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# Reality and Perspectives for the Development of Rural Tourism in Mălaia-Voineasa Area, Vâlcea County

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## ABSTRACT

Tourism is a phenomenon of the modern society which answers humanity's needs to escape everyday tumultuous life. The global economic process has developed and suffered various shifts and local communities have to adapt to present challenges in order to maintain and grow their economic and social competitiveness. Rural areas must use in their own advantage people's need to spend their holidays from the crowded urban. This paper was elaborated as an analysis of Mălaia-Voineasa rural space located on Lotru river valley and its touristic potential. This potential primary emerged from the advantage of being located in a mountain area favorable to winter sports and summer trips. Lately, it has been acknowledged the potential of rural tourism based on nature, traditions and habits preserved by the rural communities, quietness and unaltered environment. The rural space places its physical-geographical components to individual's disposal and on return the individual has molded it according to his needs, filling it up with his anthropogenic creations. In exchange, the human being has the responsibility to protect both natural support and his creation in order to be maintained a long-term sustainable relation. The revival of rural tourism occurred due to the demand for a new form of holidays spent in a more qualitative and pure environment and new touristic destinations, the weekend trips have become as important as the annual ones, the European Union has acknowledged its importance and encouraged its development and it is considered to be the key-point for triggering the rural economy. The touristic potential of Mălaia-Voineasa rural area arises from the congregation of all the criteria namely: the value and variety of the touristic resources, the presence of the agro pastoral and ethno-folkloric traditions, the advantageous position near a touristic route, closeness to attractive mountains areas, the population's psychosocial profile which externalizes in a high degree of hospitality, honor and morality. These valuable advantages must be exploited and sustained for increasing area competitiveness. In this respect action has to be taken for developing the infrastructure (water supply, heating, waste water management, mending and modernization of the access roads) in order to enhance the tourists' comfort according to required standards and to ease the accessibility in and within the area, the development and diversification of the technical, commercial and sportive facilities (touristic pats, ski slopes, sports fields, etc). Among all of these marketing actions for promoting the area on a national and European level as an organic, unitary touristic product have to be taken, considering that the foreign tourism tends to focus on nature and on unspoiled values of the rural communities. Individual initiatives drew the local and national authority's attention towards the rural potential as the engine for local economic development. Sustained efforts are needed for increasing area attractiveness which is to be gained through specific projects, actions and activities encouraged not only by private individual investors but by large-scale European projects too. Under these circumstances, this paper tries to be an evaluation of the region's attractiveness potential and an analysis of criteria which should be reached in order to enhance full potential of the discussed area.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a phenomenon that characterizes the modern society, with broad economic implications; it is the result of human evolution in response to its needs. Due to its complex nature and its mass nature tourism involves multiple human and material potential, having a polyvalent effect on human national and international relationships. So, although tourism

has been defined in many ways, one of the most relevant definitions seems to be the one given by Freuler Guy according to whom tourism is a "phenomenon of our times, based on the increased need to restore health and to change the usual environment, to cultivate the for the beauty of nature as a result of trade, industry and means of transport development". Worldwide, the most comprehensive sense which has been given to tourism belongs to the

Swiss professor W. Hunziker, according to whom tourism is *“the set of relationships and phenomena resulting from people’s movement and stay outside their homes as long as the stay and movement are not motivated by a permanent establishment and any business activity”*.

Related to the development of the tourism phenomenon, it is remarkable the lately attention given to the rural areas with touristic potential, to analyzing its forms, the analysis of its socio-economic benefits analysis being necessary for highlighting new opportunities for the economic development of this sector. Rural tourism has become a major point due to its economical function as through its complexity stimulates the growth of other domains, such as industry and agriculture, construction, transport, trade, etc.

Due to global economic development and diversification, local communities must adapt for maintaining and increasing competitiveness through economic and social changes both in the rural space structure and its usage and exploitation. In this respect, rural areas should use for their own advantage the latest trends in leisure, people's desire to escape from the tiresome urban conglomerate, and to maximize it as a support for tourism development in rural areas.

The importance of rural tourism is acknowledged at the European level through the regional development policy of the European Union combined with the national policies of the member states, policy which encourages the orientation of tourism toward the rural areas, taking into account its positive social effects and its implications. So, due to the fact that tourism actions for introducing the natural environment and the cultural and historical patrimony within the domestic and international economical flow, it contributes directly to the economical development of cities or areas, stimulating the development of transport, movement of goods, etc. and creating new jobs.

