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Romanian Village, Exponential Tool for Sustainable Development and Exploitation of Rural Tourism

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ABSTRACT

The Romanian village-keeper of the popular art treasure, the most of the ethnographical and folk heritage, placed in an attractive natural framework - might constitute (as part of the national and international touristic potential) the base of a quality touristic activity, having a local and national specific, giving a personal touch to the Romanian tourism. From this point of view, the agro-tourism – or, generally speaking, the tourism in rural spaces-might become a new and proper direction of transforming the rural life. In the same time, the agro-tourism is a way to increase the values of Romanian specificity, without affecting the quality of natural environment. So, it is imperious necessary to identify and typologies the specifics of the villages, from a touristic point of view, and to determine the specific activities that can polarize different segments of touristic necessities. Another objective is to find some more ways than can promote tourism into external touristic markets, mostly the touristic activities based on religion, hunting and fishing, horse riding and even culinary tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Unbalanced and sometimes marginalized, the Romanian rural areas have maintained, in spite of all vicissitudes, the cultural and ancient traditions and especially, the typical Romanian hospitality, being among the few areas in Europe that still preserve, almost unaltered in some areas, the traditional spiritual valence, the economic life and the environment.

Due to the ethnic-cultural and ethnographic peculiarities, and to the originality and richness of the resources specific to the related geographical area, the Romanian village may be referred to as a unique tourism product that can satisfy a wide range of motivations in organized and self-organized, as well as domestic and international tourism.

Especially in mountainous and hilly areas, *the traditional costumes and the folklore* preserve that touch of originality so rare today and, therefore, so sought-after by tourists. All these items form a potential

that acts as a tourism resource in some areas and, in rural tourism, it contributes to individualizing the rural destinations, if existing heritage items are successfully enhanced.

Folk creation is "alive" because of the existence of workshops specialized in various activities, such as pottery, wood and stone carving, sewing and painting, working metal and bone, weaving vegetable fibres [1].

Besides the cultural value, they are important to tourism, and especially to rural tourism, as they represent components of the traditional economic profile in households and villages.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Houses and homesteads are elements of attraction especially due to the traditional architecture (which is characterized by various styles from one region to another), the size and shape of the building, and the predominance of a certain type of building material (wood, in the Carpathian and Sub-Carpathian

Mountains, Suceava Plateau; stone, in the southern part of Dobrogea, the Năsăud area etc.).

The plan of the house varies depending especially on the elevation, which determines a different distribution of rooms intended for habitation, hosting tourists and meal preparation.

The housing interiors have decorations that provide a rustic character or are limited only to the inventory required by the rules for classification of accommodation structures.

In order to preserve some valuable heritage items and to highlight the variety and originality of

architecture and traditional techniques, starting with the first part of the 20th century, outdoor museums with different profiles are being set up, as well as exhibitions and ethnographic collections.

They provide *ex situ* protection of houses, homesteads and peasant industry equipments, and various pieces of household inventory [2].

In rural areas, there are 15 rural houses that are protected as monuments of rural architecture, and some rural traditional dwellings (table 1), which may be included within the category of values of cultural heritage regarded as being of national interest.

Table 1. Rural architecture monuments (rural houses) and rural traditional dwellings.

