

THE TOURIST VILLAGE IN VALCEA – PROMOTER OF FOLK TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *This paper discusses the perception, links and potential of folk in Romania, in general, and from Valcea County, in particular. The purpose of this paper is to show the link between rural tourism and folk which can help in promoting this form of tourism, which is rural tourism. In the paper the perceived benefits of folk are analyzed by examining the importance of this activity in promoting the concept of rural tourism.*

This paper links the changes at the local and at broader level in the rural community, under the pressure of globalization, allowing for deeper and sophisticated considerations of the main factors that contribute to rural tourism development.

This paper considers the extent to which a relationship can exist between rural tourism and spiritual experiences closely connected to the folk potential.

Key words *rural tourism, tourist village, ethnofolklore, tradition, crafts, customs*

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1. Introduction

Tourism is an activity based on the environment, so integrity is required. Sustainable tourism development requires meeting the needs of present tourists, protecting the environment, and tourism resources for the future. Recreation is an important part of the tourism activity, thus its development is strongly connected to the surrounding environment.

The title of this paper suggests a genuine truth which is known by many people, but only a few appreciate it at its real value: folk events (represented by the entire range of this kind of events hosted in rural areas) perform a major role in the promotion of the tourist village.

The vitality of folk art is strongly exhibited in the current craftsmen's and artisans' receptiveness, continuators of ancient traditions, in the new elements of content and expression. In Romania, as in fact in Valcea County, we are witnessing an abstraction in the conceptual framework and in the ornamental décor, of the major vision about the meaning of the world and of our own life in the past and the present society.

At the moment not all the variations that exist with regard to the forms of tourism have developed yet. I am referring here to tourism for relaxation and rest, but also to the tourism for knowledge of various interest targets, as well as to the tourism for wine tasting, because there are many opportunities related to agricultural products of the various areas of the country. Together with rural tourism development, other economic activities develop in the respective areas, such as butcher's shops, candy stores, handicrafts and all sorts of such small lucrative related enterprises.

Proper management of the rural tourism by all stakeholders involved in this activity could bring multiple benefits. They could include creating prerequisites for better living standards in rural areas, but also the "setting" of young people in these areas by providing them opportunities to get jobs and to maintain a family. In this way, the risk of emigration is reduced, because at present many young people from rural areas go abroad in search of better jobs. Another opportunity is given by the fact that Romania is now in trend, and many Europeans are keen to come here and know the beauties of the country.

The Romanian tourist village is an original tourist product equally for the national and international market. On the other hand, the Romanian tourist village can contribute to

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the discovery of our country as a possible tourist destination, creating interest in Romania as a place that offers a wide range of experiences, quality vacations spent in the country side. From this point of view the Romanian rural tourism can be considered:

- a real anti-stress therapy
- a place of meeting with the wild nature
- a gateway to the world of folk traditions and customs
- return to origins;
- with direct demand and precise segments of tourists from large urban areas, from the industrialized countries, where, through the multitude of concerns, they lead a stressful life, increasingly devoid of reverie elements or the opportunity to go out in the middle of nature.

Along with the people's peasant house, architecture, crafts, folklore, traditions and popular port, a large number of Romanian villages have tourist and other resources: historical monuments, art and architecture, unpopulated natural setting (mineral waters, picturesque landscapes, hunting places) so that in the Romanian rural areas there is the possibility of achieving increasingly more diverse offers that are addressed to all categories of tourists.

Ethnofolklore tourism involves the preservation and development of traditions in a globalized commercial context. Currently we are looking for diversity and originality in various areas of the world and the Romanian village as a tourist product can contribute to the discovery of our country as a possible tourist destination, by creating interest in Romania as a place that offers a wide range of quality holiday experiences and even business opportunities.

Ethnofolklore tourism is a concept that includes the specific problems of a rural area receiving tourists and providing tourist services that meet the specific traditions and secular practices in terms of nutrition, the folk costumes and folklore specific to that area.

Ethnofolklore tourism includes a wide range of events, festivities, sports and other entertainment possibilities for spending enjoyable leisure, all deployed in an environment that includes the elements related the ethnic and folk aspects specific to this type of tourism.

