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Present-day topics

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE TRADITIONAL COMPONENTS IN THE NEW RURAL TOURISM PRODUCTS. THEIR IMPACT ON THE BEHAVIOR OF TOURISTS

### Abstract

*Rural tourism is presented to us as an economic activity with important particular characteristics in terms of the tourism services offers. It can be said, without fail very much, the fact that, in this area, a real competition does not exist almost at all. The provider of such services is not able to offer services that meet the quantitative, qualitative or structural level of the services offered by other tourism services operators in the region or outside it. The source of these differences is represented by the set of individual, local or organizational particularities. In this diversified structure of tourism products, an important share is held by the traditionalist component that is often the element of differentiation and attractiveness on the specific market. However, some contemporary tourists, although they state that they prefer these services with a high degree of originality and local specificity, they have the tendency to choose those tourist establishments that offer modern accommodation conditions, a well-known gourmet menu and modern entertainment and leisure services. In this study, we aim to identify the extent to which traditional rural tourism products may or may not be preferred by those that include an important component of modern tourism services. We also want to highlight those specific traditional components that have a major impact on the behavior of tourists.*

**Key words:** rural tourism, the structure of tourism services, tourists' behavior.

### 1. Introduction

Tourism is an activity that has evolved very much lately along with the technological revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Communications and transportation have significantly evolved, which allowed the development of tourism [O'Connor, P., 1999, Sorupia, E., 2005]. The development of the food industry has resulted in attracting in the tourist circuit some towns or regions that did not have the raw materials necessary for covering the food component of tourism products [Sheldon, P.J. și Fox, M., 1988].

Nevertheless, the Fordist mass tourism [Donaire, J. A. 1998] worked in the large tourist resorts, but its impact on the environment and local population led to the need for a more evident differentiation between the tourism products [Weaver, D.B. și Lawton, L.J. 2007]. The accountability of the tourism stakeholders in relation to the impact of tourism on the culture and characteristics of the population in the areas where the tourist activity was performed, determined the distribution of the revenues coming from tourism to the local population as well with the view to supporting the common interest in maintaining the cultural and ecological features of these regions. [Vayda, A. P. , ed. 1969].

The rural tourism product is designed in order to add value to the potential of the village with a view to meeting the recreation and knowledge functions for a certain category of tourists. Therefore, this tourism should be a form of reconciliation between traditional elements that are specific to village and the culture of the rural population and the components required by tourists. There is great diversity among tourist preferences – be they supporters of the same form of tourism, their expectations are also determined by the backgrounds from which they come. Thus, a first distinction appears between the preferences of tourists from different areas, countries or regions with different development levels and living standards.

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Moreover, tree preferences become diverse along with the appearance of new criteria, such as the one related to the information and awareness about the characteristics expected for each form of tourism. Thus, a tourist who comes from an area with a high living standard, but who has minimal knowledge about rural tourism might be particularly interested in nature, quiet and maybe some recreational activities, hoping to find standards related to classical tourism at the level of the rural guesthouses: large rooms for accommodation, modern household and entertainment equipment, etc. On the other hand, a tourist who is very well informed and loves rural values will exclude from the beginning the modern or the “hybrid” establishments from his search even if they are in rural areas. He will move towards the rustic, possibly original, unaltered establishments, which create a successful compromise between comfort and the primary values of the village.

Under these circumstances, the rural tourism operator must identify those components of the tourism product which should give it attractiveness for a wide range of tourists, but which, at the same time, should ensure enough authenticity so that they are able to subsequently operate in the field of rural tourism. In fact, they will have to find the optimal combination of accommodation services, food and entertainment which, in the geographical and cultural area of the village, should attract and reward the loyalty of a number of tourists, ensure the profitability of their activities.

In its traditional form, rural tourism includes all the accommodation, food and entertainment services that are specific to rural life and to the areas in which tourism activities are practised.