Monuments of folk architecture (rural housing)	Village	Comunal	District
Wooden house (19 th century)	Goiеști	Vidra	Alba
Houses (18-19 th centuries)	Roșia Montană	Roșia Montana	Alba
Houses (18 th century)	Vadu Morților	Vadu Morților	Alba
Avram Iancu House	Avram Iancu	Avram Iancu	Alba
Hagi Tudorache House	Budeasa Mare	Budeasa	Argeș
Cărtianu House	Cartiu	Turcinești	Gorj
Székely Gates	Satu Mare	Brădești	Harghita
Deac Vasile Moșu Wooden house	Bogdan Vodă	Bogdan Vodă	Maramureș
Iurca Wooden house	Harnicești	Desești	Maramureș
Polina Omir House	Sisești	Sisești	Mehedinți
Maria Moaca Wooden house	Schitu Topolnitei	Izvoru Bârzii	Mehedinți
Buzescu House	Strejeștii de Sus	Strejești	Olt
House of Mărcuț Iacob al lui Gligor	Călinești – Oaș	Călinești – Oaș	Satu Mare
Matisievici Ecaterina House	Demăcușa	Moldovița	Suceava
Maria Veruleac House	Breaza de Sus	Breaza	Suceava
Rural traditional ensembles			
Traditional tools	Rucăr	Rucăr	Argeș
Mills and traditional hydraulic equipment	Putna	Prigor	Caraș – Severin
Mills	Ciclova Română		Caraș – Severin
Cellars of the hill	Bălănești	Glodeni	Gorj
Three wood mills	Ponoarele	Ponoarele	Mehedinți
Buzescu wine cellar	Buicești	Priseaca	Olt
Water mill	Vițanești	Țifești	Vrancea

Source: Law No. 5 of March 6, 2000 on the Approval of the Spatial Planning of the National Territory - Section III - Protected Areas [2]

Once the houses and the households are eligible for receiving tourists, they become elements of attraction with a double role: hosting guests and serving as tourist attractions specific to a certain destination; they are the results of the influence of geographical, historical, socio-economic and demographic factors in that area, and their structure reflects the main occupations of the rural population, i.e. agriculture, livestock, fishing, logging, processing raw materials, etc.

Rural households that receive tourists should be classified, the classification system being improved in recent years. In order to individualize, a new symbol (i.e. the daisy) is used. This symbol is different from the one assessing other categories of lodgings. Depending on the quality and existing facilities, the households may receive from 1 to 3 "daisies." Due to the conditions imposed by the effective rules, the guesthouses provide

the tourists with a certain degree of comfort and protection. Their classification is done by specialized structures, represented by committees, prepared in advance for this action [3].

The value of the guesthouse is boosted by the potentiality components that are enhanced in order to complete the offer. This is favoured by a number of elements, which represent general characteristics of quality: attractive landscapes, healthy climate, good food, tidiness, great atmosphere, a good price – services ratio, the opportunity to practice swimming (in the sea, lakes, rivers), skiing and other sports, hospitality, affordable rates, reduced vehicle traffic volumes. Their value depends on the subjective impression of the people involved in tourist travel, but is clearly influenced by the image of the destination, the state of infrastructure, the accessibility, the quality of reception

areas, and the hosts' endeavour to ensure appropriate tourist services. Besides the cottage, the rural architecture, the crafts, the customs, the folklore manifestations, the traditional costumes and the folklore, a large number of Romanian villages also have other resources available to tourism: historical, art and

architecture monuments, pure and natural environment with a diverse potential (mineral and/or thermal waters, bio climate, special scenic landscapes, hunting ground, skiing areas etc.). Therefore, the Romanian rural areas offer increasingly diversified opportunities in order to satisfy all categories of tourists (fig. 1).

