

RURAL DEVELOPMENT SUSTAINED BY AGRI-TOURISM AND THE NOVELTY OF THE ROMANIAN VILLAGE

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Abstract. *The balancing of the rural-urban ratio aims to find attractors for rural development. Such a demarche is represented by the present study that aims to find solutions for rural development in different regions of Romania with various characteristics in geo-resources, analyzing as **attractors**: agri-rural tourism and the capitalization of the novelty of the Romanian village. There is introduced a series of elements regarding farm production and typology, but also applications of the principles of Hospitality Industry in rural tourism. From here also the proposed objectives of the paper to emphasize the diversity of local communities, in function of village categories and, respectively, the structure and definition of tourist destinations from the rural space. The paper also proposes to apply the concepts of the agri-rural tourism in order to find solutions to avoid or counteract socio-economic dangers for the feasible development of the rural areas. Thus, there is described the economic potential, especially on the line of the agri-food system and, implicitly, the settlement of the development through the tourist dimension in correlation with the novelty of the Romanian village. There are established a series of aspects necessary to the bioharmonization of the traditional rural with the modernity of the current decades.*

Keywords: agri-food, farm, rural, tourism, village

1. Introduction

Next to the modern **urban Romania**, preferred for its dynamism, promptitude and receptivity, there is a **rural Romania**, much poorer and more traditional, less visible for investors (especially the foreigners), but that, as it is known, counts about 8-9 million inhabitants and detains almost 90 % from the country surface.

The average rural „Out of mind” is although to be seen, among others, by the more and more accentuated tourism, especially its productive form: **agritourism that through cyclicity”rounds off”** the farmers ‘revenues. **Agrirural tourism** as a whole, by potential offers, *archives* the patrimony delimited only by the vivid space and time of the village and imposes an accentuated development of products and touring services. The action is motivated by economic, social, historic needs but, surprisingly, especially **cultural ones**, with dramatic accents to save traditional,

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identity, authentic Romanianism and common sense of the peasant who loves its land [3, 6,12].

Mountain, highland, lowland or wet zone **agri-rural tourism** may lead the respective local community to a trend of *economic growth*. The hope is even greater in the context in which periods of economic crisis go by and, from social point of view, many rural zones are in degradation (as for example some of them from the mountain rural zone), with effect of *demographic desertification* [8, 13]. In this context one observes *the population getting older* and the extinction of the traditional Romanian village, with its cultural model and with all the theories that have tried to explain the wonder of its survival (!).

All these require as basic **objective** of the study an attentive analyses in order to find solutions to avoid or counteract major dangers for the rural space. This fact may be avoided on one condition, respectively the one through which **agritourism with rural Carpathian, sub-Carpathian or plain incidence** – may be professionally and seriously executed, *attentively selecting from the special and temporal memory of the rural community*, those TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS completely disappeared from the contemporary European context, with the feeling of **restitution** of an apart cultural patrimony.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is based on a diagnosis of the Romanian rural environment and on analyses and statistic processing. There are considered principles, techniques and regulations specific to ecology and responsible tourism.

Data processing in order to find solutions to achieve the proposed objectives is made by analyzing three dimensions specific to rural environment: - the agri-rural dimension; - the touring dimension; and the cultural dimension by identifying the novelty of the Romanian village.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Romania's agri-rural dimension

The rural environment (*Romania's Encyclopedia*), unlike the urban environment, represents all the areas outside the towns and inhabited in our country by the population generically called „peasants”, as an antonym for the urban population of „townsmen”.

In Romania the rural space represents about 90% of the country surface, and the inhabitants share in the rural environment – among the highest in Europe – is of **45.4%** from the total population, namely 8,636,700 inhabitants (in 2021) (Fig. 1).