Rural tourism in Romania has its beginnings in the '30s, being related to the capitalization of the mountain areas, being concentrated in areas such as Bran-Rucăr, Olt Valley, Covasna and Harghita.

In these areas were built resorts, spas and their surrounding rural areas offered summer accommodation in local homes and as the activity was being developed it led to the construction of boarding houses.

After the Second World War and when the communist regime came to power, the activity slowly disappeared as accommodation structures such hotels were built and everything was owned by the state.

In 1973-1974 rural tourism resurrected at the request of the Ministry of Tourism of the Socialist government, through an act of "identification" of 33 "tourist villages" in all the ethnographic areas for

approval. But the result was not the settled one and only 13 villages were certified and only two actually functioned: Lerești (Argeș County) and Sibiel (Argeș County). Rural tourism, in an organized form, started to function only after 1989, being concentrated in the upland area which has a population of approximately 1.7 million inhabitants and over 600,000 households.

A first official step was made in 1995 when the Economic Commission for Europe had a meeting in Bucharest and its interest for supporting the rural tourism in Romania materialized in approving a document regarding the role of rural settlements and their sustainable development in terms of regional planning and focused on supporting a multifunctional rural development direction.

Later, in 2004, at the International Conference "Rural tourism and ecotourism - Potential and Perspectives" held in Bran – Moeciu under the auspices of the World Tourism Organization, its General Secretary Francesco Frangialli said that Romania has all the basic factors to enhance the development of the rural tourism, namely: many villages developed on various forms of relief and arisen from immemorial times, villages which have preserved traditions and ancient customs, valuable ethno-folkloric items, natural potential, large rural population, rich traditions and attractive geographic position.

We should not forget the fact that since 1992, Romania benefited from PHARE Program for tourism, with allocated funds of approximately 9.5 million euros for institutional development, staff training, development strategies, tourism grants and financing some development projects.

Broadly defining tourism as *“the form of tourism focused on the destinations in rural areas, having a functional structure of accommodation and other heterogeneous services”* [1], p. 180, it has determined various opinions regarding its content and features.

Another definition was given by the World Tourism Organization. It defines rural tourism as *“a form of tourism that includes any touristic activity organized in rural areas and run by local people, exploiting local resources (natural, cultural, historical, human resources) and touristic facilities, including boarding houses and agrotourist farms”* [2, p. 190].

Rural tourism is based on the natural environment and there is a complex relationship between them, a relationship which manifests in both directions. Natural environment and cultural and historical heritage of the villages (landscape, flora, fauna, historical and folk traditions) represent tourism basic resources; on the other hand, the tourism industry as a complex industry influences the ecological and cultural environment, changing the its listed elements.

Therefore, tourism development should be enhanced based on a special concern for environmental

protection measures and quality development of its resources in the touristic, also controlling the consequences of this type of activity for an optimal exploitation of the touristic potential.

## **2. THE PREMISES OF DEVELOPING THE TOURISTIC POTENTIAL IN MĂLAIA-VOINEASA AREA**

Mountain area is considered, along the seaside and the Danube Delta, one of the most favorable for tourism development, fact which is based on the international experience and the practice of the latest years. Realizing the huge potential of this area, the associations in charge with rural tourism and agrotourism have succeeded in increasing the number of rural areas and villages included in the touristic circuit.

The first step was taken after 1990 when, after understanding the importance of rural tourism and together with certain laws for sustaining its development, the first households homologated as touristic villages appeared. Within this context, the study of Mălaia-Voineasa area is able to essential elements for the development of other rural areas in terms of touristic orientation and for promoting the rural tourism on the international market.

### **2.1. The advantages given by the geographical position and the natural environment**

Although the national recognized reputation of Mălaia-Voineasa area has abruptly declined in the last 15 years, it benefits by a great touristic potential created by a spectacular and varied landscape and by its cultural heritage and spiritual value of its people.

Located in Țara Loviștei depression, on Lotru Valley (river which a tributary of Olt river), at the foot of Lotru Mountains (Southern Carpathians), at 650 meters altitude, surrounded by fir forests, spruce and beech, the area is surrounded by the following mountain peaks: Baltur (1117 m) in south, Dalmele (1293 m) in north, Stânele Runculeț (1465 m) in west and Pleșa (1052) to the east.