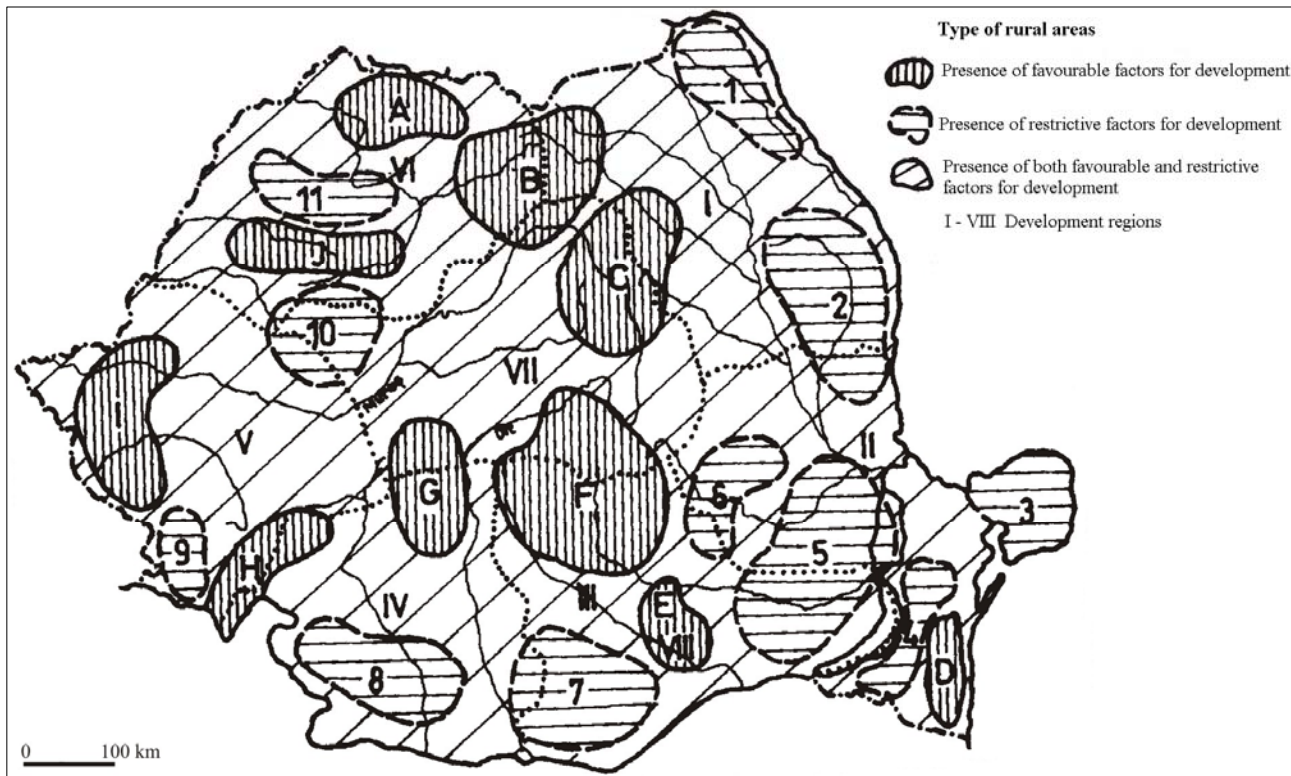


Fig. 1. Rural areas with favourable and restrictive factors for development [2]. Areas with favourable factors: A. Maramureş. B. Rodna – Bârgău – Călimani. C. Ciuc – Bistriţa Valley Depression. D. South-East Dobrogea. E. Bucharest periurban areas. F. Braşov – Prahova Valley Depression – Muntenia Sub-Carpathians. G. Sibiu – Lotru Valley Depression. H. Iron Gates Hydroelectric Power Station – Cerna Valley - Tismana Depression. I. Banat Plain. J. Criş – Someş Depression. Areas with restrictive factors: 1. North-East Moldavia. 2. Central Moldavia. 3. Danube Delta. 4. Central and South-West Dobrogea. 5. Bărăgan Plain. 6. Subcarpații de Curbură. 7. Teleorman Plain. 8. South Oltenia. 9. South Banat. 10. Apuseni Mountains. 11. Someş Plateau.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the items described are factors that can generate tourist activities or may influence their emergence. According to the existence of natural and anthropogenic potential components, the existence and accessibility of tourism resources, and the infrastructure developed to receive tourists, the economic literature differentiates between *baseline factors* (existing prior to the performance of tourist activities and being independent of them) and *derived factors*. The latter are relevant to ensuring the attractiveness of a village, a space or a rural region that is of tourist interest. As for rural tourism, the derived factors refer to:

- tourist infrastructure: accommodation and meals, organization and guidance, transportation;
- leisure infrastructure: sports and cultural activities, and attraction incentive programs (participation in festivals, exhibitions, feasts);

- special tourist offers relating to the existence of mineral springs and thermal facilities. This category also includes fairs.

What minimum conditions must satisfy a village to become a tourist village?

