

# RURAL TOURISM IN DOBRUDGEA

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## **Abstract:**

*The natural and anthropic tourism resources of a certain area generate specific tourism forms, which complete each other within the different destination categories. The rural area in Dobrudja has diversified tourism potential, provided by the contrast of natural environment factors, ranging from the oldest and to the youngest relief units, natural protected areas, spa resources and cultural, historical, religious sites, as well as multicultural local customs and traditions of the rural area. This potential can be used under various kinds in the rural area: cultural tourism, historical tourism, religious tourism, ecotourism, fishing tourism or bird-watching tourism, and other kinds of rural tourism. By linking these tourism resources and tourism forms, tourism routes can result, which together with the local customs, traditions and cuisine may contribute to the social and economic development of Dobrudja's rural area, through sustainable tourism as alternative to seasonal seashore tourism.*

**Keywords:** *sustainable tourism, rural space, economic development, Dobrudja.*

**JEL Classification:** L83.

## **1. Introduction**

In conformity with the competitiveness, durability and sustainable development principles, the tourism coordination and development, as well as the management of tourism resources have a strategic importance for Romania's national economy. That is why the public administration authorities, the associations, economic operators, as well as all the natural persons or legal entities that carry out tourism activities are involved in this economic activity sector.

The tourism, as priority sector of national economy, has complex functions and multisectoral implications, covering the whole set of activities carried out in order to produce goods and services for tourists. The rural tourism is a priority sector of tourism that covers all the tourism activities, products and services that are organized and performed in the countryside, mainly by the local population, in close connection with the environment and the basic activities of local people, by which the tourism resources, the cultural heritage, tourism structures and local products are put into value. Agro-tourism, as a form of rural tourism, is organized and takes place in close relation with the basic occupation of rural people – agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts and other specific activities, the tourism activity being secondary to agriculture.

The Romanian villages have a distinctive character from the point of view of the cultural and architectural heritage, depending on region, which gives them a specific identity with regard to the life style, as well as to putting into value the local resources.

Generally, the Romanian rural area comprises agricultural activities. The non-agricultural activities are mainly based on forestry, agro-processing, small-scale trade activities, handicraft, services, mining activities, energy production, which are insufficiently developed.

At regional level, the rural tourism development largely depends on the existence and quality of tourism boarding houses and on the presence of various types of activities, of folklore, by the existence of ethnographic regions and by the practice of agriculture and viticulture (agro-tourism). The tourism specific for the region Bucovina is the religious tourism, in Maramures the architectural and ethnographic tourism prevails, in Transylvania the recreational and cultural tourism, the art of cuisine and wines, while at the foot of the Carpathians fishing is practiced. The rural tourism and agro-tourism (specifically linked to on-farm activities) are activities that generate alternative incomes, which provide

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development possibilities for the Romanian rural area, due to the unique landscape, large semi-natural areas, to the inborn hospitality of rural people.

In this sector, we must mention that the rural tourism and agro-tourism activities in Romania are little mediatized by the tourism agencies both for the Romanian and foreign tourists.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the tourism potential and the tourism market development in Dobrudgea's rural area. The motivation for selecting this area is that for most of us Dobrudgea means the Black Sea shore with its resorts or the Danube Delta with its priceless biodiversity, but between the Danube and the Black sea there is a territory that represents a true reason for a travel in space, time and spirituality, where nature, history, creed and traditions are intermingled, forming a unique picture.

The study starts from the premise that the specific resources of Dobrudgea's rural area are not fully and appropriately put into value. The methodological approach includes the identification of the "territorial tourism capital" of the rural settlements from Dobrudgea located outside the influence zone of the Black Sea shore, where the "cultural-historical potential", by association with the other resources, can contribute to the concrete actions of implementing the proposed strategic objectives for shaping the community future as integrating part of the rural development policy of Dobrudgea's space. The research methods used are the inventory-type analysis of the usable resources in the rural tourism and the cause-effect explanation of the investigated phenomenon. The analysis of the cultural-historical tourism potential of Dobrudgea's rural area is based on data and information obtained by bibliographic documentation and field visits. The main investigated elements are the tourism resources with cultural-historical character, the existing infrastructure, the opportunities for rural tourism organization and practice, as well as the possibilities of licensing and certification of qualified staff for different tourism activities in the rural area.

For the researcher of the contemporarry rural phenomenon, the investigation of relations that exist between the environmental and social factors, at local level, makes it possible to define the necessary mechanisms for the sustainable development of tourism activities that should contribute to the increase of the number of jobs and of altenative incomes, as well as to the increase of rural space attractiveness.