The tourism product that resulted is different from the other types of tourism products, with a high specificity according to the area, village or person that organizes such a type of tourism. The village is represented by that group of families who live together in the rural area and carry out specific economic and cultural activities. If we approach the issue of the life of the peasant and his family, we will notice a strong connection with nature, religion and tradition. It can be generally stated that the villagers know better the terrain and the weather conditions, interact with them and fuse in a “symbiotic” way into the space intended for their activities. The thorough knowledge of the terrain, flora and fauna that are specific to the village area, are elements that can be used by villagers by means of the rural tourism. As most of the tourists come from urban areas, they are often in search of nature, of the green areas – regions without pollution and agglomeration. However, the access to these areas can be a cause of stress due to the lack of practical knowledge about nature, man’s interaction with the natural elements, which creates, for most of the tourists, a contradictory feeling of attraction and fear. Their assistance by the rural hosts in the process of discovery of the surroundings and the benefits of nature determines a great attractiveness of the rural localities from the tourist point of view. In this respect, based on the hosts’ ability to develop programmes of raising awareness on the surroundings, to initiate the direct contact with the flora and fauna of the region, the tourist will be fulfilled from the point of view of their fusion with the natural environment of the village and the direct knowledge about it.

## **2. Data and methods**

The study took into account the offers made by a number of fifty rural guesthouses in Bukovina for which the components of the provided tourism product were considered. The sample was drawn from the tourism package offers in the Bukovina area (site: [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro)). The localities and areas from which data concerning tourist guesthouses were taken were the following: Moldovița, Vatra Moldoviței, Vama, Humor Monastery, Sucevița, Frasin, Gura Humorului. Being highly attractive tourist locations, especially due to their position and the existence of the monasteries with painted churches in

the area (internationally well-known sights), we believed that the sample is representative of rural tourism. Furthermore, the display of the offers on a public website confers a high degree of confidence in the data collected due to “customer testing” that penalizes any discrepancy between the information provided and reality. The general data and the data specific to the studied guesthouses have been subject to the process of analysis and synthesis with a view to their statistical processing. The tabular and graphical representation of data as well as the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results represented research methods of the relation between the traditional and modern components of the rural tourism product.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The tourist guesthouses in the Bukovina area provide rich tourist offers, specific to rural tourism, agritourism, adventure tourism, religious tourism, ecotourism and other specific forms of tourism carried out in an environment with a rich natural and anthropic potential.

The analysis performed on the selected sample aimed especially to highlight the structure of the rural tourism products offered by guesthouses and their share. The distribution of these guesthouses per area types is shown in Table 1 and highlights the general directions of the offer specialization.

**Table 1**

**The distribution of guesthouses per area types**

Areas	Number
Periurban	4
Rural	12
Natural rural	2
Rural with monasteries	32

Source: Personal processing according to [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro)

The data emphasize the placement of guesthouses mainly in the areas of the monasteries in Bukovina, a thing which is justified by their reputation on the national and international level. Although the existence of the places of worship represents an important aspect of the strategy of promotion of the guesthouses, we can not relate the existence of rural tourism only to the villages with monasteries. We have to take into consideration the fact that the cultural and historic dimension of the Bukovina region is pervasive in all the localities, which means that the existence of guesthouses is connected with the activities of sightseeing and presentation of the local specific religious places. From the offers that have been analyzed, it results that in 18 of the guesthouses, the hosts are directly involved in specific programmes aiming to organize visits to the monasteries in the area. These activities can be organized under an authentic, traditional form, by attending different religious ceremonies, discovering monastic life, eating at the monastery, and others. However, when visiting churches and monasteries occurs as part of the “passage” tourism (transiting the area) – in which the predominant factor is not the component related to getting acquainted with the monastic lifestyle, but the one related only to visiting the churches and their surroundings, tourism becomes one with several modern characteristics, in which the transportation, the purchase of craft food and non-food products made in monasteries and of the souvenirs become prevalent. The rural tourism operator is the one who decides, according to the type of tourists arrived in their guesthouse, what type of equipment they should make available and what activities they should promote:

- organizing short-term sightseeing activities carried out on any day of the week and, possibly, a route leading to several such goals or
- the complex involvement in organizing a programme together with the religious institutions, at specific moments of the monastic life or of the Orthodox religion, a

programme being developed over a longer period of time (possibly lasting several days or even the entire stay), in which the informed tourist who is prepared for such a programme, merges with the cultural and church life so that they can live unique experiences concerning the traditions and the specificity of the life of the inhabitants residing in the visited areas.