It must be set in a naturally attractive environment, without sources of pollution; it must be characterized by accessibility and availability of rich tourist resources which may be exploited by carrying out cultural activities or by participating in cultural activities taking place in the village, etc. It also requires a minimum of comfort, solved with local resources (running water, sewage, bathroom etc.).

Along with these factors, the value of a tourist village may be increased by means of the following elements: the existence of a tradition in the tourism activity, the contribution of possible curative spa elements (mineral and thermal springs, therapeutic mud, mofette, coastal-marine salt lakes etc.), the

existence of valuable archaeological remains, historical, art and architecture monuments, and the presence of social-cultural, sports and business facilities etc. [4].

To determine the categories of tourist villages means to identify and reveal the peculiarity of regions and to group them into several basic types in order to promote, in every region, the most appropriate forms of tourism, according to the major geographical, social and economic features, and to the main motivations and opinions stated by tourists who frequent the region. Implementing the specialization principle in the organization and functioning of village tourism is all the more necessary as each rural region represents an entity with its own peculiarities and specific activities that have to be identified and exploited as efficiently as possible in terms of tourism.

Also, determining the types of tourist villages is a means of selecting tourists; they group in a village or another, depending on their main motivations and travel options. This allows a better understanding and functioning of the supply - demand economic

mechanism and hence a better organization of accommodation and other services, depending on the socio-economic characteristics of the main tourist patronage. Last but not least, determining the types of tourist villages allows propaganda, and concrete and specific advertising, depending on the characteristic of each type of tourist village. From the theoretical point of view, the problem concerning the typology of tourist villages may be approached as a matter of option, but its practical application, i.e. determining the type of tourist village, is of an objective nature. In order to achieve this, it is necessary that, along with the desire and intention of the organizers, the tourist village shall meet certain natural and historical, social and economic conditions that should define and characterize each type of tourist village. Since the features that can be taken into account when determining the typology of tourist villages are numerous and differ from one geographical area to another and even from one region to another, we will limit our presentation to the submission of a general typology of tourist villages [5].



Fig. 2. Rural traditional architecture [5]: 1. Bogdan Vodă (Maramureş county). 2. Moişeni (Satu Mare county). 3. Alejd (Bihor county). 4. Sălcăua (Alba county). 5. Chereleş (Arad county). 6. Cîmpu lui Neag (Hunedoara county). 7. Bran (Braşov county). 8. Curtişoara (Gorj county). 9. Măldăreşti (Vâlcea county). 10. Plopi (Mehedinţi county). 11. Cuciulata (Braşov county). 12. Rădeşti (Alba county). 13. Şanţ (Bistriţa-Năsăud county). 14. Viştea (Braşov county). 15. Moşoaia (Argeş county). 16. Stăneşti (Argeş county). 17. Trăisteni (Prahova county). 18. Cobia de Sus (Dâmboviţa county). 19. Periş (Ilfov county). 20. Dragalina (Ialomiţa county). 21. Ruşefi (Buzău county). 22. Chiojdu (Buzău county). 23. Curteni (Vaslui county). 24. Năruja (Vrancea county). 25. Piatra Şoimului (Neamţ county). 26. Hangu (Neamţ county). 27. Voitinel (Suceava county). 28. Oltina (Constanta county).

Rural settlements of tourist interest (table 2) have burgeoned on the most various landforms, from the Black Sea and the Danube Delta up to the mountains, being grouped into several major types based on their peculiarity:

Landscape and climate villages are characterized by the presence of an attractive natural environment, with numerous and diverse elements of tourism potential which encourage leisure.

Table 2. Rural settlements with tourist potential in Romania.