Characteristics of folk tourism:

- proximity to nature, tranquillity;
- it takes place in a nonindustrial environment;
- personal contacts in opposition with classical tourism;
- transmission of a vivid and lasting state of continuity due to the fact that this form of tourism creates friendships renewed every year;
- the possibility to know the places and the people of those places;
- the opportunity to accumulate documentary material in images that show us the identity and concerns of the individuals belonging to the community.

In folk tourism it is known that the tourist product is regarded as an economic activity in a specific dimension, volume, quality and structure and, through its tourist destinations, the product may be a message addressed to potential consumers (tourists) who give birth through the quality of the services to tourist flows and to tourism consumption.

This is explained by the rich cultural heritage of Romania which has some elements of uniqueness and originality which distinguish Romania in relation with the neighbouring countries:

- Churches painted on the outside (Bucovina),
- The amplitude of the wooded architecture (Maramures, Transilvania),
- The large number of fortified churches,

- The uniqueness of the civil fortified architecture of the Oltenia area (vestiges of Maldaresti),
- Development, on the territory of Romania, of three architectural styles specific by the synthesis of the oriental elements with the Western ones, alongside with the elements of the Romanian folk art,
 - Dacian architecture in the area of the Sebes mountains,
 - Brancusian art found at Targu Jiu and in the museums in Bucharest and Craiova County,
 - Memorial houses of the great internationally cultural figures: Constantin Noica, Eugen Ionesco, George Enescu, Constantin Brancusi etc.,
 - Cultural richness due to Romania's multiculturalism by the presence of a large number of minorities, representatives of great Western and Oriental cultures.

Although enjoying a rich potential for cultural tourism, Romania still faces a series of challenges which still hinder the development of cultural tourism. Among these, I can mention: the number of tourist information and promotion centres is very low, the major tourist areas do not have tourist services (North of Oltenia, Hateg and Salaj areas), cultural tourism without funds, promotion of tourism aims at the already popular tourist objectives and regions, leaving aside centres and regions equally valuable, the lack of communication between the Government and the private sector discourage the promotion of cultural destinations.

2. Research Methodology

The research objectives were:

- The purpose of this research was to explore the extent of folk potential in Valcea county, a place where tourists participate in nature-based activities located in rural areas;
- It focuses in particular on the characteristics and particularities of folk tourism and folk events that take place in tourist villages from Valcea County.

3. Ethnographical context of Valcea County

The rural space of Valcea County has great variety of tourism resources. It also benefits from a strong tradition and a millenary culture. The traditions and folk values (popular architecture, customs and traditions, folk costumes, etc.) constitute the rural ambience of the whole rural environment in Valcea.

Traditions are those which bring into light the national specificity, the popular culture which includes music, dance, crafts, traditional cuisine as well as certain special skills.

Romanian traditions represent the Romanians at home and the tourist interested in a country like Romania, looking in the Romanian villages for picturesque mountain spots, riversides, looking for inestimable religious and cultural legacies with old traditions valued and respected at European level and internationally.

A well-preserved tourism is the one which preserves intact traditions and customs, preventing the various forms of folk pollution by the fact that each year the traditions are the same and are at the same time renewed as folk tourism, and the force the tradition is that the tourist from other countries can learn, understand and popularize the Romanian specificity.

The social life of rural communities is carried out in accordance with a specific tool for measuring time, showing agreement with a variety of human concerns such as folk events. These bindings are evidenced by multiple celebrations and rituals specific to the Romanian people.

The whole range of folk events is based on the existence of three different calendars:

- *civil calendar*, with two periods of the year: each of the two periods of the year when the Sun is at the highest height in relation to the Equator; dates corresponding to these moments (21 June and 22 December), marking the longest day or shortest of the year, phases of the Moon and other astronomical or meteorological events;

- *church calendar*, in order to keep the christian good order. The holidays related to the conduct of the religious calendar are known especially for the celebration of the days of the Archangels, Apostles, Saints, which represent many of the monasteries and worship temple, Christmas, Easter or ceremonies connected with the events in our life

- *popular calendar*, with deep roots in the ancient Dacian-Roman history, which showed the most favourable periods for the implementation of agricultural and pastoral occupations, specifying the type of celebration and customizing certain special practices.

In addition to the elements of folklore, culture or tradition, the geographical area constitutes a means of attracting tourists lovers of the countryside, in particular urban tourists who want to escape from a polluted and crowded environment toward a peaceful and natural environment such as nature. Valcea County can meet by its rich natural resources the highest demands and preferences of such tourists.