The discussed area is accessible from all directions, thus offering the advantage of a large flow of tourists. Thereby, the main link of the studied area and the rest of the country is on Route 7A to Petroșani and hence making the connections with major cities in the north-west (Arad, Timișoara, Lugoj, Deva, Petroșani) and south on Valley Olt (E81) and from here to Rm. Vâlcea, Pitești, Bucharest.

Another connection with the studied area is on Route 67 C, which was modernized on Râncea-Obârșia Lotrului-Sebeș-Alba sector through by Urdele clough up to over 2200 m altitude. On this road, which joins DN1 and DN7 roads (E81 E68 4<sup>th</sup> European corridor) the

links with cities in the center of the country is eased – Cluj-Napoca, Alba Iulia, Sibiu, and with the ones in the south west - Târgu Jiu, Craiova, Drobeta Turnu Severin.

These two roads meet at Obârșia Lotrului and they cross the strategic road also called the "Royal Road" which was built in the First World War, it gets over Latorița Mountain, passes through Chica Lupului over Voineasa resort on the right and Ciunget village on its left, and then rises slowly to Plaiul Poienii at an altitude of 1600 m. Here the road joins another road from Ciunget, on Rudăresei Valley. From Plaiul Poienii the roads continues on Fratoșteanu Mare Mountain, passes under the alpine peaks at an altitude of 2000 m (Fratoșteanu, Mogoș, Pietrele, Petrimanu, Puru, Bora, Ștefanu), crossing Coasta Benghii to Ștefanu lap where it crosses Transalpina road.

The climate is another favorable aspect for practicing tourism and the area lies in the subalpine zone, with an annual average temperature of 6-7°C. The climate within the mountain area is characterized by cool summers (the average temperature in July is 14°C) and cold winters (the average temperature in January is -7°C), and the annual precipitation quantity is about 800 mm per square meter. The main therapeutic factor is the stimulating and tonic climate with clean air, dust free and non allergenic, highly ionized and rich in ozone, aerosols and ultraviolet radiation, the area *being "one of the rare areas in Romania with zero pollution level, with strong air rich in negative ions and volatile tree essences"* [3, p. 33].

### **2.2. The tourist potential of the area**

Mălaia-Voineasa area benefits from all the specific features of a complete touristic area thanked to its geographic location: mountainous with towering peaks, alpine peaks, deep valleys, abrupt or slowly descending saddles, abundant natural resources, lakes and rivers with crystal water, large forests, a great diversity of plants and animals, a valuable hunting volume, mild climate throughout the year. In addition of all these, there is a consistent number of special attractions consisting of trout fishing (native, rainbow, brook) in rivers such as Lotru, Latorița, Voineșita and lakes - Bradîșor, Petrimanu, the Yellow Lake and Vidra, hunting in the surrounding woods (wild boar, deer, bear, wild grouse and hazel grouse). This area is a destination for hiking, rehabilitation, recreation, adventure and sports being given the complexity of its natural touristic potential which can be exploited all year long.

Lotru Valley is well known for its natural beauty and major energy facilities (Ciunget, Mălaia, Bradîșor), and together with the surrounding mountains forms the most important tourist area not only in Vâlcea county, but also in the Southern Carpathians. In this area which is quite varied

regarding its appearance, the most beautiful part is the one situated on Lotru Valley between Voineasa and Brezoi and the more distant mountain area in the upper Lotru basin above Voineasa (including Latorița Valley and the mountains between Lotru and Latorița River), Căpățâni ridge in the south and Lotrulului Ridge in the north.

Lotru Valley before Voineasa is the place where all the roads which connect all the mountains and areas around they start or end roads that connect with all the surrounding mountains, roads which go on main or secondary rivers valleys or peaks.

The mountains are crossed by many paths offering scenic routes and the possibility of practicing a

variety of touristic activities such as hiking, mountain biking, off-road).

As for example, we mention the path which starts from Mălaia and reaches a point near Zmeuratul Peak (1938 m) and another one which links the road on Repedea Valley (a tributary of Lotru River) an Ursu Peak (2124 m).