District	Locality	Tourist Importance
Alba	Bistra, Lușța, Vidra, Albac, Arieșeni, Gârda de Sus	**
Arad	Bocsig, Pâncota, Săvârșin, Șiria, Hălmagiu	*
Argeș	Arefu, Stoienești, Brădet, Brăduleț, Lerești, Rucăr	**
Bacău	Cașin, Ghimeș – Făget, Berzunț, Slănic Moldova	*
Bihor	Aghireș, Bucium, Pietroasa, Șinteu, Șuncuiuș	**
Bistrița Năsăud	Chiraleș, Lechința, Bistrița Bârgăului, Colibița, Prundu Bârgăului, Rebra, Susenii Bârgăului, Telciu, Tiha Bârgăului	*
Brașov	Bran, Bucium, Cristian, Fundata, Moieciu, Șirnea, Moeciu de Sus, Poiana Mărului, Șoarș, Preduleț	**
Botoșani	Drăgușeni, Ipotești, Lunca	*
Brăila	Gropeni, Ianca	*
Buzău	Buda, Cislău, Lopătari, Starchiojd, Siriu, Bârnova, Ciurea, Mânzălești, Tomești	*
Caraș-Severin	Armeniș, Bozovici, Cornereva, Gârnici, Marga	**
Cluj	Călățele, Iclod, Valea Drăganului, Beliș, Băița, Ciucea, Poieni, Sâncrai	**
Constanța	Tuzla, Costinești, 2 Mai	**
Covasna	Augustin, Bățanii Mari, Belin, Micăsasa, Olteni, Arcuș, Brețcu, Băile Balványoș, Malnș Băi, Sânzieni, Șugaș Băi, Turia, Zagon, Zăbala	*
Dâmbovița	Dragodana, Malu cu Flori, Pietroșița, Tătărani, Voineasa	*
Gorj	Cerna Sat, Călnic, Glogova, Baia de Fier, Dobrița, Novaci, Polovragi, Padeș, Tismana	**
Harghita	Atid, Bucin, Ciceu, Dănești, Lăzarea, Praid	*
Hunedoara	Bănița, Grădiștea de sub Munte, Hălmagiu, Nucșoara, Șoimuș, Vețel, Bucium Orlea, Densuș, Sântămăria Orlea, Subcetate	*
Ilfov	Căldărușani, Snagov	**
Iași	Andrieșeni, Ruginoasa, Tansa, Cotnari, Păun	**
Maramureș	Bogdan Vodă, Vișeu de Sus, Botiza, Ieud, Moisei, Ocna Șugatag, Rozavlea, Săliște de Sus, Săpânța, Vadu Izei	**
Mehedinți	Dubova, Eșenlnița, Cireșu, Isverna, Bala	**
Mureș	Gurghiu, Hodac, Ceaușu de Câmpie	**
Neamț	Agapsla, Târcani, Vânători, Vișoara – Bistrița	*
Olt	Gostavăț, Drăghiceanu, Dobroveni, Orlea, Teslui – Comănița, Vitomirești, Vlădila	*
Prahova	Cornu, Izvoarele, Măneciu – Ungureni, Teșila, Telega, Valea Doftanei, Breaza, Brebu, Poiana Țapului	*
Satu Mare	Certeze, Tășnad, Vama	**
Sălaj	Nușfalău, Boghiș	*
Sibiu	Biertan, Cisnădie, Cisnădioara, Jina, Poiana Sibiului, Tilișca, Gura Râului, Poplaca, Săliște – Sibiel, Sebeșul de Sus	**
Suceava	Broșteni, Ciocănești, Cărlibaba, Putna, Dorna Arini, Iacobeni, Mănăstirea Humorului, Panaci, Poiana Stampei, Șaru Dornei, Vatra Dornei, Vatra Moldoviței, Vama	**
Timiș	Giarmata, Gladna Montană, Recaș	*
Tulcea	Crișan, Maliuc, Sf.Gheorghe, Murighiol	*
Vâlcea	Vaideeni, Costești, Bărbătești, Sălătrucel, Mălaia, Căineni Mari	**
Vrancea	Câmpuri, Lepșa, Mărăști, Mera, Nereju, Negriștești, Răcoasa, Soveja, Țifești, Tulnici, Vidra, Vizantea, Vulcăneasa	**

Source: Database of the Tourism Research Institute. Settlements in italics are registered within the current package tour [2].

