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## Rural Tourism – Fortifying Factor of the Romanian Villages

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Rural tourism, as a modality to capitalize the attractive potential of the rural space, imposed itself immediately after 1990, as a spontaneous way, in that time, of the private initiative's materialization (personally or as a family), stimulated by the liberation of the human energies.

The rural tourism appeared at the beginning in several regions, as would be Bran-Moeciu, in Braşov County, Maramureşului Country, Bucovina, and subsequently it was extended in the whole mountainous and Sub-Carpathian areas till in Dobrogea and the Danube Delta.

This very dynamic component of the tourism in Romania, which renders a distinct personality from one year to another, and which conquers segments of internal and international touristic market - with an increasing degree of fidelity, was impelled by more different factors.

First of all, the Carpathian region, which holds the most valuable natural touristic potential, that still preserves a valuable, often unique, touristic patrimony, belonging to the rural and traditional culture and civilization and it was, in general, protected by the effects of agriculture's socialization. As a result, the rural population that was not registered in the socialist agriculture had to find solutions and to have initiatives in order to survive. This explains the fact that immediately after the promulgation of the first laws that stimulated the market economy, this category of population was the one who rapidly adapted to the stimulating legislation and often applied it cleverly for the rural tourism. Then governmental organisms and agencies were set up, as the Romanian Federation for the Mountainous Development, which subsequently launched extended programs associated with others which benefited by a total or a partial non-repayable European financing. Such programs would be Phare-Lien (1994-1997), Phare-Interreg (1995-1997) or Transhumancia Programme (1998-1999), having European partners or those earned by local associations or even by the enterprising-physical persons.

A positive aspect was the cooperation in associative system through the setting-up of organizations, as would be the National Association for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC), Operation Village Roumaine (O.V.R.) as well as other regional or local associations built up in the main regions with rural tourism. By their means some financing funds could be accessed; the idea of pilot-villages project with a rural tourism was also set up launched, together with the first programs of professional training and of image promotion.

In this organizational-legislative context, the project of rural pensions' classification was prepared, launched and applied on the hierarchical system from one to five daisies.

Thus, the tourism from the rural environment registered one of the most remarkable dynamics, due to some specific traits, namely:

- the value and the diversity of the touristic offer belonging to the natural and the anthropic environment, leading to varied forms of turning into account and manifestation;
- diffusion in territory;
- adaptability of the material basis of accommodation;
- modest costs;
- the variety of services offered.

On the other hand, the elements of structure, the functional and the organizational ones permit a diversification in the frame of rural tourist system, where can be unfolded tourist, agricultural and traditional activities, with tourists' involvement.

All these led to the individualization of a distinct personality of rural tourism, having specific *traits*:

- *components* of the primary tourist offer that have either a general character or a specific one;
- *forms of manifestation*, very varied, (agro-tourism, tourism of rest, tourism of pleasure and weekend, cultural tourism, tourism for cure and last but not the least, tourism with secondary residences (holiday houses) etc.

Though the *effects of rural tourism* are very important in its evolution, hesitations, contradictory tendencies, inconsistencies and lack of professionalism were manifested. The reason was the fact that a strategy of general development of rural tourism, comprising precise objectives, that had to be attained on a short, medium or long term, was not achieved.

As a consequence of this last, very important aspect, Romania, in general, and the rural space, especially, do not have a modern transport infrastructure. The essential means as: water supply and sewerage systems are lacking in general. At these, the actual deficiencies are to be added, related to the education, protection and preserving the natural environment, powerfully modified and affected, offering doubtful chances of durable and long-term development.

Considering all these, evident positive effects are to be noticed, which begin to detach and to impose the rural settlements and the regions with settlements where the tourism has become a viable alternative and even a component of impact.

First of all, the adaptation and the modernizing of the arrangements are to be mentioned. Rural pensions are distinguished, on the background of the classification system that was introduced, and on the increasing competition on tourist market, thus coming closer to the standards of the rural tourism from countries with tradition. This tendency could be followed on phases:

- improvisations, with reserving some space (one room) in the household, but the contacts of the tourists with the spaces used in common were inevitable (the place for dinner, the access to the bathroom);
- pensions in distinct parts of the building within the household, with a clear separation of the uses;
- independent rural pensions having a permanently employed personnel and offering complex tourist services that were continuously improved.

The preservation of the local specificity of rural architecture is sought for.

A similar tendency could be also noticed as regards the water supply beginning with that coming from its own sources to the centralized systems. Here exists the possibility of quality's control or that of warming. For rural authenticity, near the modernized and competitive systems (thermal centrals), those that use natural combustible materials are also kept (stoves and fireplaces).