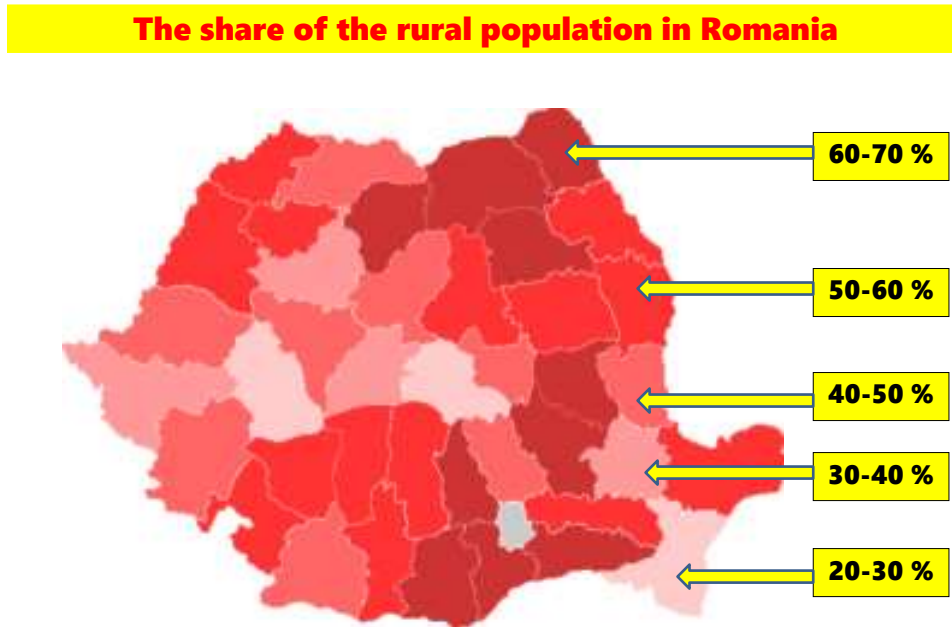


Fig. 1. Rural population share per departments

Source: Encyclopedia of Romania, Rural environment, http://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Mediul_rural, Accessed on January 20, 2021 [15].

In the broadest meaning, it is considered that **agri-rural tourism**, which is part of the **responsible tourism** group (tourism responsible in relation with Nature), has as an objective to recreate in rural landscape events or attraction points that are not at disposal in urban zones in order to participate or experiment them. This landscape includes: natural reservations, open rural zones, villages and agricultural zones.

As for understanding the complexity of the **agri-rural tourism**, we mention the following basic concepts in „*agriculture-tourism-natural environment* interface [3]:

- **The concept of rural-tourism** – concerns the organization of the touring activity within the rural community, a zone, a region, a micro region or from the average rural basin;
- **The concept of agritourism** – treats the touring phenomenon only from inside the agricultural exploitation (with own pension and food) and activities of the tourists in the farm.
- **The concept of tourism at the farm** – treats the touring phenomenon in farm location (hire), but without active peasants, the allocated space being

meant to activities with the tourists (pedagogic farms, farms of equitation, guest houses, health houses, hunting lodges etc.)

From here also results the establishment of responsible tourism structure [2, 4], which is illustrated in Fig.2.

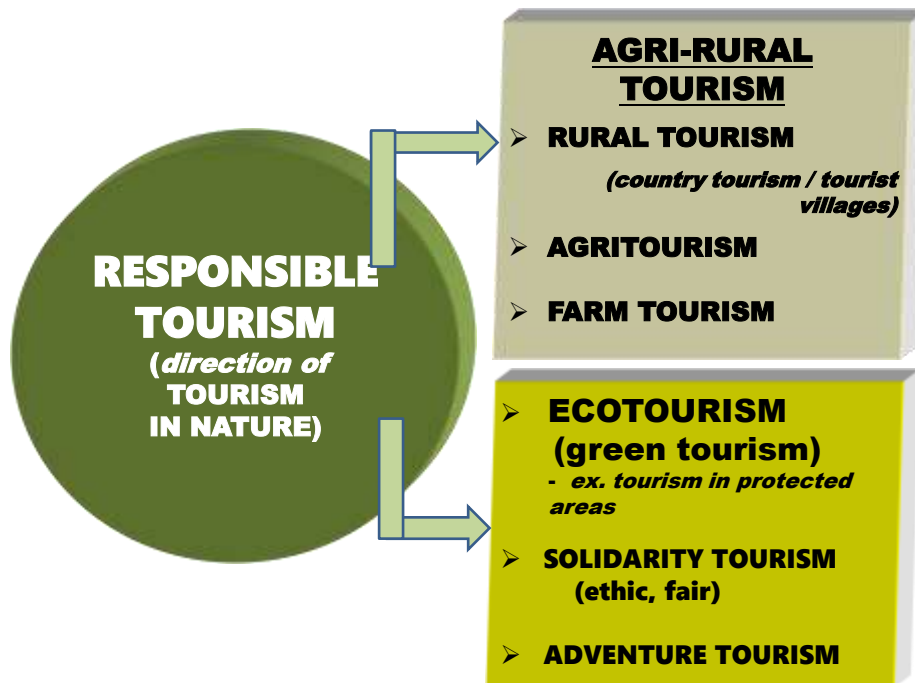


Fig. 2. Components of the tourism industry that have environment in the development equation
Source: Original conception.