Some of these guesthouses are located in the periurban area of Gura Humorului, which reflects a shift towards a blending of the rural tourist values and those offered by the opportunity to practise winter sports on professionally landscaped slopes, to visit museums and urban institutions. These guesthouses meet the need for accommodation in the urban area and at the same time they have characteristics specific to rural tourism: they offer cosy and authentic spaces, a cuisine particular to that area, the direct contact with the natural and village environment, the access to rural activities and occupations. Thus, we can identify a first relationship between the modern and traditional components of rural tourism. This relationship is determined and influenced by the level of attractiveness of localities, which represent additional options for ensuring accommodation for the tourists who, visiting the area, appreciate and look for its authentic features.

The positioning of guesthouses inside or outside the rural areas is a fundamental condition of rural tourism; the rural specificity is also conditioned by the type of the activities carried out as well as by the objectives aimed at by means of them. The main reasons for the placement in these areas are: the particular natural landscape, specific to mountainous areas, but also the characteristics related to the possibility of rural entrepreneurs to get involved in a tourism activity. The two guesthouses situated outside the village borders (in Vama and Vama – Molid) had as a main objective a unique offer of accommodation and recreational activities carried out in the middle of nature (especially, the forestry activities). There are diverse traditional components of the tourism in the rural areas, from the traditional, authentic rural locations with annexed farms and visits to the local craftsmen to the new, modern buildings (9 guesthouses having new locations), with few internal rural elements, most of them without their own farms, but which exploit the rural space; the latter have found a market niche that is specific to other forms of tourism (for example, to the passage tourism by building a restaurant with a larger capacity).

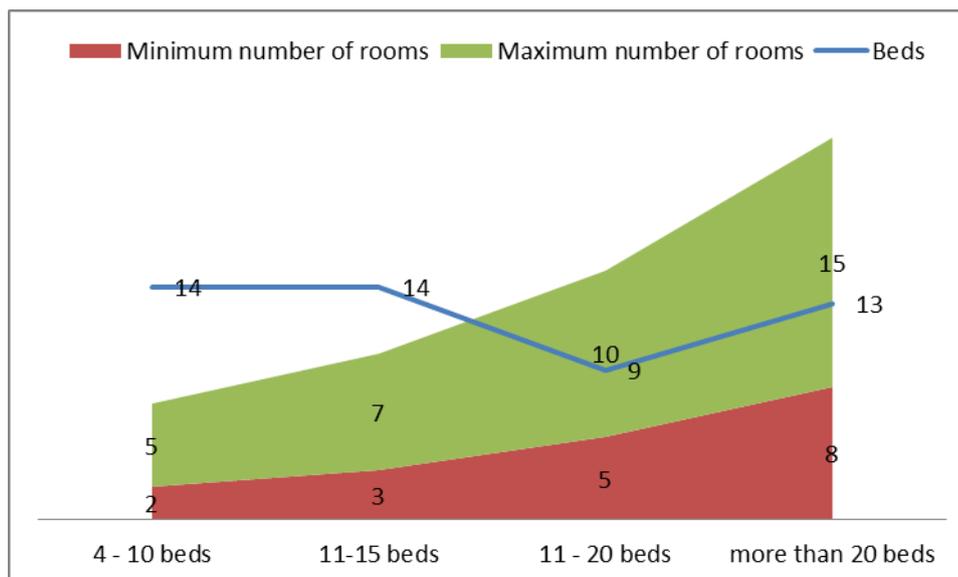
Table 2

**The distribution of guesthouses by groups according to the number of beds and rooms/apartments for accommodation**

Category of guesthouses	Number	Rooms	Apartments
4 - 10 places	14	2-5 rooms	1 apartment
11-15 places	14	3-7 rooms	1-2 apartments
11 - 20 places	9	5-10 rooms	1 apartment
more than 20 places	13	8-15 rooms	1 apartment

Source: Personal processing according to [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro)