Next to these, the communication facilities are penetrating thus drawing closer the Romanian rural tourist arrangements to those of acknowledged categories. They concern the access and the comfort, (television, telephone, fax, Internet), permitting the immediate connections among the rural tourist pensions and the tourist markets (the tourist request).

A preoccupation for creating arrangements and facilities for rest and pleasure purposes in the space conterminous to the rural pensions exists, keeping the authentic and offering a character of originality.

All of these lead to modifications in the physiognomy of the settlements fostering a development in rural tourism, the functional zones being frequently outlined - especially the peripheral ones, located at a direct contact with the natural landscape – as they present an increased attractiveness. The appearance of this new activity led to a diversification on the rural work market, with the appearance of typical tourist activities, at which the authentic population reacted rapidly, attending authorized programs of training and specialization. On this basis, authorizations of functioning for tourist rural units were obtained and they are integrated in the vocational registry.

In the same context, the rural tourism stimulated the involvement in agriculture in order to offer agricultural products obtained from the orientation towards the ecological agriculture.

After 2007, the consistent European funds for agriculture could be obtained through projects, following thus a double connotation, agricultural eco-development and rural tourism. Thus, the components and factors within the frame of some original cultural rural landscapes (landschafts), so much appreciated in an over-anthropized Europe, will be able to be preserved. Also, the traditional activities as traditional pottery, painting on glass, traditional processing of wood, fabrics, food raw materials (plants, animals) register tendencies of revival.

The cumulated effect of these tendencies led directly or indirectly to the appearance of more than 20.000 new working places, the gradual orientation towards the achievement of some ecological farms, compatible with the accessing funds for development from the European Union. On a long term, rural tourism will have a positive role to the attenuation of the geo-demographic decline that is acutely manifested from almost a half of century in the rural environment. It contributes to keeping the population in the territory, especially the active one, the young and the adult, and to the improvement of the geo-demographic structures.

The rural tourism contributes to education and stimulates its level. This is realized through attending high-schools, achievement of practical learning in a specialization, vocational learning (in tourism), and even the graduation of some university specializations of long or short term (colleges), in a tourist, geographic or economic domain. The concrete result is manifested through starting some businesses in the field of rural tourism, or by taking over a business and continuing it in a family setting, through succession and often as a tradition from generation to generation.

On the other hand, the direct contact with the tourists from different backgrounds, but also from countries with different cultures, imposed the necessity of the contact and of the immediate communication. This is made through the mediation of an international language (especially English), by acquiring knowledge in that language, adapting and refining the manners, which also reflect the level of education.

Technical communication skills are also to be noticed more and more frequently and their knowledge at the level of modern requirements: the necessary knowledge for using the Internet, making and launching promotional Web sites etc.

The increasing request for the rural tourist product determined a better and a continuously increased preoccupation for modernizing and endowing the pensions, with a positive impact upon the beginners in tourism. And this aspect had a double connotation: the increase of the incomes coming from non-agricultural activities (tourist) and the possibilities to reinvest, with impact upon the increase and the diversification of the organization and modernization of the pensions.

The Carpathian region concentrates more than 75% from the accommodation capacity of the rural tourist pensions' type, which sum up almost 5000 units with approximately 10.000 places. These are dispersed in 150 settlements from 20 counties placed in regions with a complex natural potential, but also with an anthropic tourist patrimony. As concerns the last one, there are to be noticed especially the components of traditional rural civilization and culture, with traits of originality and even of uniqueness (for instance, the wooden churches and the Merry Cemetery in Maramureş).

Remarkable concentrations of rural tourist arrangements are distinguished in *Maramureş*, with 25 settlements, among which there are to be noticed: Vadu Izei, Botiza, Ieud, Bârsana, Sălişte de Sus, summing up 1.000 places; *Suceava* (Bucovina), with 11 localities, having almost 500 places with Vama, Suceviţa, Iacobeni, Dorna-Arini, Cârlibaba, Ciocăneşti; *Bistriţa Năsăud* with 10 settlements and more than 300 places with concentration of rural pensions in Lunca Ilvei, Prundu Bârgăului; *Neamţ* with Vânători, Agapia, Văratec; *Harghita* with Praid and Lăzarea; *Covasna* with Cernat, Balvanioş, Covasna; *Vrancea* with Soveja, Lepşa Tulniei, all in the Eastern Carpathians.

In the Meridional Carpathians, the Braşov county with Rucăr-Bran area is noted for, with several hundreds of rural pensions, concentrated in Moeciu, Bran, Şirnea, Peştera, summing up almost 1.500 places. We can also mention: Sibiu county with Sibiel, Gura Râului, Sebeşul de Sus; Prahova, Argeş, Vâlcea Counties (with Vaideni).