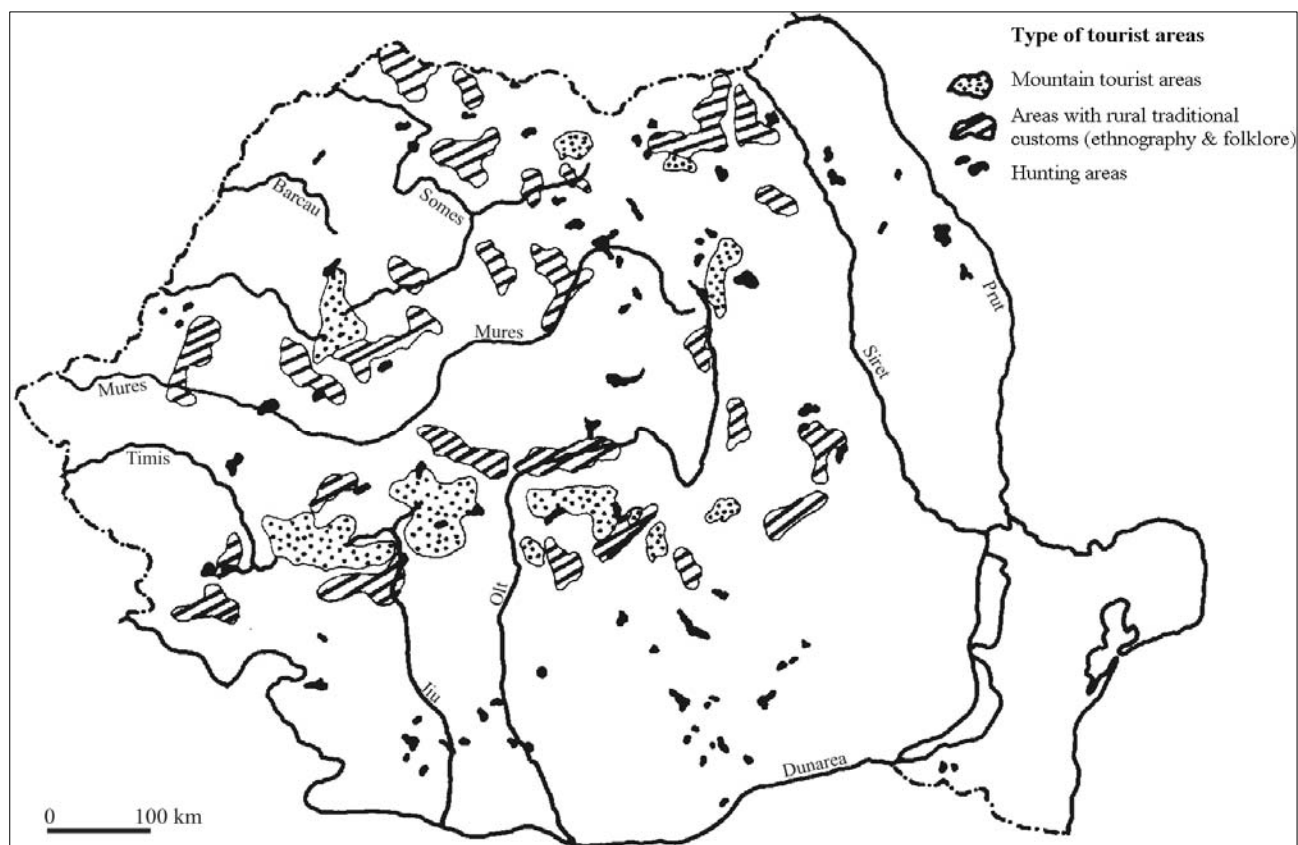


Fig. 3. Areas with special tourist features [2].

This kind of tourist settlements, located in hilly and mountainous areas, with houses sometimes scattered at some distance from each other, but also in the coastal zone - isolated from main roads - are suitable for holiday tourism, providing various opportunities, such as walking outdoors, air baths, sunbathing, hiking: *Fundata*, *Șirnea* (in Rucăr-Bran), *Tismana* (Gorj), *Brădet* (Argeș), *Botiza* (Maramureș), *Vama Veche*, *2 Mai* (Constanța) etc.