From the point of view of accommodation, the studied sample is a diverse one, the guesthouses ranging from those that have 4 beds and 2 rooms to those with more than 20 beds and 10 rooms. (Table 2) As it can be noticed, based on the allocation that was made, the rural guesthouses with less than 15 beds (Figure no. 1) are prevalent. This situation is normal for the rural tourism which ensures its effectiveness from the additional charges related to specific rural activities or from ensuring the return on the specific rural products by means of direct sales to tourists. However, we can notice that the hosts also turn towards modern tourism, through the existence of some apartments which, while not being particular to traditional guesthouses, meet the requirements of tourists with higher expectations in terms of the size of the accommodation place.



**Figure 1. The distribution of beds for accommodation according to the size of tourist locations**

Source: Personal processing according to [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro)

The efforts of tourism entrepreneurs to meet the needs of a wider range of tourists make them provide, to the extent of available funds, two types of tourism products, at least from the point of view of accommodation:

- a product including one stay in traditional establishments, at least classic ones, specific to that region (even rustic ones – for example, the preservation of a traditional house or the reconditioning of “a barn” with all the preserved facilities) and
- a tourism product including accommodation in new buildings with modern equipment and facilities. Five such guesthouses, namely 10% of the studied sample, are included in this category.

Almost all the analyzed guesthouses have gardens, yards, orchards and even their own farms.

**Table 3**

**The structure of rural holdings**

Structure of the holding	Number
Courtyard	50
Garden	24
Orchard	16
Personal farm	32

Source: Personal processing according to [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro)

Table 3 presents the situation of the guesthouses which, by the existence of these components and their number, fall into the category of traditional establishments that have large spaces available for tourists, fresh and green vegetable and animal agricultural products, as well as specific activities related to the rural life, from the farm or to the traditional life.

Out of the total number of guesthouses, 12 have a complex structure, with all the components (yard, vegetable garden, orchard and their own agricultural farm), 9 of them having three such components, in general: yard, orchard and personal farm. Most of the guesthouses has their own garden and farm which give hosts the possibility to provide their own food products to tourists. The studies conducted indicate that, out the total of 50 guesthouses taken into consideration, 47 also offer meals, most of them providing three meals a day, and at least half of them provide raw materials from their own farm, the rest being

purchased from the region. The traditional meals and feasts in the open air are also part of the packages offered by rural guesthouses so that 10 such guesthouses organize festive evening events with a specific local character during the tourists' stay. The package offers provided on the occasion of holidays, especially on Christmas, New Year's Eve and at Easter also include festive meals that are at the center of the structure of the products offered; the other activities are intertwined with them and supplement their traditional value (slaughtering the pig and preparing the pork or lamb, preparing and preserving food, welcoming carol singers, attending the religious ceremonies, etc.).

Moreover, regardless of the cuisine-related component offered by guesthouses, 19 of them make available to tourists the barbecue and terraces for having meals and 17 of the guesthouses hold for tourists campfires and recreational activities specific to this custom. Although preparing the food using the barbecue is not necessarily a specific rural occupation, being a common activity by its nature, the activities entailed by these occasions and the meals prepared under these circumstances place the tourist packages within the traditional field.

The activities of picking, processing and preserving wild berries, mushrooms and medicinal plants are both traditional and general activities related to the knowledge acquired about the environment and its ecosystems. This activity is carried out by about half of the studied guesthouses (24), reflecting, on the one hand, the interest of tourists in looking for and picking with their own hands such products and, on the other hand, the hosts' availability to guide and advise tourists to identify, harvest and prepare natural products according to local customs.

The large number of guesthouses that have their own farms as well as the agro-zootechnical specificity confer a highly rural character to local tourism products; thus, the peasants' daily, common operations are transformed into recreational, entertaining and relaxation activities for tourists. Visiting the farm (25 offers), a nearby sheepfold (10 offers) and tasting their specific products, are elements that lead to the highly traditional character that is conferred to the practised tourism activity. On the other hand, by the inclusion of the tourists' visits to these farms in the tourist programmes, even by taking part in the activities covered by them, the traditional practices of rural activities are kept and hence, the biological quality of the products obtained is maintained (which is otherwise lost in the process of industrialization and by the intensive activities).