In the area of the Western Carpathians, the Apuseni Mountains are to be noticed on the territory of Alba counties, in "Moşilor Land", with Scărişoara, Albac, Gârda de Sus, Arieşeni and with distinct specific traits: Remetea (within Trascău Depression) and *Cluj county* with Sâncrai, Bologa, Poieni, Ciucea and Băişoara.

Even if it is peripheral to the Carpathian region, Dobrogea is integrated in the tendency towards rural tourism, stimulated by the vicinity of the Black Sea (Costinești, Vama Veche) of the interrelation Black Sea Laguna Razim (Jurilovca-Portița) and especially by the impact with the Danube Delta (Crișan, Mila 23, Mahmudia, Murighiol, Sfântu Gheorghe). For the counties from the western part of the country, Timiș, Arad, Bihor, where the rural tourism with pensions is much less representative, comparatively with the neighboring counties (Alba, Cluj), the cause could be related to the mentality that is in a way different, specific for the Banat space.

Usually, a rural pension, organized, modernized and classified, has a capacity of 2 - 6 places (beds). There are also situations in which the substantial investments led to the achievement of rural pensions (or complexes) of such tourist arrangements with more bodies of buildings. These grouped facilities can accommodate more tens of persons, as would be those from Ocna Șugatag, Bran, Moeciu, Albac Sâncrăieni in the Carpathian region, or Crișan, Uzlina, in the Danube Delta.

The spatial distribution of the pension type endowments spotlights differentiated concentrations whose quantification can facilitate the obtaining of some useful classifications in the perspective of a differentiated orientation in time and space of some funds for rural development.

Consequently, on the basis of an attentive following of the geographical components, with a direct implication in obtaining some quantitative values significantly differentiated, the use of some mathematical relations is proposed for application, in order to obtain the general index of rural tourist arrangement and a specific index of rural tourist organization within the settlements or regions studied:

$$I_{tr} = \frac{N_{pt} \times N_p}{N_g \times N_f} \times 100$$

in which:

$I_{tr}$  - general index of rural tourist organization;

$N_{pt}$  - total number of rural tourist pensions;

$N_p$  - average number of persons working in tourist pension;

$N_g$  - number of households from locality;

$N_f$  - average number of persons in a household.

$$I_{trs} = \frac{N_{pt} \times N_p + 2(N_{pt1} \times N_{p1})}{N_g \times N_f} \times 100$$

in which:

$I_{trs}$  - specific index of rural tourist organization;

$N_{pt1}$  - number of pensions with functions and spaces of exclusively tourist use;

$N_{p1}$  - average number of persons occupied in rural pensions for an exclusive tourist function.

Another form of tourist organization, especially in the rural space, representative for the period after 1990 is *the secondary residence – the holiday house*. The appearance and especially the proliferation of this category of tourist endowment, under the conditions of elimination of the previous absurd interdiction, to hold a single residence, are absolute normal in the new context.

As a result, important financial accumulations, realized at an individual or familial level, were channeled towards the achievement of holiday houses - secondary residences belonging to the population coming from the urbane environment.

The modality of initiation and achievement of the projects in this domain are connected to the following situations:

- obtaining, through succession, households and spaces subsequently organized as secondary residence;

- acquisition, through buying, of households subsequently adapted to the exigencies of a comfort comparable with that from the urban environment;
- acquisition, through buying, of fields in the rural environment and the edification of holiday houses.

The areas chosen as locations are in areas and rural settlements around the towns, especially around the large ones (the peri-urban space):

- areas and rural settlements with natural tourist potential (especially landscape potential) and anthropic potential of high attractiveness, found at distances of several tens of km from the urbane centres;
- the balneo-tourist resorts at whose infrastructure can connect;
- reservoir from the mountainous space;
- the lake and forestry systems from the proximity of the capital – Bucharest.

Also, the villages from the Danube Delta became destinations for building secondary residences, alike the Black Sea shore.

An interesting phenomenon, of some groups of secondary residences' constitution, is outlined from more tens to hundred of secondary residences. They can obtain a statute of true "spas" in connection to reservoirs, as those on the Someșul Cald (Tarnița), Iada, tributary of Crișul Repede (Leșu) etc., also of concentrations in the picturesque mountainous zones (for instance Boga in Bihor County) or in the sector of Danube Narrow Path etc.

The secondary residential districts contribute to the diversification of the landscape and functional profile of some acknowledged resorts or rural localities. The massive implant of this tourist category can lead to their modernizing, e.g. Cornu (Prahova County).

In conclusion, rural tourism and its specific arrangements are imposed as a dynamic component with a semnificative impact upon rural landscape, both in the sense of its modernizing, but also of the preserving the original components of civilization and traditional culture.

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