1974, when it was made the first inventory of the rural areas tourist potential, by the introduction into this category of the Tismana locality, which are still on the offer of the county, next to the Padeș and Stănești localities. This feature is highlighted especially in the sub mountainous area of the half Western part of the county.

The tourist interests for these areas are known, the tourists being especially attracted by the desire of purchasing handicraft artistic creations, directly from the local manufacturers. In these villages are also developed traditional trades, related to handicraft and various artistic creations within the households or in some specialized workshops, where the folk artists and handcrafters made sculptures in traditional materials, such as wood or stone, the folk weaving mill (carpets, beds, cloths), handworks and folk lacings of the folk costumes, domestic and household pottery, naive painting and icons on glass, wood and cloth.

The folk creations of the Oltenian folk music and dance are extremely appreciated, being also largely spread in other rural centers, connected sometimes to the specific of the locality: the shepherds' folk music, the music and dance of the wine growers and of those on the Gorjului valleys.

These activities are sometimes practical even within the households of the hosts, but the possibilities are generally limited by the dimensions of the households and the volume of these activities. In general, the basic occupations in these localities have been developed at the level of some folk manufacturing centers, but the rentability of these units being low lately, it determined their progressive extinction. Within the households could be organized products handicraft selling exhibitions and activities where could be invited the interested tourists.

The essential feature of these villages, their brand image, is the wide spreading of the art and handicraft, as a clear form of preserving the forms of the traditional rural life, showed towards the changes concerning the way of life and the conceptions of the inhabitants of these regions.

**The pastoral tourist villages** are grouped in the area bordering the mountain, on the whole length of the Vâlcan and Parâng mountains, but present a single center integrated into the rural tourist offer of ANTREC. It is about the Novaci center, where around the town are developing many rural localities: Cernădia, Bercești, Hirișești, Pociovaliște, Aniniș.

In this category are generally included mountain villages, where the main occupation within the localities is the animal breeding, either sheeps or cows, and which could provide to the tourists a specific way of life, based on a milk and meat products alimentation. For the entertainment, one can add the visits to the sheepfolds within the mountainous area and wanderings specific to these areas. Very appreciated are the organized feasts, with shepherd's specific, including some original menus: grilled wether, outlaws 'mutton, maize porridge with cheese and milk, sweet cheese, whey mixed with ewe cheese, ewe cheese, cheese, pastrami, these being able to be organized both in the households and the sheepfolds outside the mountainous localities.

The originality and unicity of those aspects is completed by the resistance in time, along with the preservation of some associated ethnographical and folkloric values, worthy to be considered for the creation of a clearly differentiated tourist product, compared to the other types existent in the county.

**The fruit growing and viticulture villages**, predominating in the collinear area, are rarely included in the rural tourist set-up, as result of a rapid and early modernization, ever since 1950.

The advantages of a quality infrastructure and of more advanced techno – edilitarian and social – communitarian facilities determined in this type of localities the extinction of some traditional aspects of the rural life.

In some of these localities are made attempts of tourist recovery. They are widely spread in the Târgu Jiu depression area, up to Motru and Polovragi, as well as in the Western area, in the hills on the right bank of River Jiu, and the most eloquent example is given by the localities from the Motrului platform.

The development of the mining in this area caused the extinction of many villages, the only representatives being in the Eastern area of the Târgu Jiu depression, expressive being the case of the Ciuperceni, Telești, Câlnic, Arcani localities.

In these localities the fruit growing and vineyard activities are prevailing and the tourist activities are possible throughout the year, but some fluctuations related to the allocation of holidays also appear.

The disadvantage comes from the non-correlation between the holiday period and the fruit growing-vineyard production period, where to are connected many quite picturesque activities, being able to attract many tourists. There is the possibility of the preservation of the products and their offer in the more active period of the rural tourism, during the summer and winter holidays, but also the offer diversification of the culinary products and natural, common and dietetic products made of fruits.

The value of this tourist product is given by the unique beauty locations, of the households among the fruit tree orchards and vineyards and the large spaces of the related fields, necessary for creating of some facilities, such as sport fields (tennis, golf) or the combination of some heterogeneous activities (rising, sport, specific cultural events).

**The fishing and hunting tourist villages.** As we have also previously presented, these activities are presented under the limited and non-specific forms, as a result of the ecological vocation of the county of Gorj .

These activities are connected especially by the collinear area from the Eastern half of the county, on the left of the Jiu river, as well as around the Vâlcan massive, where are seen the most suitable regions, having a high forestry level, with a rich hunting headcount, in the near vicinity of the localities and supporting the development of the hunting type activities.

Even the Parâng mountainous region does not have a forestry level as high as the tableland area, on the left of Jiu, due to the extension of the forest into the mountains, over the first line of peaks made especially of limestone.

