

## Rural Tourism Development in the Republic of Moldova in Terms of Benefits and Constraints

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### Abstract

*Nowadays rural tourism is one of the Top 5 tourist motivations that drive people to travel. The desire to escape, the desire to relax, the desire to find oneself in a peaceful and picturesque natural environment drive people to the countryside.*

*Rural tourism is thus becoming an increasingly important part of tourist motivations, which creates the prerequisites for more extensive research and a more complex analysis of this phenomenon.*

*This article highlights both the benefits and opportunities for the development of rural tourism and the negative impacts that can arise because of the unwise development of this form of tourism.*

*The nature of the research carried out was made possible thanks to the analysis of a comprehensive bibliographical study, as well as information collected from the tourism business environment, which refers to the opportunities and prospects for the development of rural tourism.*

**Key words:** tourism, rural tourism, tourism offer, tourism potential, tourism motivation

**J.E.L. classification:** Z32, Q56

### 1. Introduction

Rural tourism is a fast-growing motivational form of tourism, which forms the tourist offer of many European countries.

Today, tourists prefer tourist destinations with tourism potential untouched by industrialization, urban agglomeration and genetically modified food.

Safe travel, the tranquillity of nature, the diversity of organic consumer products, traditions and authentic values are among the motivations that induce tourists to travel to these tourist destinations.

The Republic of Moldova is no exception to this trend, as it has a vast natural and man-made tourism potential, which can be enhanced by developing rural tourism.

Traditional rural houses, tourist and agro-tourist guesthouses, peasant holiday cottages, where the delicacies of local cuisine can be enjoyed with a good wine, all combined with the art of handicrafts and craftsmanship and the diversity of leisure activities, can help to create an attractive and competitive tourist offer capable of attracting foreign visitors, with the result that rural tourism is developing.

All these considerations have led to the need for a comprehensive and unitary study on the opportunities for developing rural tourism in the Republic of Moldova, from the point of view of realities, prospects and possible negative impacts.

### 2. Theoretical background

Rural tourism is a phenomenon that has gained momentum in the 21st century. The interest in recreation and psycho-emotional rejuvenation in rural areas began to emerge at the end of the 20th century as a response to the stress of industrialization, technologization and urban agglomeration.

People want to migrate to a picturesque natural environment, away from stress and everyday problems. This can only be achieved in rural areas that can provide peace of mind, emotional comfort and healthy food.

Seen in this light, rural tourism is an alternative to traditional tourism, which as a rule takes place in crowded resorts and tourist centers.

The incursion of visitors into rural areas is beneficial for local economies, as tourism generates income, creates jobs, provides a market for agricultural production, etc. However, rural tourism can also create environmental problems through pollution, overcrowding and the destruction of traditional habitats.

To avoid these problems and to maximize the efficiency of rural tourism, as the author, I set out to carry out this research with the aim of highlighting both the opportunities for developing rural tourism and the possible shortcomings and constraints which are linked to its development. So, the objectives of the study can be summarized as follows:

- to define rural tourism as a motivational form of tourism;
- to elucidate the conditions necessary for the development of rural tourism;
- to reflect the differences between traditional mass tourism and rural tourism
- to establish the benefits of developing rural tourism
- to analyze the constraints hampering the development of rural tourism
- to render the negative impacts that may arise with the development of rural tourism.

### 3. Research methodology

The research methodology was selected in harmony with the objectives of the study. It is represented by content analysis and the process of analytical prioritization, with the aim of obtaining scientifically substantiated conclusions.

The author of the study focused his research on studying the phenomenon of rural tourism, establishing the benefits, analyzing the negative impacts, while reflecting the constraints that hinder the development of this motivational form of tourism.

Theoretical foundation of the researched problem was achieved through a study of multidisciplinary literature, as well as the analysis of the tourism legislation in force. General empirical research methods were also applied, such as: the analytical method, through which the essence of the problem was reached; the systemic analysis method, through which the phenomenon of rural tourism was investigated; the synthesis method, applied to establish the connections between the objectives of the study.

### 4. Findings and discussions

Rural tourism is one of the motivational forms of tourism that ensures the development of inbound and domestic tourism for many European countries. The Republic of Moldova is part of that group of countries.