There is also another path on Păscoaia Valley, over the Black Hill (1966 m) to Garcu chalet and a path on Voineșița Valley from Voineasa to Jidonia chalet.

On Latorița Valley which is said to be one of the most beautiful valleys in Romania, there is a path which ends at Galbenul chalet.

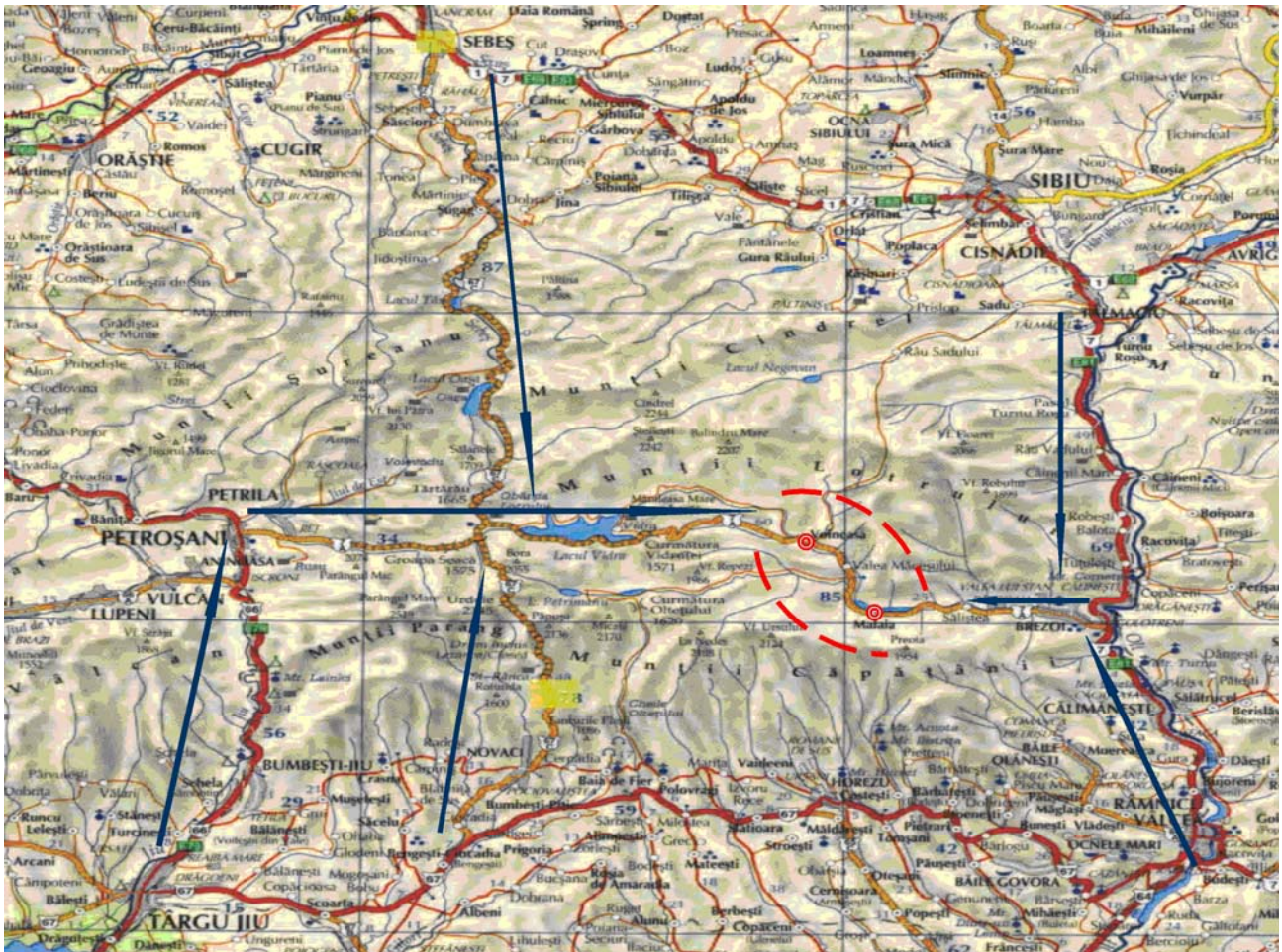


Fig. 1. Accessibility in Mălaia-Voineasa area (source: <http://motocicleteedeepoca.blogspot.ro/2011/03/dansati.html>)

As the movement and accessibility in and within the area is so favorable, all the mountains in Lotru Basin were included in the touristic circuit, but the hydro dams were the ones which paved the way for a real tourist area.