In the Eastern half of the tableland (collinear area), can be also found the most important river network, developed on the Gilort, Amaradia, Olteț Valleys and their affluents. These represent some of the most clean rivers of the entire Subcarpathian and tableland hydrological network of Romania, following the low industrialization of the area and low waste waters discharges and of the small changes brought by the river beds. As a result, the most of the fish species are kept, with many specimens, placing the region in the category of those with high fishing potential, and by the numerous lakes and ponds from the meander areas of these rivers.

The villages are numerous in this area, keeping many authentically rural elements, representing one of the regions with the richest tourist potential within the county of Gorj, but the hard economic situation of the inhabitants and localities caused only a few of the economical premises to impel on the rural tourism.

Thus, only the localities on the Gilortului Valley had the possibility of more serious development, being also connected to Târgu Jiu – Filiași, important arterial road of the county, here appearing also a first example within the agro tourist offer of the classified category within the locality of Vladimir. The number of the localities with a rich patrimony is also much higher, considering the important localities as Jupânești, Bărbătești, Logrești, Bustuchin, Alimpești, Roșia de Amaradia, Hurezani, Stejari, Dănciulești.

The value of these rural localities is related to the hosting activities, along with those connected to forest and hunting and waters, with the fishing fund being made the most valuable combination of the natural environment within the county.

Nevertheless, the tourist value of these localities is still insufficiently exploited, representing a development area, priority for the future of the rural tourism within the county of Gorj .

*The climatic and landscape villages:* the prevalent features of these localities, adequate for the holiday/sejour tourism are the natural environment and the vicinity of spectacular tourist objectives out of the category of relief, such as gorges, caves, slopes and pitches, tablelands for panorama. It takes also benefit from favorable climatic conditions, non-affected by the modern pollution forms and by the naturist treatment forms, extremely well appreciated in the rural tourism.

The mountain and hill villages, with houses situated on hills with lawns and grasslands, sometimes orchards, are satisfying the fundamental motivation of the numerous tourists, meaning the „return to nature”.

The situation of these localities is strictly connected to the existence of these elements, solitarily spreaded within the territory of the county of Gorj. They can be found again in various areas, where are also tourist villages from the previous categories, but are obviously defined through these elements, clearly being differentiated from the other examples.

As a predominant alignment, there is the sub mountainous area, closely connected to the karstic phenomena from the region and the favorable mountainous climate, but their appearance is also remarked in the hilly areas.

Representative in this sense are the Runcu and Baia de Fier localities, included also in the ecologic patrimony of Romania, by their extremely spectacular natural phenomena, to which is added also the Săcelu locality, associated with the characteristic of balneary treatment, being defined also as local interest resort station.

The many positive considerations on these objectives within the mentioned localities, already included also in the tourist literature, favor deeply the development in the field of rural tourism of these localities, regarded as a form of approach between the classical tourism and the rural tourist products, being able to develop a first stage of the competitiveness in the economic sector of the tourism.

#### 4. Conclusions

Solving various aspects of rural tourism product restructuring policy must be based on an intensive strategic planning activity. This, according periodization action is intended to ensure, in a first stage conduct studies aimed at efficient use of rural tourist resources, preparation of rural tourism projects for new areas for new forms of tourism such as rural tourism weekend tourism, sports, etc. Scientific research program the following steps might refer to carry out interdisciplinary scientific research to establish correlations between rural tourism resources of the county of Gorj, the capacity of reception facilities for accommodation, entertainment, transport, technical infrastructure, and tourism zoning County land as a basic tool in strategy development unit, harmonious and priority rural tourism in the territory, in conjunction with other existing forms of tourism. Establishing contacts with research institutions in the county, the development of exchanges of experience at management level ANTREC Gorj are all ways to develop science-based rural tourism in Gorj County.

Policy of restructuring of rural tourist product in Gorj County has a procedural character, determined by the specific conditions in the area. Ways and measures proposed are minimal, but necessary for the transformation of rural tourism in an efficient activity capable of leading to improved living conditions of the rural population.

Creation of rural tourism products for specific markets or segments of buyers, tourist service type - market, forming range of tourism products for a certain type of clientele, is the most advantageous specialization in which acts rural tourism in Gorj County, practiced every kind of service can be considered a success factor for every tourist program that is integrated.

Some specific areas currently have a clearly specific as Tismana-Baia de Arama area where rural tourism product is defined by traditional crafts materials processing such as wood and stone construction, architectural households are generally constructed from these materials. The area Novaci-Baia de Fier-Polovragi with potential both natural and anthropogenic activities related to shepherds life and activities must continue to rely on the development of households with a rich green space, recreational areas, and to practice hiking and equestrian activities . In the area Stănești-Bumbești-Crasna, located in the central part of the mountain and foothill of the County prevail ethnographic and folkloric heritage elements reason that would require the development of facilities type holiday villages in which they could be made numerous cultural activities invoice for larger tourist groups.

Integration of rural tourism network in a whole can be achieved on the basis of interdependent networks which consider tourism network integration in economic and social network of the county. Needs and aspirations of tourists must be present in the mind of local population; the correlation of these two components can be achieved by changing the mentality of most participants, hosts or simply inhabitants in tourist areas.

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