

CULTURAL TOURISM CONSUMPTION MODELS IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract: *Rural areas may contribute to tourism development. Through the rural tourism activities, the natural and human potential of the villages is used and the way of life of the communities in the areas concerned may be enhanced. In this paper, the cultural tourism consumption models specific to the rural area at national and European level are discussed. The rural area is constantly changing, without losing identity and disappearing. Rural communities have their own dynamic, maintaining interdependence links with the urban areas.*

Keywords: *tourism consumption models, rural areas, cultural heritage*

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1. Introduction

Tourism is an economic activity with a significant contribution to value added, jobs, budget revenues, diminishing regional disparities, preserving and valorizing the cultural heritage. The paper discusses various aspects of tourism and cultural consumption models in Romania and other European countries.

2. Consumption models specificities

2.1. Romanian experience

Tourism is characterized by a structural complexity with multiple forms of service (1). The implementation of long-term strategies in the field of rural tourism provides the premises for accelerated development. In Romania, some of the tourists are attracted to rural or agro-tourism areas, due to the advantages offered by this form of recreation, low prices, away from the often-polluted urban areas.

The rural areas have a homogeneous structure, with their own cultural heritage (2). The type of tourism specific to these areas has been present in Romania since the 1920s and 1930s, and between 1973 and 1974 there have been attempts to revitalize it by identifying 33 "tourist villages".

For Romania, the following points highlight the model of cultural consumption (3):

- Collecting books – the book collectors' segment that is comparable in size to other EU

countries;

- Musical taste is different from those in other EU countries;
- Cultural activities (participation in public celebrations, music shows and museum visits) differ from those in other EU countries, being mainly influenced by the relatively limited individual budget allocated to these types of activities;
- Private infrastructure (household facilities) - can be comparable to other EU countries; in Romania there is a trend of cultural consumption that is centered on TV, the Internet, etc.

Romania has an attractive cultural heritage, with the possibility of valorizing the following elements (2): architecture; traditional costume; traditional music; artistic creation, with specially designed workshops, where tourists, guided by experts and local artists and artisans, can learn to paint on glass, to manufacture ceramic objects etc., to fish and hunt, etc. Due to the need for relaxation, a growing number of tourists prefer a return to nature, irrespective of age group, profession or social status.

The desire to learn more about rural life, the appreciation and understanding of old customs and traditions, the need for harmony are elements that determine tourists to prefer rural houses. All these factors underline the motivation of some tourists to look for an ideal holiday in the countryside.

Rural areas in Romania are very rich in tourist attractions. Considering this configuration of the main factors and obstacles to tourism development, it is possible to underline some tourist products/services that could be provided in rural areas in the short term. In order to organize and promote them, little financial resources are needed, and the effort of organizing and motivating local people is more important. These products/services could be: organizing holidays in “grandparents” houses, offering periods of convalescence in the countryside, practical demonstration workshops for amateurs and / or tourists, interactive forms of tourism, valorizing mineral and therapeutic springs, rental of vacation homes and/or small fields of arable land, annual meetings with people born in the village who have gained a good financial status or became famous, proud of their origins, areas of interest for religious tourism, rural tourism for shopping and animal husbandry in mountain areas (4):

- Organizing holidays at grandparents. This old practice consists of sending children to the countryside to “adoptive” grandparents during the holiday. Children can experience the proximity of rural world, being closer to nature, eating local healthy foods and breathing a cleaner air.
- Providing periods of convalescence in rural areas refers to the possibility of hosting a person during healing after a disease, the clean air and healthy food contributing to a faster recovery.
- Practical and demonstrative workshops for amateurs and / or tourists, with village craftsmen, working with ceramics, sculpture in wood, handicrafts, fabrics, etc.
- Forms of interactive tourism, including helping members of a rural household in various activities (digging, harvesting, etc.), specific to each season. The volunteers receive free meals and accommodation.
- Valorization of mineral springs with therapeutic effects used in various health problems.
- Holiday home development projects that will have positive effects on the rural economy: job creation, developing a market for agricultural products, generating tax revenues to local authorities, promoting personal relationships, etc.
- Renting small plots of arable land for practicing agriculture by urban residents, as a hobby, generating revenues for local budgets, from agricultural products sales, tourists' accommodation, etc.
- Regular meetings with persons born in the village, allowing contacts to exchange ideas

for local development, better knowledge of economic potential, and effective use of tailored services for tourists.

- Areas of interest for religious tourism, based on an important number of churches and monasteries;
- Rural tourism for shopping, based on agricultural and food products, alcoholic beverages, sweets, forest fruits, honey, rustic furniture, handicraft products, etc.
- Animal husbandry in mountain areas.

The Romanian tourists are paying more attention to spending (5). Low income, rising prices, job instability are all reasons to think twice before deciding to spend money. Romanians are interested in participating in cultural activities, attending festivals 2-3 times a year (6). Romanian tourists are willing to rediscover the country, participating in various cultural circuits.

2.2. Situation in some European countries

Rural tourism represents an important activity to sustain the economy. This type of tourism is a valuable component of the tourism industry. Rural tourism creates the conditions for preserving the identity of the villages. Moreover, it is one of the most effective solutions for the harmonization of tourism demand and environmental protection with the goal of sustainable development.