It worth to be mention the bridal-veil falls on Lotru River located between Vidra and Voineasa for 2 kilometers, between Balindru and Mălaia reservoirs, in a gorge area. The beauty of the bridal-veil falls is given by two impressive waterfalls and the area had been inaccessible before the establishment of the mine which exhausts pegmatite – mica and feldspar. Nowadays, the

water discharge is 3-4 times lower in comparison with the time before Vidra dam being built, dam which decrease the number of old waterfalls and increase the negative consequences of the excavation for mica and feldspar which has completely changed the place configuration in this area.

Mălaia Lake was built in 1978 on Lotru River old rock bed, at the point where the used waters from Ciunget hydropower plant come out. The lake is populated with trout, grayling, chub, and broad snout. It is situated at an altitude of 480 m, it has an area of 46 hectares and a water depth of 22 m, reaching a volume

of 3,440,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water, and the view from the dam and the lake is really impressive.

Brădișor Lake is an anthropogenic one having an area of 230 hectares and a volume of 8 million cubic meters of water; it is located at the northern foot of Căpățâni Mountain and southern foot of Lotru Mountain.

The lake "hosts" the Brădișor-Lotru hatchery complex. Besides trout breeding, the complex is the only one in the country where taimens are still bred trying to repopulate the mountain waters there. After the construction of the dam, the Lotru River lost its title of "taimens' heaven" as they have gradually disappeared and have become protected through law and declared "natural monument".

In the south-west of Voineasa village at a distance of approximately 25 km, Latoriței Gorge can be admired as it is characterized by a wild beauty. The gorge gives the possibility to cross the mountains by Curmătura Oltețului Clough and reach Muierii cave and monastery and from here to Polovraci cave. The main attractions of the valley are the Hanged Water Waterfall, Piatra Fetii and Galbenu Lakes, the Devils' Mill Waterfall, Iezerul Latoriței Lake and Piatra cu Găuri.

At approximately 20 km south from Voineasa, on Rudăresei Valley (tributary of Latorița River) the Milk Cave can be reached, a cave famous for its unique gallery, 87 m long, easy to cross and ending with a cold water tank.

At 25 km upstream to Voineasa there is Vidra resort, one of the most beautiful mountain resorts in Romania, situated at an altitude of 1370 m where the air has a high concentration of ozone. The resort has a ski slope and a carriage back which was recently improved as the snow is present here almost six months per year. Unfortunately, after 1990, the started investments (a 200 rooms hotel and a gym) were stopped and currently only five villas are opened.

However, the landscape is great and completed by Vidra Lake which appeared after the construction of Vidra dam, the only anthropogenic hydro construction on a river in Romania made of rocks and not of concrete. We also have to mention that Vidra Lake is located at the highest altitude compared with other lakes in the country.

### 2.3. Accommodation Infrastructure

The accommodation infrastructure is diversified in terms of types of accommodation structures (hotels, villas, boarding houses). On one hand, Voineasa resort which was built on the structure of Lotru hydropower plant and designed as an all season resort for cure and rest has an accommodation capacity of 1000 seats in its hotels and 500 seats in other touristic pensions; Mălaia is characterized by

guesthouses founded mainly by natives who acknowledged the touristic potential of the area.

Voineasa has hotels and villas, tennis, basketball and handball courts, and a cinema and it is also a starting point to the chalets in the Lotru and Căpățâni Mountain. The touristic infrastructure of this resort consists of 21 single and duplex villas with a capacity of 716 seats, eight hotels with a capacity of 1612 seats, 31 rural locations with a capacity of 394 seats and 40 villas at Obârșia Lotrului.

Although the resort is located in the mountains where winter sports can be practiced, during the cold season the number of tourists is low, the period from February to May and from September to December being considered the low season and peak season remains the summer time. The cure facilities are equipped with modern equipment which can treat neurasthenia, physical and intellectual overwork, musculoskeletal and respiratory disorders, and other associated diseases. The main problem is the lack of funds for full coverage of the modernization works and for equipping the accommodation facilities with modern furniture.