Valcea County is a well-packaged region in Romanian popular culture. Its ethnocultural specificity can be defined by three dimensions.

First, it is situated in the North-East of Oltenia region (in the vicinity of two large historical provinces of Wallachia and Transylvania), thus representing a land of folk traditions interference. Then, Valcea County has experienced since the medieval period, a permanent dialogue between oral folk culture cultivated in villages – hearths of peasant tradition – and the written culture practiced in the monasteries. A third point refers to Valcea as keeper of the archaic culture, an area of the dynamics of the relationship between tradition and modernity, open to innovation.

All these three dimensions give Valcea County the ethnocultural status of a space for creative development of tradition, which is expressed by a vivid heritage, of strong authenticity and striking originality, which the tradition keepers pass on from generation to generation, as an enduring legacy.

Viable and productive, folk traditions become, in modernity, marks of Valcea's cultural identity in the Romanian and European context. This reality is the result of a cultural strategy grafted on the folk tradition "school".

Through its creations and traditions – identity brands of spirituality, the folk culture in Valcea County has enough data that provide it with the ability to enter in the concert and tour of European cultural values.

The regional folklore is characterized by great richness and diversity, the result of the assimilation of the confluences with the neighbouring areas and of the creative synthesis which confers an original mark in northeastern Oltenia. Traditional folk life is still vigorous in Valcea, manifesting itself in the two main classes of (calendar and family) habits, which represent viable means of cultivating the folk songs and dances.

Valcea County falls by its geographical situation and a series of elements of folklorical and spiritual culture in the wider region of Oltenia. Through the configuration of settlements by developing trade and opposed by popular artistic creativity, Valcea characteristics of a distinct ethnographic areas with a folk art that has, like in the rest of Romania, ancient traditions and rigorous, which took over the common features in weather so the whole arts folk-tales, and features original, unpublished and original forms of expression which define their own characters specific

The regional folk creation has met specific crystallizations, both in the ceremonial folklore and in the literary, musical and choregraphic one. Among the types of ceremonial folklore, Valcea County excels in terms of folk carols and songs. Among the many folk events annually organized in Valcea I mentioned the most popular ones:

Tabel no.1. Folk events in Valcea County

Event	Location: town/village	Period	Features
The “Hora costumelor” Festival	Pietrari	Organized in the the first of Palm Sunday, in April	Contest of designers of popular costumes was grafted on local tradition, according to which the young peasant girls show every spring what they have made more beautiful, in secret, during winter.
The “Cântece și dansuri” Folk Manifestation	Valcea County	May	The purpose of the festival is to turn to advantage the authentic creation of the area, of the Romanian folklore, and affirmation of the young talents in performing, preserving and enriching the folk cultural values, their acknowledgement nationally and internationally. The choregraphic repertoire includes, in addition to the wide spread regional dances of Oltenia, a series of specific local games: Bărbătești, Costești, Malaia, where the local popular dance is part of the folk life reality.
The “Cocoșul de Hurez” Celebration	Horezu	June	Romanian folk pottery fair, organized in Horezu, on the first Sunday of June, which coincides with the usual summer Estates. Ceramic pottery artisans craftsmen from renowned Romanian ceramic pottery centers take part in the event, but also ceramic pottery artisans and representatives of the national ceramic pottery organizations of Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy, Moldova, Serbia, Spain, Ukraine and Hungary. Visitors can taste traditional products from the area, and can buy from the stands of ceramic pottery and can enjoy the music of the bands present.
The “Sărbătoarea căpșunelui” Folk Event	Bunești	June	Annual cultural event which brings together producers of strawberries in the tradition of Valcea County.
The “Învârtita Dorului” Competition	Vaideeni	25-26 of June	Folk Festival Competition, supported by artistic groups from different areas of the country and a folk shepherd costume parade. On this occasion tourists can taste various traditional dishes specific to the area.