The specific local activities are also found in the field of crafts, of the transportation by traditional means of transport (the sleigh, carriage or the cart pulled by horses) or of other activities specific to the hosts' profession. Table 4 presents the situation of the main categories of specific rural activities carried out in the rural households and underlying some recreational and cognitive activities from the tourists' programme. In some cases, these activities are supplemented or replaced by general recreational sports activities without a local specific character, but with an important share in all the contemporary tourism products. From the point of view of the provider, many of these activities involve only minimal investment or low organizational efforts and the effects obtained are important from the tourist's perspective.

Table 4

**Rural crafts activities among the offers provides by rural tourism**

<b>Traditional activities</b>	<b>Number of guesthouses</b>
Rides by carriages, carts or sleighs (in winter)	33
Visits to craftsmen (weavers, sculptors, egg painters, painters, twiners working with wickers, etc.)	32
out of whom when the host is:	
- a local craftsman	4

- a forester	2
- a beekeeper	1

Source: Personal processing according to [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro)

Practising summer or winter sports inside or outside the guesthouse, going hiking and on trips in the area, cycling and climbing as well as board games are activities mentioned in the packages offered by most of the tourism operators. (Table 5)

**Table 5**

<b>Sports and recreational activities offered by rural tourism</b>	
<b>Sports and other activities</b>	<b>Number of guesthouses</b>
Hiking, trips	37
Horse riding	5
Cycling	2
Sports practised with equipment on the grass surface	3
Badminton, tennis	3
Table tennis, billiards	3
Sledging, personal ski	6

Source: Personal processing according to [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro)

The combination of these specific general or local activities, of the services providing tourist assistance (with the hosts' close involvement) with the activities of supervision and tourist information lead to a wide range of services that offer the tourism product values that are specific but also diverse from one provider to another – from the highly traditional to the classical, general values. Nevertheless, the existence of some particular activities and components related to the hosts' profession, to their qualities, to the area in which they are carried out or to the specificity and the components of the guesthouse, entail the traditional characteristics of tourism products and the authenticity of the package offers made by rural tourism. In the studied sample, such examples of specific components are listed: "sweets made by Mary", " dining accompanied by the hosts' stories ", "the cranberry drink made by Mrs. Maria ", " Lăcrămioara's traditional cakes ", "royal meals", "Bukovina's specific food ", "traditional food", "feasts in the open air", "the traditionally furnished barn".

The analyzed study indicates the highly traditional character of the guesthouses and of the offers provided by rural tourism and the tendency of the tourism operators to increase the return on all the elements of the natural potential and of the village in the Bukovina area.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The specificity of rural tourism is strongly linked to the traditional character of all the components of the provided tourism product. The traditional component of its structure is determined by two aspects: the traditionalism availability and the tourists' preference for traditionalism. As regards the first aspect, from the study conducted, we can conclude the fact that the rural guesthouses in Romania have a potential that is rich in natural and anthropic elements characteristic to most of the Romanian villages. The accommodation in old and refurbished or reconditioned houses, the rural specific activities, the traditionally prepared food are only some of the traditional offers made by the rural tourism operators in the analyzed region. The second aspect that triggers the traditional component of the tourism product is determined by the tourists' preference; they express two types of needs: the one related to knowledge that makes them choose the authentic and the traditional character and

the one related to comfort and modern facilities to which they are accustomed. The rural tourism product results from this mixture of potential aspects, preferences and strategies of the tourism operators and has the following characteristics: it complies with the legal criteria related to the classification of the tourism establishment, includes authentic and traditional components specific to the area, village and even the host family, increases the value of the traditional component as an element for the diversification of the tourist offer in relation to the competitors in the sector, uses the modern components in those places where the tourist searches for them or where it streamlines the tourist activity.

If, through traditionalism, rural tourism acquires its specificity and sustainability, through modernism, it creates the connection with the characteristics of the current period, improving the efficiency of the tourism business and opening new opportunities in order to increase the value of the traditional elements.

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