In terms of administration, Vidra resort belongs to Voineasa territory and has a capacity of 1,000 beds, but as the investment is not finished, many of the accommodations facilities are not functional. However, during the peak season 400-500 tourists can receive accommodation and meals in this small resort. Both Voineasa and Vidra resort are under the administration of the Romanian Syndicate Confederation - Olănești Branch which modernized only 4 villas here, raised the accommodation standard at 3-5 stars, while Voineasa remained classified at 1-2 star hotels and 3 star villas.

In Mălaia touristic establishments include two or three flowers boarding houses, namely 21 units with 195 beds capacity. They have modern facilities, water, heating, sewer, cable and in some cases internet connection. Note that the number of boarding houses has increased every year as this type of tourism has been encouraged and sustained by providing financial facilities for people investing in rural tourism.

### 3. THE REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS FOR MĂLAIA-VOINEASA AREA

As at the beginning of this century the tourism industry has been the most dynamic activity one and the most important jobs generator, it represents the main source for the recovery and development of local economy in such countries which possess important touristic resources and exploit them properly. Under these circumstances, a medium and long term strategy for local development is necessary, based on coherent projects and connected to the modern touristic demands, taking into consideration the local potential

and the existent resources and also the opportunities and possible threats.

The development premises are based on the main advantage of this area as one of the least spoiled European mountain areas, a territory where we find unique landscapes of rare beauty, a great human resource, locals' warm hospitality, a specific cuisine and an almost patriarchal environment.

In analyzing the development prospects which aims to exploit this area real and full touristic value, it is necessary to review the main factor influencing the development of this area in order to achieve important strategic objectives for the coming years. In this respect, it is understandable that strengths can turn into opportunities, and some elements of weakness can become threats.

As it was mentioned previously, the area has an advantageous position in relation to European projects regarding transport infrastructure (two national roads, DN 7A and DN 67 C Transalpina, cross the area and they are connected to the 4<sup>th</sup> European corridor which will become in the near future the most important gateway to connect the Western part of the to Bucharest and Constanța), which facilitates the access within this area, encouraging tourists flow from all over the country. However, should not be overlooked that modernization and maintenance works are needed in terms of widening the road where topography allows and suitable arrangement of footway along the road should be done in order to ensure the development of specific activities without jeopardizing traffic on the rural road. It is also necessary to develop parking spaces outside the village for giving the tourists the opportunity to stop and admire the landscape, but also inside the villages as the access road should no be blocked.

On the other hand, there is no link with the main towns nearby in terms of means of transport (minibuses, buses).

There are no scheduled or even seasonal bus lines to provide accessibility within the area for those tourists who don't have a private car from localities such as Brezoi (for tourists who come from the South side – from Râmnicu Vâlcea, Bucharest, or from the North side – from Sibiu), Novaci (for tourists coming from the South-West side) and Petroșani (for tourists coming from the South side of the country). For this category of tourists it would be useful to have organized transport within the area for easing their mobility in order to visit its touristic attractions.

Even if the quality of the local accommodation infrastructure is good, with varied accommodation structures, the modern touristic demands and requirements impose its upgrade and modernization. Agrotourism has been practiced for many years in Mălaia-Voineasa area, but there was no adequate legislation to classify the boarding houses according to

specific criteria related to comfort and facilities and no specialized agencies in rural tourism.

It is true that tourists who decide to spend their holidays in a mountain area, especially the foreign ones, look for an unspoiled countryside environment, which preserves the traditional Romanian village charm, but modern accommodation utilities must be provided as they have become indispensable for the modern man. In this respect, it is necessary to modernize the big hotels in Voineasa resort, improving their facilities to raise the level of classification as there are only two or three stars hotels now. The main objective of this exercise is not to increase prices and thus to transform the resort into one accessible only for that social class whose income is over average, but rather to attract tourists of all categories by varying the present offer. The alternative is to create services packages which include accommodation, conference room, fitness room, sauna and curative services. Currently, the touristic offer in Mălaia-Voineasa area is quite diverse and generous; it is open to all social categories, including those who enjoy mountain sports, to representatives of the elderly for whom the climate is a true blessing. The offer can however be extended by initiating and developing several types of complementary services provided by the boarding houses for answering all customers' demands. It should not be missed the modern man's permanent need of being in touch with reality, the Internet connection being absolutely necessary even during holiday and adding value to the services provided by the accommodation structures.