The “Florile Govorei” Celebration	Govora	July	Known cultural and artistic manifestation of “Govora Flowers” which became in time a meeting opportunity for all those who love this resort.
The “Brâul de aur” Dance Competition	Bărbătești	8 of September	Folk festival which aims to optimize the performare of the folk dances – from the traditional “hora” to the choregraphic show.
The “Cântecele Oltului” Folk Songs Competition	Călimănești	August	Local folk festival with international participation - Calimanesti-Caciulata, August; the competition is in fact the artistic expression of unity in diversity of folklore from the area crossed by old Altus.
The “La izvorul fermecat” Popular Festival	Băbeni	September	In the event there is a parade of costumes in which artistic folk groups from all over the county take part and a folk music show. The Festival is organized by the County Center for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture and by the City of Valcea County.
The “Târgul meșterilor populari din România” Event	Râmnicu Vâlcea	29 of June	The cultural program initiated by the County Centre for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture, an event which takes place in a context of great celebration – the “National Anthem Day” - and which celebrates the first singing in a public assembly of the revolutionary march “Deșteaptă-te române!”, which after 1989 became Romania’s National Anthem.

These events are hosted in the ambience of a traditional holiday, offering a one-day united view of the Carpathian region: Transylvania, Muntenia and Oltenia regions, all gathered in the same Romanian vibration. The fiddlers animate the specific dances of the village, “hore”, “sarbe”, “braie” (regional dance popular styles) and other specific traditioanal games, collected, transcribed and published in peer-reviewed journals.

During the festivals cultural and other activities are organized, such as exhibitions, work demonstrations, an exhibition of works of art by painters, book launches, short concert of religious songs, a trip to the sights of Valcea County. All these folk activities promote rural tourism in Valcea County, bringing various benefits to the businesses involved in this activity.

The cultural folk holidays/festivals represent one of the most extensive and complex elements of the immaterial folk culture, acting as an identitary mark because they integrate social, ethic, aesthetic, cultural values specific to a nation.

However, ethnofolkore events have an important role to play, from community-building to rural renewal, cultural development to fostering national identities— tourism is not the only partner or proponent

Another factor which comes to promote rural tourism in Valcea County are the folk themed routes. Such a route is set up by the Association of Professionals in Tourism in Romania and called “Ethno-cultural and architectural routes in the historical region of Oltenia”. These actions aim at promoting the cultural and historical values and the tourism potential of the region, promoting the following areas with cultural potential, which included some areas from Valcea County: Novaci – Baia de Fier – Bumbesti Pitic – Polovragi – Vaideeni – Horezu – Bistrița – Băile Govora – Francesti – Ocele Mari – Ramnicu Valcea – Baile Olănești – Călimănești – Căineni.

Folk tourist destinations in Valcea County, Romania

Every weekend and holiday, thousands of people leave their homes in the city to go, even if for a few hours, to small rural towns that have historic or architectural appeal. The same behaviour can be found in relation to the flow of tourists who travel from larger coastal or urban places, either as tourists or excursionists, attracted by the characteristics of this kind of destination.

One of the characteristic features of Valcea County lies in the fact that human settlements have developed extremely well in terms of relief. In the area of contact with the mountain, the settlements have developed particularly in depressions which stretch from East to West in the North of the County (Lovistea, Jiblea-Berislavesti, Muierasca, Horezu) and to the South, in particular, on the course of river valleys which have North-South direction (Govora, Otasau, Bistrita, Luncavatul, Cernisoara etc.). This concentration of the population in the course of the Sub-Carpathian depressions is specific to the configuration of the ethnographic atmosphere. Tew and Barbieri (2012) pointed that this type of tourism which is agrotourism includes recreation and leisure activities for visitors and brings economic benefits for the farmers and for communities

In Valcea County there are two elements that have led to the development of this form of tourism in recent years: the village and the nature. Valcea County stores a wide variety of cultural values – historic folk art, ethnography, folklore, traditions, historical artifacts – a natural setting harmoniously merged, with a varied and picturesque landscaping.

The regional village, in general, and the tourism-oriented one, in particular, represents a unique tourist product to the Romanian tourism market. On the other hand, the tourist village from Valcea may contribute to the discovery of Valcea County – as a possible tourist destination. The rural space from Valcea meets through its components a wide range of motivations: rest and recreation, knowledge and culture, practising sports, air treatment or spa, hunting or sport fishing, an occasion to be taken by unique and timeless legends, customs and traditions.