In the view of the authors Gherasim, *"the motivation behind traveling is the first defining element of tourism"* (Gherasim, Gherasim, 2025, p.14). In our case it is the motivational form of tourism - rural tourism.

The diversity and complexity of tourism services in rural areas create premises and prospects for the completion and diversification of the tourism offer of the Republic of Moldova, which contributes to attracting foreign tourists.

Against this backdrop, there is a need for proper knowledge and a complex understanding of the mechanisms operating in the rural tertiary sector.

Rural tourism today is a particular context which meets people's need to find refuge in villages. Weekends, holidays and rest days are perfect opportunities to escape from the daily routine and to find oneself, even if only partially, through contact with protected nature and a rural environment full of cultural and traditional values.

The university professor Vasile Glăvan defines rural tourism as *"a form of tourism whose destination is the rural environment, using farms and agro-tourist farms as tourist reception structures"* (Glăvan, 2003, p.38).

The group of authors Alecu Ioan Niculae and Constantin Marian defines rural tourism as *"a concept that encompasses the tourist activity organized and managed by the local population and based on a close link with the natural and human environment"* (Niculae, Marian 2006, p.73).

The Lexicon of tourism terms defines rural tourism as *"a form of tourism focused on destinations in rural areas, with a functional structure of accommodation and other heterogeneous services"* (Stănciulescu, 2002, p.180).

Law 352/2006, "On the organization and conduct of tourism in the Republic of Moldova", defines rural tourism as *"a form of tourism carried out in rural areas and oriented towards the use of local tourist resources (natural, cultural, etc.), knowledge of the rural environment, its specific activities, local customs and traditions, peasant and farmer households, etc."* (Law 352/2006).

The author of the present study is of the opinion that *"rural tourism is a motivational form of tourism, which provides for the touristic valorization of the natural and anthropic touristic potential existing in the rural environment, with tourist consumption being ensured through tourist reception structures with accommodation and food service functions, as well as other service providers in the villages"*.

Generalizing the above, we can say that rural tourism includes a wide range of activities with specific tourist activities that can be carried out in a typical rural environment. Based on these considerations, it can be stated that rural tourism can be developed in any geographical region of the Republic of Moldova that meets the following conditions:

- there is natural and man-made tourism potential
- it has a technical and material base and tourist infrastructure;
- the private and public desire persists;
- there is a specific and original way of life;
- unaltered natural landscapes are preserved;
- traditions, customs and cultural values are preserved and conserved;
- activities to promote the rural destination are carried out.

The increase in tourism motivation for the countryside can also be determined by the ethno-folkloric features that are specific to certain areas. The great diversity of these genuine treasures specific to each territorial area, combined with the unpolluted, natural environment, can be an important factor in motivating the consumption of rural tourist services.

How does rural tourism differ from traditional mass tourism? An analysis of tourism services highlights those features that are specific to rural tourism, namely:

- tourist consumption takes place only in rural areas, where the essential elements are: familiarization with community customs and traditions, getting to know the natural environment and landscape, originality of food products;
- the tourism on offer is authentic, differentiated, varied in its diversity, organized and managed by the people of the village;
- tourist movement is limited and not compatible with mass tourism;
- the service provision activity is complex, as the whole range of tourist services is present: accommodation, food, leisure, excursions;
- does not require large investments in the technical and material base and infrastructure.

Why is it important to contribute to the development of rural tourism? Scientific researcher Andreea-Mihaela Băltărețu is of the opinion that *"the development and promotion of rural tourism is urgently needed due to the positive effects it generates on local economies"* (Băltărețu, 2016, p.65).

To analyze those positive effects that can be obtained because of rural tourism development, the author of the study identified 10 benefits, which are reflected in **Table 1**.