It is well known that the main component of tourism in the mountain areas during the cold season is represented by ski domains which are poorly arranged in our country. Although the area suitable for winter sports has increased over the past decade, it remains to be 300 times lower in comparison with France or 100 times compared with Germany even if the Romanian Carpathians provide the largest mountain area within the same country. As more than 50% of the ski area in Romania is found in a very limited area, respectively in Bucegi, Postăvaru and Predeal and most of these slopes measures less than 1 km, many of them being located at a low altitude where snow does not last many months, and the infrastructure which sustains winter sports is outdated or underdeveloped, it is necessary to exploit the touristic potential of this winter sport within those areas which provide all the required premises.

One of these is located on Voineasa territory, namely the touristic potential of the ski areas around Vidra Lake (altitude 1320m) which is bordered by Lotru, Latoriței and Parâng Mountains (alpine mountains with heights over 2000 m), area which is favorable to a complex development through an integrated ski system connected by a ski lifts, gondolas and chairlifts network. In this way it would be possible

to accomplish and finish an old large-scale project that was born around 1970 when the hydro dams and plants on Lotru River were built. For developing and opening the area to tourists in the white season a project whose main objective is the exploitation of the natural environment of the alpine ski area and Vidra Lake is considered. The project includes building several ski slopes, all linked with other neighboring ski area (Râncă ski area) through a complex ski lifts, gondolas and chairlifts network. It is also taken into consideration the use of anthropogenic and ethno-folk specific fund by organizing visits to the sheepfolds located on the mountain peaks for touristic purposes and building here lodges and tourist refuges.

The project which plans the development of a ski area with three locations (Vidra, Obârșia Lotrului and Voineasa) tends to be the biggest one in Romania as it includes 13 passenger ropeways place on the following mountains: Fratoșteanu, Petrimanu, Puru, Mioarele, Mereuțu, Ștefanu and Cărbunele. The overall capacity sums up 14.1 km of ski slope for 10,475 skiers per day at Obârșia Lotrului and 12.5 km of ski slope for 5,645 skiers per day at Vidra.

The accommodation capacity includes 7,500 beds for Obârșia Lotrului resort and other 4,500 new beds for Vidra resort. In this way, Lotru Valley will become a touristic attraction for the ones who enjoy winter sports and for those who prefer to combine sport activities with traditional winter activities and customs which are well preserved in Romanian, especially in mountain areas. The first step was made in April 2012 when 10 kilometers of ski slope equipped with a ropeway was inaugurated (Mioarele Slope). It is located between 1200 meters altitude and 1900 meters altitude.

One of the main problems related to the activities specific for the winter season is the maintenance of the equipment during the months when they are not in use.

Other negative aspects are the lack of jobs during summer time and the lack of activity. These generate social disadvantages in terms of heavy workload during the season and total lack of activity in the rest of the year, but also social imbalances created by employment of a large number of non-locals in the winter season, but all these offer an alternative solution to balance the summer touristic activities.

In the context of tourists' mobility and diversification of their habits, Mălaia-Voineasa rural area is able to offer modern leisure activities for long-term holidays or short-term holidays (for weekend holiday). One alternative activity is organizing cycling tours as the relief is favorable and offers special routes both in terms of landscape beauty and difficulty for more adventurous and experienced tourists. This type of activity should be encouraged and promoted as an increased interest towards cycling has been observed lately especially among foreign tourists. Also, the

touristic paths, natural and anthropogenic sightseeing are enough exploited, in this concern specialized support as qualified touristic guides and organized tours would be a solution to increase tourists flow.

On the other hand, the existing communications ways, particularly rail, offers the possibility to organize excursions with a vintage train on the railway around the mountain as there are many tunnels and viaducts and this type of activity hasn't been exploited yet but cannot be neglected as it is well known the foreign tourists' interests for what was lost in their countries due to excessive modernization and landscape urbanization. It is also considered the possibility of organizing ridding trips in the mountains and riding centers, knowing that in this area horses are still used for carrying materials and for transport.