The rural tourism of Valcea County is a specific activity that differs from other forms of tourism by:

- attraction to natural beauties, novelty and charm of “country life”;
- accommodation and meals are offered with hospitality by the locals, though there are other standards than at hotels, however, they are of the highest quality;
- recreational and/or sports appeal of holidays, trekking, excursions in picturesque regions are combined with exciting experiences, determined by knowing the beliefs, traditions and authentic folklore. Tew and Barbieri (2012) pointed that type of tourism, which is agrotourism, includes recreation and leisure activities for visitors and it brings economic benefits for the farmers and for communities.

Armand Faganel (2011) had concluded that is a softer way to develop sustainable tourism in rural areas and also acts as form of tourism. Agrotourism is seen as a kind of rural tourism related to agriculture. Visitors become acquainted with a cultural landscape,

local products, traditional cuisine and people's daily life, as well as the cultural elements and the authentic features of the area, while showing respect for the environment and for tradition.

Valcea area is in full development in terms of rural tourism, especially in the North of the county where there are most guesthouses in the County.

According to the settlement of villages, in Valcea County we meet the following villages:

- ❖ Ethnographic and folk tourist villages – where traditional costumes, architecture and interior decoration of houses predominate and become essential features. Examples of these kind of villages: Vaideeni, Costești, Slătioara, Pietrari, Roșiile, Nicolae Bălcescu;

- ❖ Tourist villages of artistic creation and craft – Olari village from Horezu, Maldaresti, Tomsani, Pietrari. These villages present interest to tourists due to their importance for artistic creativity, craft, where under the guidance of folk craftsmen they might become initiated in archaic folk art and techniques.

- ❖ Tourist mountain villages – Malaia, Vaideeni, Bradisor, Runcu – provide tourists with conditions for the practising winter and summer sports;

- ❖ Pastoral tourist villages –in general the mountain villages might be included - Vaideeni, Malaia, Alunu, Tisa, Gurguiata, Pleasa, whose main tourist attraction are the dairy-based menus, and the tourists can participate in various sheepfold activities;

- ❖ Tourist uval villages from Dragasani area (Stefanesti, Orlesti, Ionesti) – where the practice of tourism has a permanent character as tourist activities are conducted and after harvesting the fruit, there can be direct consumption of products obtained from the processing;

- ❖ Cultural- monastic tourist villages – Costesti, Barbatesti, Slatiora, Stanisoara, Francesti (where “Manastirea dint-un lemn” is), Cornetu, Boisoara, Iezer, visiting the monasteries and the surroundings being the main form of entertainment in the area.

The following ideas can be drawn from the above:

- that regional folklore is not only a component of the rural tourism, but it also has large implications in making the best use of the local tourist resources;

- it contributes to improving the standard of living of the inhabitants in the socio-economic development of the rural village;

- and last but not least it contributes to promoting the regional tourism offer.

The changes that have taken place in the contemporary village life have led to a vast process of renewal of the popular artistic creation. Along with the songs and traditional habits, new items, which are the expression of life, feelings and ideas what animates our people today. It is therefore necessary that recovery folklore to take into account firstly of the elements which are more updated news. Recovery folklore raises difficult problems in terms of penetration of modern communication and urban influences. In order to preserve traditional values and the unadulterated spiritual Fund and to revitalize the process of creation, the animators of life hosted cultural-artistic regional operation shall ensure that a fruitful activity of the circuit between the hearth and home and folk cultural scene.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to explore the extent to which rural tourists in Valcea County benefit from the folk potential, considered to be a spiritual or transcendental experience. It is clear from the research, there is no doubt that the tourist experiences in Valcea County acquire some form of spiritual fulfillment.

Sustainable development of tourism does not act brutally against the environment, keeping it unaltered. Through the development of rural tourism areas, taking into account the best type of accommodation, there is the belief that there will be no negative effects on

the environment, and the natural resources will be used rationally. On the other hand, migration to the city, the modernisation of labour in the agricultural sector, the changes caused by the increasing competition in the rural world by enlarging the free rural community market have a counterpart in rural tourism. The activities in the field of rural tourism can boost the villages' economy, if their inhabitants' benevolent attitude (to receive and accept in their midst the wave of prodigal and pretentious guests) is received favorably.

With a cultural heritage so rich and valuable, Romania could be an important destination on the cultural tourism world map. The lack of adequate infrastructure, in the transport sector in particular, the questionable quality of the tourist services and, last but not least, the absence of more aggressive advertising and better centered campaigns are just some of the causes that determine Romania's peripheral position as a tourist destination in Europe.

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