The prevalent feature of these villages that are characteristic of holiday tourism (for lovers of quietness and solitary walks in a beautiful natural setting) is the natural setting and the geographical position isolated from crowded urban areas and major roads. The hill and mountain villages, with houses spread over valleys and hills, at some distance from each other, with pastures, meadows and orchards, satisfy the fundamental motivation of many tourists, i.e. "the return to nature."

Spa villages support health tourism of more local and less regional importance, based on a series of "tourist resources" that are exploited and used: carbonated water, mofette, springs and salt lakes, mud etc.: *Zizin*, *Covasna*, *Bala* (Mehedinți), *Oglinzi* and *Băltățești* (in Moldavia's Subcarpathians), *Coștiui* (Maramureș), *Călăcea* (Timiș), *Săcelu* (Gorj) etc.

Tourist villages appropriate for practicing sports are specific to mountain areas with persistent snow cover, special ski slope conditions that favour

winter sports (*Fundata*, *Gărîna* - in Caraș County etc.), and to low areas with water surfaces, favouring water sports (*Murighiol*, *Mila 23* etc.).

This kind of village attracts two types of tourists, most of them youngsters: amateur sportsmen, uninitiated or less initiated tourists, but eager to learn and practice sports. The latter category may be initiated by ski, bobsleigh, swimming instructors, recruited from the local population. In these villages, there may be sports equipment rental centres.

Pastoral villages (Vaideeni, Prislop, Jina). This group may include mountain villages, where the main occupation of local people is sheep and cattle breeding. Local people attract tourists with menus based on dairy products. These menus can be supplemented with eggs, poultry, sheep and bovine meat, and for entertainment, shepherd banquets (consisting of food preparations such as *batal la proțap*¹, *berbec haiducesc*², *balmuș*³, *urdă*⁴ and *jântiță*⁵), as well as specific and traditional festivals are being organized.

¹ A wether on the asado.

² A ram baked in a tandir.

³ A polenta-like traditional Romanian dish obtained by boiling the cornmeal in sheep milk.

⁴ A type of curdled cheese obtained by boiling and curdling the whey left from *caș* (a type of fresh curdled ewe cheese without whey, which is sometimes called "green cheese" in English).

⁵ A drink made of sheep milk whey similar to kefir.

Piscatorial and venatorial villages offer and organize various forms of special entertainment for tourists - hunting, fishing, safari – providing, at the same time, accommodation and gastronomic services based on fish or game (fig. 3): *Crișan, Sfântu Gheorghe, Murighiol* (Delta area) *Ciocănești* (Suceava County), *Gurghiu* (Mures County), and the villages in the Vișeu and Bistrița valleys [7].

Tourist villages of artistic and homemade creation (Tismana Oboga, Margina, Marga etc.). The interest of numerous tourists for artistic and homemade creation is well-known, as well as their desire to acquire such objects directly from the manufacturer. So far, these regions are only for itinerary tourism. At best, some of them are included in the tourist routes of travel companies. These villages offer the possibility of practicing holiday tourism, where, in specially equipped workshops and under the guidance of renowned artists and craftsmen, tourists might get initiated into folk arts and archaic techniques: icons on glass, naive paintings, wood and stone carving, weaving, folk clothing and sewing, ceramics, folk music and dances etc [6].

We shall identify the opportunities to practice some of these activities within households hosting tourists. There are many villages where the housewives' basic activities are weaving, seaming or embroidering, activities that tourists can get initiated into. Therefore, the essential characteristic of these villages would be represented by artistic and homemade manufacture, which could be exploited in various and efficient ways.

Ethnic folk tourist villages cover rural settlements that have an invaluable ethnographic background, represented by museums, outstanding rural architecture, traditional costumes and folklore: *Curtișoara* (Gorj), *Avram Iancu* (Alba), *Rășinari* (Sibiu), *Vama* (Suceava), *Năruja* (Vrancea) etc.