The rural society in general and especially hospitality aspects [1, 9, 14, 15], as well as the Romanian rural economy, might remain of traditional type only under conditions of *resize*, of adequacy to the modern type of organic ecologic agriculture and, finally, of *viability*.

Table 1. Structure of the European agricultural properties, per classes of size (ESU)

Country	U.M.	TOTAL	0-5 ha	6-20 ha	21-50 ha	51-100 ha	over 100 ha
EU-27	No.	7,816.0	3,921.0	2,405.7	808.3	393.4	287.6
	%	100.0	50.2	30.8	10.3	5.0	3.7
Romania	No.	1,236.0	918.2	289.6	14.9	4.6	8.6
	%	100.0	74.3	23.4	1.2	0.4	0.7

Source: The FSS for 2005 Report, Eurostat, 2006 [17].

The resize can't correlate to the American standard farm (being a practical impossibility), but reaching a quota comparable to EU-27 average (Table 1).

The solution of modernizing agriculture and rural space will inexorable expand over all economic and social structures, and also concerning psychology and communication [7, 10] within such a process, already obvious, the focus in on the main directions described in Table 2.

Table 2. Directions and actions in the development and modernization of the Romanian rural space

DIRECTION OF MODERNIZATION	SPECIFICATION
<i>Direction (1)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increasing agricultural productivity;
<i>Direction (2)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> economic organization of exploitation structures in agriculture;
<i>Direction (3)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sustainable development of rural space infrastructure;
<i>Direction (4)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvement of the production structure;
<i>Direction (5)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organization of branches on agri-food products;
<i>Direction (6)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> soil conservation against natural and caused degradations;
<i>Direction (7)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> diversification of cultures in order to ensure economic and ecologic stability;
<i>Direction (8)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> programs to establish youngsters in rural environment;
<i>Direction (9)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pro-family rural agricultural policies and insurance of alternative sources of income;
<i>Direction (10)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village revitalization, but through a new rural cultural model, a new type of rural community, much closer to the urban one.

Source: Original synthesis.

At present, *the structure of the agricultural exploitations* might be a little bit closer to the European model, but obviously completely different from the traditional village, the new defining elements being described by the following proportions (Table 3).

Table 3. Prognosis of the Institute of Agrarian Economy

No.	Category of agricultural holding	Average area	Share in total area (%)	Tendency
1	Subsistence households	0.5 - 3 ha	about 13.5	- reduction to about 1,100,000 ha
2	Peasant exploitations	3 - 10 ha	about 6.8	- growth to 1,000,000 ha
3	Commercial peasant exploitations	40 - 50 ha	towards 6.8	- growth to about 25,000 ha
4	Family associations	90 - 250 ha	Towards 20.3	- towards about 15,000 ha

Source: Original synthesis based on various studies made by the Institute of Agrarian Economy.

Of those presented, as a first step towards improvement, it results the indicative recommendation, namely to have as mark the *average dimension* of an exploitation 10 ha, and of a family association 200 ha.

3.2. The touring dimension of the Romanian rural space

Deepening the analysis, we will observe that the **touring destination** – *village, farm, pension or rooms from the peasant house* – is not the only touring product, or its single component, as it is known the fact that, as a rule, a destination includes several types of different touring products, adapted to the market [2,11]. Therefore, a **direct** solution is that the Romanian village should be **included in the tourist circuit**, so that it can be found either singular and original, or as a component among *several types of touring products*, such as for example those from Table 4.

Table 4. The Romanian village in the tourist circuit

No.	TYPE OF RURAL TOURING PRODUCT	SPECIFICATION
1	Destination of holidays in the country	By rural tourism or by agritourism
2	Forms of the tourism at the farm	- farms specialized in receiving people with handicap; - farms specialized in receiving children; - farms specialized in receiving groups; - farms specialized in receiving special classes of nature study (botanic, zoology, biology and others); - farms for fishermen; - horse farms (equestrian) – host of a 7 day seminar for a certain number of participants;
3	Monastic tourism	A night long halt for a circuit at Moldavia or Oltenia under the mountain monasteries;
4	Visits at craft workshops	With observations or getting competences of folk crafts or achieving new performances (ceramics, pottery, carving wood, painting on glass or on eggs, braiding twigs or different fibers etc.);
5	Practicing and/or learning useful activities in urban environment too	The opportunity to practice gardening, cooking, juice and jam preparation etc.
6	Initiation in ethno-folklore	The scene of initiation in the art of folk dance or song.