In **Bulgaria**, alternative forms of tourism are created for urban residents, looking for a clean environment. Alternative forms of tourism are chosen by tourists with high level of education and incomes (7). Persons interested in those activities are aged between 36 and 55, with tertiary education. They are attracted mainly by cultural and historical landmarks, low prices and nature. In eco-tourism, they combine mountain tours with culinary and cultural tourism. The rural tourism has specific characteristics:

- A high percentage of tourists use the services of travel agencies;
- They prepare their trip up to three months before;
- The planning time depends directly on the duration of the stay - the longer the duration of the stay, the earlier it is planned;
- Rural tourists are mainly the middle-aged persons (36-55 years), with tertiary education. However, young people are also an important segment of tourism demand.

Croatia has a rich biodiversity and protected natural areas, which attract a large number of tourists. Structural changes in agricultural production have contributed to the deterioration of the rural economy, which has led to the need to identify additional sources of income for farmers (8). Consumers of tourism products/services are searching for interesting stories related with their destination and local food, contributing to the increase of demand in rural areas. Growth in demand for rural tourism in Croatia has been driven by increased availability of cultural heritage, but also by the need for adventure and gastronomic experiences. Most tourists visiting the countryside are urban residents, from middle class. Rural tourism supports the revitalization of agriculture, the repopulation of rural areas and the creation of jobs for locals.

In **France**, visitors to rural areas prefer to relax and enjoy the landscapes. A study in three regions of France (Aquitaine, Auvergne and Rhône-Alpes) highlighted the features of rural tourism (9):

- Tourists are willing to travel less than 300 kilometers to reach the place to stay;
- Tourism has a more pronounced intra-regional character in the Rhône-Alpes than in Auvergne and Aquitaine;
- Visits to rural areas are mostly made by families with children from Rhône-Alpes, while in Aquitaine and Auvergne, visitors are generally single adults or couples;
- Rural areas seem to be the preferred destination for short stays (three nights or less) or very

long (at least a week);

- An important share of these stays generates reduced accommodation spending, as the main purpose of the stay of some tourists is to visit their family, friends, or visit their own holiday homes. As a result, tourists who pay for accommodation have a low share in total number of tourists.
- Accommodation to units offering a limited range of services (eg holiday cottages) represents about one-quarter of the total.

Different types of consumers are identified in rural areas: those who prefer not to do anything during the stay, those who participate in water activities, those who choose to visit natural and cultural heritage attractions, those who enjoy long walks in nature, those who prefer running and those who are interested in local gastronomy.

In Germany, the tourists choosing a farm as a holiday destination are about 44 years old, with an intermediate level of education and earning a regular monthly income. Large families dominate this group of tourists (10). The main reasons for choosing such a destination are the desire to escape from the routine of daily activities, and the need for relaxation and recovery. In order to meet the demands of tourists, there are various trips, local food/wine tasting and relaxing activities organized.

In Greece, the gastronomy is an important cultural product, influencing the decision to choose a particular travel destination (11). Tourists are interested in visiting the traditional restaurants (taverns) to enjoy the specialties of Greek cuisine, but also local wines or ouzo. They also visit the places where food and beverages are produced (eg wine cellars, beer factories, olive presses, farms, dairies, etc.). During these visits, tourists can actively participate, learning about the production process, how to use different specific tools, they can taste and buy the products. There are many vineyards and wine cellars in Greece that can be visited by tourists, such as ecological vineyards from the "Porto Carras" in Halkidiki, "Gaia" vineyards and wine cellars of Nemea, Achaia Clausin wine cellars in Patras, Boutari wine cellars from Santorini, which attract a large number of tourists, both Greeks and foreigners. Numerous cultural / gastronomic / wine routes and excursions are developed for tourists. One of the most popular routes in Greece is the "Wine Route in Northern Greece".

In Italy, the reasons to choose a certain destination are natural beauty and cultural attractions. An important project refers to Wine Routes, which are routes announced by road signs, with vineyards and wine cellars, open to the public. There are 154 wine routes in Italy, with about 1,450 cities, more than 400 protected designations of origin and 3,300 farms. The number of protected designations of origin is a determinant of tourist flows (12).

In Latvia, the tourists are focused on experiences, senses and knowledge (13), being interested in authentic cultural heritage, untouched nature and unpolluted and clean environment. Resources that can promote nature-based tourism refer to favorable climate, lakes, rivers, forests, swamps, meadows, wetlands, landscapes, natural monuments, biodiversity, natural parks, botanical gardens, etc. (13) Tangible cultural heritage is made up of over 9,000 cultural monuments of national or local importance. The important cultural resources are architecture (wooden architecture, castles, historical centers of cities, churches, etc.), gastronomy, military heritage, intangible cultural heritage (crafts, rituals, and customs), museums, theme parks, creative cultural spaces etc.