These villages can provide tourists with accommodation and meals in authentic conditions (the folk style of furniture, decor and sheets; traditional dishes are served by using special tableware and cutlery: ceramic plates and bowls, wooden spoons, etc., which do not exclude, of course, the use of modern cutlery).

In these villages, permanent craft exhibitions, where people can purchase the items they desire, can be organized. For tourists who just visit the village, one or more households can be arranged as outdoor ethnographic museums. Minstrels can be identified and encouraged; Sunday round dances, festivals, fairs and other local customs and traditions can be perpetuated, the tourists being invited to participate.

It is well-known that the preservation and perpetuation of folklore and ethnography (i.e. the traditional costumes, the working techniques, the architecture etc.) in their original and traditional forms fall into decline, becoming more isolated points on the Romania's ethnographic map (fig. 2). Forms and content of urban lifestyle have penetrated and continue

to penetrate the rural areas in an impetuous and irreversible way.

Approaching the future of rural settlements from a tourist perspective, and adapting to this end, it is necessary that their ethnographic peculiarities be preserved and perpetuated in appropriate forms. Otherwise, the tourists' interest in Romanian villages and unpolluted environment will gradually decrease.

Villages with tourist attractions of scientific interest have different types of nature reserves which attract numerous foreign and local tourists by originality, uniqueness and beauty: *Andrieșeni* (Vrancea), *Cireșu* (Mehedinți), *Bosanci* and *Sadova* (Suceava), *Chiuzbaia* (Maramureș) etc.

Villages with historical, art and architecture monuments, having an extraordinary value, nationally and internationally renowned, are specific to Moldavia, which has an impressive chain of monasteries, the result of the Moldavian "rebirth" of the 15th -17th centuries (*Sucevița, Putna, Dragomirna, Agapia, Văratec*, etc.); to Getae Subcarpathians (*Aninoasa, Cotmeana, Cozia Horezu, Polovragi, Tismana*); and to southern Transylvania – the region with the famous fortified churches (*Hărman, Prejmer, Biertan, Feldioara, Cristian* etc.).

Fruit and wine growing tourist villages. In these villages, where the main activity relates to cultivating fruit trees and grape-vine, tourism can be practiced throughout the year, during and after harvesting, by offering to the tourists fruits, grapes and food preparations based thereon.

Also, other food preparations, either common or dietary, based on fruits, can be considered. In these villages, a special attraction and, at the same time, a main source of income is represented by refreshing soft drinks, made out of fruits (*Recaș, Giarmata, Șiria, Agapia* etc.).

Many types of the villages that were mentioned above do not present well-defined features; the same type could include characteristics of other types, the delimitation being rather theoretical. For example, Sibiel and Tismana villages present ethnic folk particularities, but they are placed in an attractive natural landscape; whereas Fundata and Vaideeni are pastoral, ethnic folk and landscape villages.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that Romania's rural areas abound in cultural and historical values, which respond to the traveller's various motivations, including the treasures of rural art, ethnography and folklore that represent the emblematic image of our people and of the Romanian village. All these elements give proof of the fact that our country has multiple opportunities for developing rural tourism.

Here are the reasons why the Romanian Government supports natural individuals, family

associations and business companies that are mainly active in providing tourism services in classified rural guesthouses located in rural mountain areas, the Danube Delta and the Black Sea regions.

There were established the methodology and minimum criteria concerning the classification of rural establishments and tourist guesthouses by means of stars or daisies symbols, and a series of laws and regulations were issued in order to provide facilities to those interested in organizing and promoting rural tourism, but also in protecting the tourists.

The Ministry of Tourism has established short and medium term measures and a series of specific goals: the development of a legal framework to regulate the classification and functioning of rural tourist establishments; the expansion and diversification of the tourist attractions characteristic of diverse rural areas by way of attracting tourists to events inspired by the rural population's ethnic-cultural way of living; the enhancement of the ethnic-cultural potential of ethnic and folk traditions in order to create new Romanian tourism products, which are to represent new attractions in international tourism; the support - by some tax incentives - of investments concerning rural tourism development, including recreational facilities as well as infrastructure and utility facilities.

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