*Table no. 1. Benefits of tourism for rural areas*

No.	Benefits of rural tourism	Benefits feature
1.	Creating new jobs	Rural tourism can generate job creation opportunities for rural population, youth, women and ethnic minority groups. Jobs in tourism are not only those linked to the activity of tourist accommodation and food and leisure facilities. Tourism also synchronizes other sectors of the national economy, such as agriculture, trade, crafts, handicrafts, provision of various services, etc.
2.	Local infrastructure development	For tourism, it is necessary to develop an adequate infrastructure: roads, telecommunications, water and sewage systems, electricity, natural gas, waste processing equipment, etc. Experience shows that in areas with tourism potential, tourism infrastructure is developing much faster than in other regions.
3.	Investment attractiveness	Rural tourism creates opportunities for capital investment in business development. Thanks to these investments, different sectors of the national economy such as construction, agriculture, trade, etc. are developed.
4.	Generation of local taxes	Rural tourism generates revenues through the payment of local taxes to the Budget of the Territorial Administrative Units, which can be used to improve community facilities: repairing schools and kindergartens, modernization of parks, construction of recreational facilities, increasing the stock of books in libraries, etc.
5.	Market for local products	The food for tourists in rural accommodation can be provided by organic, locally grown products. In this way, tourism creates opportunities for the marketing of local products, such as agricultural products, fish products and their derivatives.
6.	Funding for tourism heritage conservation	The development of tourism is also justified by the fact that it contributes to securing sources of funding for the preservation of natural areas, archaeological and historical sites and cultural traditions, which are tourist attractions. Their protection is necessary to maintain the tourist flow.
7.	Technology transfer	Tourism employees are learning new skills and familiarizing themselves with new technologies, which will lead to the development of local human resources. Some of these skills may be transferable to other economic activities.
8.	Environmental protection	The environmental quality of an area can be improved by tourism, as tourists prefer to visit attractive, clean and unpolluted places. From this perspective, the local population will be responsible for protecting nature so as not to jeopardize tourist traffic.
9.	Revitalizing national identity	Tourism implies greater concern on the part of the locals to preserve their national identity, when they notice that tourists are interested in getting to know local folklore, customs and traditions. In this sense, tourism can be a catalyst for revitalizing national identity, an aspect that cannot be neglected in the context of exploiting local tourism potential.
10.	Opportunities for a decent living as a result of developing a business	The development of rural entrepreneurship as a result of tourist movement can materialize into a source of money for the locals. The income obtained as a result of tourism services can be channeled to the consumption needs of the native population, thus raising the standard of living in rural areas.

*Source:* Author's contribution

Although rural tourism signals important benefits, we must also consider the negative impacts that this form of tourism can have if not organized correctly and responsibly. *Table 2* shows the negative impacts that rural tourism can generate.

*Table no. 2. Potential negative impacts of rural tourism*

No.	Negative impacts generated	Description of the impact
1.	Environmental pollution	Tourism can cause negative environmental impacts if tourists are not educated in the spirit of nature protection. Waste that is left by tourists in forest areas, nature reserves, plains and hills, rivers and lakes can destroy the flora and fauna of the area.
2.	Territorial overpopulation	Uncontrolled tourist traffic can overcrowd rural areas, creating discomfort for the native population. Once this discomfort is felt, it can create resistance from the population in terms of tourist services.
3.	Increasing the tax on land-use planning and maintenance	The local public administration, by decision of the local council, can decide on an increase in the sanitation tax to maintain and sanitize tourist facilities. This may cause discontent among residents.
4.	Changing local customs	Visitors from different cultures and religious denominations can influence local customs and traditions, which over time might be changed due to the tourist movement.
5.	Loss of authenticity	To be protected, elements of authenticity must be preserved. In the case of tourism this is practically impossible, as the motivation for traveling to the countryside is also focused on elements of authenticity.
6.	Damage to the zoning architecture	Unightly construction can affect the architecture of the area. When developing the technical and material basis for tourism, it is not always the case that the contractor considers the specific architectural features of the rural area in order to avoid additional costs.

*Source:* Author's contribution

We note, however, that the benefits obtained because of rural tourism development outweigh the negative impacts. Moreover, the benefits obtained from tourism activity could offset those negative impacts generated by the development of rural tourism, if tourist movement to rural areas is guided by a well thought out and well-organized operational management.

It is important to realize that rural tourism can only be successful and sustainable if those constraints, which have been identified because of the present study, are removed. **Table 3** presents the constraints that are currently a barrier to the development of rural tourism.