Connected to tourism in the mountain areas and not taking into account the degree of satisfaction provided by the facilities and infrastructure the "off-road" activities have become very popular during the last years. The number of amateurs who practice this form of entertainment, especially foreigners, with jeeps, motorcycles, etc. has shown a constant positive evolution lately. Paradoxically, poor transport infrastructure development, combined with natural unaltered relief creates a huge potential for developing extended off-road activities, in contrast to the decline of this activity in Europe where the mountain area is overcrowded and overdeveloped in term of transport infrastructure. Until now, this activity has slowly developed in Mălaia-Voineasa area but still only few boarding houses offers equipments for practicing it. There are enough trails, forest roads and plenty of rough terrain for sustaining this modern activity which should be promoted and even included in a touristic services package. The off-road tourism is a good source of income for small local communities in mountain areas as the tourists who enjoy practicing it need accommodation, food, cultural and artistic activities specific for an active holiday.

So, as tourism is located at the confluence of most socio-economic domains of activity and it really depends on some of them areas (of food industry in general and in particular it depends on agriculture, transport and public services), the increase of tourism is not only a part of the social and economical development plan, it represents the sector which can mobilize the whole region economical development. As the touristic offer in Mălaia-Voineasa area has a huge and varied potential targeting all social classes (sport fans, mountain fans, foreign tourists searching for authentic and unaltered traditions and regions, retired persons) it is necessary to set up a marketing strategy for developing complementary touristic activities able to answer tourists' requests and needs.

It should be considered combining the touristic activities which have already become

traditional with the modern ones such spa services, fitness, solarium, massage and the alternative offered by the off-road activity, mountain biking, excursions, even climbing, in combination with rural tourism which encourages tourists' involvement in specific traditional activities for a mountain household alternating with modern accommodation facilities (conference rooms, Internet services, swimming pools, sauna, massage, etc.). All of these aims to increase the touristic attractiveness for a sustainable local development since tourists searching for relaxing places and activities and tourists searching for adventure have become the most representative groups with the fastest growing in terms of number and they require special attention when the strategy for rural mountain area development is elaborated.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The development of rural mountain area takes into consideration exploiting its natural and anthropogenic resources through tourism and managing this activity for expanding the touristic activity which represents the starting point for the recovery and improvement of local economy.

In a market economy the demand for the touristic products specific for a rural mountain area oscillates especially in the upward direction, but it must be also maintained and encouraged through activities and actions which increase tourists' interest. The new trends and demands specific for a certain period of time must be materialized in equivalent activities for avoiding the situation of having demands without requests and to not conduct domestic tourist flows to abroad destinations.

In Romania, rural mountain tourism has not had yet the advantage of a long experience thus it is necessary to know the "leisure" practices and the social categories which are interested in practicing this type of tourism in order to determine the Romanian and foreign tourists target groups who are likely to accept the offers to Romanian destinations where they can experience traditional and modern activities. Therefore, the strategy for promoting Mălaia-Voineasa area should rely on two strategic directions, namely: to regain the lost touristic market and to develop area in order to obtain in time superior performance compared to the present one.

On the other hand, it should be considered that the tourism market in the rural mountain area in terms of its partisans is quite varied and this leads to the need for a differentiated view and choices in terms of prices and the requested touristic product. In this context, Mălaia-Voineasa area is able to provide specific services such as rural tourism (folk customs and ancient civilization), combined with modern forms of tourism characterized by new adventurous and luxury types of

activities. Moreover, the already existing infrastructure can be improved and modernized with fashionable equipment if investments are directed in this region in order to meet different categories of tourists' demands and possibilities in terms of prices and interests.

As it is well known that the rural mountain regions has undergone a continuous decline since 1990, the rural tourism in the mountain area must be encouraged through a coherent policy since it is yet unable to sustain and to develop itself. It is also necessary to stop the decline of the inhabitants' historical occupations, phenomenon that caused mass exodus of youth from the mountain settlements but to preserve and develop them through rural tourism which has experienced a wide growth due to the aggressive urban expansion and people's need to return to their origins.

By encouraging this type of tourism and increasing the number of accommodation facilities belonging to local inhabitants the rural mountain area can be revitalized, creating a stable economic base, maintaining an optimal level to preserve natural and human environment, developing new types of activity which can become in time professions and retaining crafts and customs which are now in danger of extinction.

Rural community is the only one able to keep unaltered the traditional charm of the rural space therefore increasing its attractiveness by diversifying the activities must be achieved through careful planning to maintain territorial local features, while providing modern alternative nearby.

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