Source: Original synthesis.

3.3. The novel of the Romanian tourist village

In an efficient strategy of touring development it becomes more than opportune to value the novel side of the Romanian tourist village. The Romanian rural society

is relatively well preserved and keeper of a rich ethno folklore, more than that, it is not to be confused with the urban one. Rural touring products are searched and considered to be novel because they emphasize the organization of the society, the economic activities and, last but not least, the relation to space, time and Nature.

For exemplification, for the hearth of the village it is indicated to develop a specific and “successor” architecture for rustic houses or rural pensions (Fig.3), and for zones of rural activity (Fig.4), to apply traditional agri-food techniques „stuffed” with scientific novelty in order to stimulate the quality of the achieved products (ecological, biological ones etc.) (image sources: <https://www.google.com/>, Accessed on January 25, 2021).



Fig. 3. Conservation and development of the cultural and architectural specificity
Source: https://www.google.com [16].



Fig. 4. Part of the Romanian village *soul*
Source: https://www.google.com [16].

The strength of the Romanian village, that it has to preserve and diversify, is the authentic and original RURAL CULTURE. In this regard, in rural tourism multiculturalism is aimed by the concept of intercultural counterbalance [5] through which there may be practically observed how the staff from the host country is preoccupied (in a high percentage) to transmit cultural information about its own region or its own country. Thus, generally intercultural exchanges are achieved at the level of symbols, and among the symbols of the Romanian tourism there might be included: music and traditional costume, crafts, gastronomic products, dances, popular instruments, handicraft items and many others.

Novel awareness, of differences and common points, may serve to make authentic tourist products, such as (Table 4): learning the Romanian language, initiation in instrumental and vocal music, learning crafts (pottery, wood sculpture, weaving, painting on glass etc.), learning Romanian folk dances, introduction to Romanian gastronomy etc.

Tourism in rural environment of high complexity and diversity is what stimulates the specialist’s creativity. The agri-rural touring offer allows thus a series of

complementary activities, such as: - close study of nature (observation of plants and animals/birds, photography, filming); hunting, horse riding, fishing; - knowledge of ancestral values; participation at festivals, traditions, rural customs; - practicing sports that need environment: touring and sport orientation, motoring and motorcycling on various land etc.; - organization of conventions/symposiums/conferences/seminars on a small or medium scale. Interweaving theoretical actions with practical ones are remarkable (at which reference was made): - visits at traditional craftsmen's workshops; - participation at different activities and house or agricultural work/learning crafts; - participation at the preparation and taste of gastronomic products specific to the zone, drinks and fruit juice, canned vegetable and fruit etc.

A novel element the tourists may discover at local rural community refers to knowing how authentic peasants carry out their life and activity in an ancestral culture that has a real peasant calendar at its basis. This one is structured sometimes religiously, sometimes occupationally, sometimes mythological or sacredly, elements that sustain a novel touring support that, through its repetitive periplus of holidays, commemorations, socializations, superstitions and rest periods manages to cover and relax the fissured and condensed urban time of the traveler escaped from the urban.

Conclusions

- (1) It becomes necessary to impose professional methods for the future of the Romanian rural tourism, in the idea to harmonize the rural space specificity, originality and tradition with globalization modernity and impact.
- (2) In order to develop agri-rural tourism a strategy to counteract the present deficiencies must be imagined: the lack of professionalism and reduced number of those specialized in leading and organizing touring activities in rural environment; problems of language and communication with foreign tourists; in-depth ignorance of the principles and methods of hospitality industry in order to successfully apply them in agri-rural tourism (how to organize the arrival and meeting, different ways to spend leisure – other day and night passions and amusements, promotion of recreation and animation etc.).
- (3) For a better appreciation of the rural touring product it is necessary to pay a high professional level attention for an original development by emphasizing the novel of the Romanian village (authenticity, traditionalism), through new investment in all modules of agri-rural tourism, from production modules to the accommodation ones (pension, parking area) and recreation (example – the development of sports equipment).
- (4) As an indicative mark and first step towards improvement there is indicated *the average dimension* of an exploitation as 10 ha, and a family association as 200 ha,

as well as the achievement of a *strategy* to solve the low level of general and particular infrastructure in the field of the Romanian rural tourism, the modernization and maintenance of access ways, all this in relation (town hall, agricultural chamber, school, church and others).

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