*Table no. 3. Constraints to rural tourism development*

No.	Constraints	Description of the Constraints
1.	Obtaining building permission	The process of applying for and issuing building permits for accommodation in rural areas is a lengthy and arduous one.
2.	Authorization of annexes	From the existing experience, it is known that all building annexes, which are to be developed for tourism, are to be registered at the cadastral offices, which causes considerable difficulties, because many rural localities do not have a cadastral plan.
3.	The one-stop shop principle does not work	The one-stop-shop principle, according to Law 231/2010 "On domestic trade" (Law 231/2010), provides for the transmission of the notification of the start of activity by the entrepreneur to the local public administration authority, which in turn is obliged to forward the information to the National Food Safety Agency and Territorial Public Health Centers, in order to issue the operating permits.
4.	Lack of tax facilities	The motivation for entrepreneurs to invest in rural areas is the existence of tax incentives that would keep the business afloat in the first three years of activity. Practice shows that economic operators are subject to a major risk of default and bankruptcy, especially in the first few years of activity.
5.	Post-factum grant	State subsidies granted through the Agency for Intervention and Payments in Agriculture (AIPA) are offered only by way of compensation and only after the necessary expenses have been

		incurred. This makes it necessary for the entrepreneur to have a pledge in order to be able to access funds from commercial banks.
6.	Territorial planning	The local public administration does not have sufficient financial resources to develop the area for tourist traffic.
7.	Lack of qualified staff	The excessive population migration currently taking place in the Republic of Moldova is depopulating villages to catastrophic proportions. This leads to a total shortage of staff, not to mention qualified personnel.
8.	Poorly developed infrastructure	Although the state authorities have recently been paying more attention to the national road network, this problem is still not fully solved. Tourists as a rule avoid rural areas with damaged roads.

*Source:* Author's contribution

Consequently, it can be mentioned that, notwithstanding the identified constraints, the negative impacts that may be generated, rural tourism can be boosted and developed, bringing an important added value to the tourism offer of the Republic of Moldova.

## 5. Conclusions

The study has generated information that contributes to the formulation of an overview of how to organize and carry out tourism activities in rural areas, in terms of the benefits and possible problems that may arise because of the development of this motivational form of tourism.

The author of the study considers not only the advantages that rural tourism can bring, but also its disadvantages.

The scientific value of the study is represented by the research objectives, which have been elucidated, analyzed and reflected in a structured way in this article.

The scientific contribution of the study consists in the complex reflection of ideas that place rural tourism as a motivational form of tourism, capable of complementing and diversifying the tourism offer of the Republic of Moldova, with the major objective being the development of domestic and inbound tourism.

To ensure that the expected results are achieved, it is important to strengthen administrative capacity and budgetary resources for rural tourism development, while facilitating investment and involving local communities in the management of tourism activities in the second-tier administrative territorial units.

In view of the results obtained and presented in this study, the author puts forward several proposals and recommendations which, in our opinion, could help to increase the efficiency of rural tourism for the tourism industry of the Republic of Moldova.

### **Proposals and recommendations** for the development of rural tourism:

1. Regulate some fiscal incentives for the initiation and development of tourism activities in rural areas: reduced income tax rate, inclusion of all taxes and fees in a single tax to simplify accounting, abolishment of local taxes in the first three years of activity.

2. Broadening the category of subjects eligible for subsidization from state structures.

3. Establishment of simplified rules for obtaining the sanitary authorization and the sanitary-veterinary authorization for the operation of tourist accommodation and food facilities in rural areas.

4. Allocation of preferential credits for the development of the technical-material base in rural areas with tourism potential.

5. To organize professional initiation courses for potential entrepreneurs in rural areas on the part of the specialized public administration body.

6. Granting tax benefits to rural tourism employers for the employment of high school students who have reached the age of 16.

7. Introduction of the vacation voucher. The holiday voucher as a value document of strict record, is to be granted to employees in the real sector of the national economy, in order to organize domestic tourism holidays, necessary to cover the costs of travel, accommodation, food, leisure, if these services are included in a package of tourist / travel services.

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