In Poland, many tourists choose to visit the countryside because they want to experience the local lifestyle (14). There are also reasons for improving health and spending time closer to nature. The products/services are grouped into several categories, including "unique nature", "traditional occupations", "wine traditions", "culinary heritage", "crafts", etc. On the market, the advantage of products is the competitive price.

Rural tourism in **Portugal** is an alternative to mass tourism. It is, at the same time, a way to support the local economy. Most of the rural tourist areas are located in the northern and the central parts of the country, offering visitors the opportunity to get to know valuable traditions (15). Several professional associations provide the information needed for tourists to choose the destination. Aldeias de Portugal (Portuguese villages) represents an initiative to attract visitors to rural areas in the northern part of the country. The association (Associação do Turismo de Aldeia) promotes a new rural tourism

concept based on developing and promoting local heritage, strengthening territorial identity, expanding local, regional, national and transnational partnerships. The Aldeias de Portugal network currently comprises 83 villages (17). Solares de Portugal, a trademark of TURIHAB (Associação do Turismo de Habitação), is a governmental organization that promotes historical locations, emphasizing local hospitality and the preservation of the rich cultural, historical and architectural heritage. Solares de Portugal includes four categories of locations with differentiated prices (16):

- Casas Antigas, mansions and historical properties in the countryside, most of them built in the 17th and 18th centuries. Their architecture is of great importance in terms of heritage, the different styles reflecting distinct chapters in the history of Portugal;
- Quintas e Herdades, representing farms and country houses, built in various architectural styles, from classic to rustic;
- Casas Rústicas, comprising residences that are distinguished by type of construction, having a simple architectural style and using regional materials;
- Casas no Campo (houses in the countryside), which offers tourists the opportunity to spend their holidays in a personalized way. Activities that can be organized on request include horseback riding, golf, canoeing, sailing, fishing at sea, garden visits, local cuisine or traditional dancing, walking or cycling, but also more modern activities, attractive especially for children and teenagers.

In Republic of Moldova, tourists are motivated to choose rural tourism due to the numerous opportunities for leisure, and recreation (18). When choosing leisure destinations in the countryside, tourists appreciate, among other things: hospitality, developed infrastructure, and accessibility. The most important factor in choosing the accommodation unit is the tranquility, the natural scenery, the level of comfort offered, and the proximity to the cultural and sports attractions. Active leisure opportunities in rural areas include hiking, fishing, horseback riding, hunting, and visiting cultural, historical and natural heritage sites.

In **Spain**, the practice of organizing rural tourism fairs is widespread. FITUR is one of the most important tourism fairs in Spain, with a long tradition. In order to meet the emerging preferences of tourists, since 1994, the FITUR Active Tourism Section has been set up - FITUR ACTIVE, dedicated to all potential consumers interested in this new form of travel. Exhibitors of the FITUR ACTIVE section are specialized in forms of tourism that focus on exploring natural surroundings, adventure tourism, rural tourism. Other fairs organized in Spain include INTUR (Castilia y Leon), Turinterior (Extremadura), AGROTUR (Catalunya), etc. According to the General Secretariat for Tourism, INTUR contributes to the diversification of the tourist sector in Spain (15). AGROTUR is a national rural tourism fair with a diverse offer. Turinterior is a fair dedicated to the promotion of tourism in Extremadura (rural, thermal, cultural, etc.). In Cinco Villas region (Aragon, Spain), the tourism activities are directly related to a high level of education of the tourists (19). Most tourists are aged between 31 and 40 years. They have a medium-high level of cultural knowledge, traveling with their family, partner or friends. The stay is between 3 and 7 days, with an average cost of 30-60 euros per day, not including accommodation or travel costs. Visitor's alternative activities focus on rural, cultural and religious tourism. Accommodation preferences show that 1-3-star hotels and rural houses (some of them belonging to family and friends) are the most chosen options for tourists.

Demand for rural tourism in **Hungary** was focused on cheap holidays for families with children, but this has changed over the last decade (20). The price still determines the decision to buy such type of vacations. Tourists have a growing interest in natural landscapes, searching for recreation in rural areas destinations. Those who choose countryside destinations are urban residents, especially retirees or families with young children, but also young adults without children. They prefer accommodation facilities that meet the contemporary demands or expectations and seek a high level of comfort. For tourists, the most important aspect is the quality of the accommodation services offered, followed by the opportunity to rest in that location, the price, the need to have a wide range of experiences in an authentic environment.

3. Final remarks

Rural tourism focuses on active participation in rural lifestyle. There is an important segment of the urban population interested in visiting rural areas. Rural tourism allows for additional income for residents, which can be used to develop folk art and crafts.

Romania has an important resource for supporting tourism development, namely the rural area. This potential can be harnessed by setting adequate strategic guidelines by the decision-makers. Romanian rural tourism represents a real engine of tourist activity that can have remarkable results. Although rural tourism is an opportunity in many regions, the necessary conditions for success are linked to the level of investment, integration into local and national networks to promote tourism products, development of new tourism activities, etc. The prospects for the development of rural tourism are related to the creation and promotion of rural tourism itineraries, the design of rural tourism products, the creation of partnerships in this field, etc. The experience of other countries has shown that the tourists are attracted by the rural areas for its valuable cultural heritage.

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