## **2. Dobrudgea's tourism potential**

Dobrudgea is a Romanian historical province located between the Danube and the Black Sea, consisting of two counties from the administrative point of view: Tulcea and Constanța. At present, the economic system specificity and the functional typology of Dobrudgea's settlements are determined by the utilization of local resources as well as by the distribution and territorial absorption of the foreign financial support for investments.

Dobrudgea's tourism vocation is equally conferred by its geographic position, characterized by a beautiful and diverse landscape, as well as by the cultural-historical profile of the region, with rich and various archaeological remains and historical monuments. Located at the confluence of several pan-European transport corridors and benefitting from the generous proximity of the Danube and Black Sea, the two counties – Constanța and Tulcea, can easily develop a whole set of tourism products, namely:

- summer tourism,
- balneary tourism,
- recreational tourism,
- sport and nautical tourism,
- scientific and business tourism,
- cultural tourism and history-oriented tourism (for those who want to visit the archaeological sites),
- cruise and itinerary tourism, as well as
- rural tourism.

Another important characteristic is represented by the harmonious blending of the old and new, of tradition and modernity. This complementarity makes Dobrugea more attractive to tourists and gives them the possibility to know and understand the history and tradition of the places they are visiting.

***The natural tourism potential of Dobrugea*** is represented by the Black Sea shore, the Danube Delta and the wetland of the river and sea zone of Dobrugea, the continental Dobrugea, the lakes with therapeutical or recreational value, a specific bioclimate and numerous protected areas.

The Romanian Black Sea shore comprises two sectors, namely:

- a sector subject to intense abrasion and to alluviation, consisting of fragile seashore areas, with the largest natural beach in the country (between Sulina and Sf. Gheorghe) and with the largest lakes from the country (area of the former bay Halmyris): lake Razim (415 km<sup>2</sup>), lakes Sinoie (171 km<sup>2</sup>), Golovița (118 km<sup>2</sup>) and Zmeica (55 km<sup>2</sup>);

- another sector, which begins south of Cape Midia, comprises seashore areas, bays, capes and beaches, sometimes protected by stone dykes built up to diminish the sea abrasion; from the morphological point of view, this can be delimited into two subsectors: the former between Cape Midia and Constanța with a transition area from the low coastline with accumulation of sediments from the Danube to the high coastline with Sarmatian chalkstone cliffs and the latter between Constanța and Vama Veche, a high seashore with cliff (up to 40 m high), shaped into limestone and loess, fragmented into bays and promontories.

The wetland of the river and sea zone of Dobrugea is one of Romania's most important tourism destinations, comprising 3 types of areas: low areas (the Danube river plain and the Danube Delta), lagoons (the Razim-Sinoie complex) and coastline (south Dobrugea seashore).

In Dobrugea, the Danube course is about 409 km long, lying from the western part of the locality Ostrov to Sulina. The high banks that neighbour the Dobrugea Plateau (in the west and north) have steep slopes that are 70-100 m high, sculptured in hard rock formations (green crystalline schists, granite, limestone), which are most often buried into recently formed sediments. The Danube Delta and the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoie is the largest wetland area from Europe, with an original landscape of great tourism attraction and scientific importance.

The morphological aspects of continental Dobrugea define a contrasting environment from that of the wetland areas, characterized by a rigid relief with different geological structures adapted to the continental climate, with strong dryness. The old Hercinic mountains, forming the highest area of Dobrugea, provide a landscape with angular mountain ridges with ruiniform aspect and pyramid-like peaks, mainly in the sectors where the forest vegetation is absent. South Dobrugea is characterized by even flat areas connecting the valleys deepened into limestone and loess deposits, where sometimes they form miniature canyons.

The hydrographical components with landscaping, therapeutic and recreational value are represented by the sea water, maritime limans, temporary rivers, the Danube – Black Sea Canal. A few littoral lakes (Tașaul, Siutghiol, Tăbăcărie, Techirghiol, Tatlageac, Mangalia) feature a landscape with steep banks sculpted in limestone, bays and promontories, being fed by permanent or temporary rivers and groundwaters and in certain cases they have sapropelic muds used in thalassotherapy.

The bioclimate of Dobrugea's wetland is characterized by comfortable cool temperatures influenced by the aquatic areas and it has two subtypes: *the seashore subtype* with therapeutical qualities in the period May-September and the *river plain type*.

The contrast between the areas with rich vegetation from the floodable areas or the compact forest massifs from north-east and rare floristic associations from the coastal areas and the steppe inside the plateau represents a high attractiveness of natural resources. In the plateau part, there is a great number of flower species (over 50% of Romania's flora), steppe and forest steppe species, deciduous and deciduous-resinous xerothermal forests, deciduous and deciduous-

resinous mesophilous forests. The bird populations from the Danube Delta, the lagoon spaces and the coastal zones of the Black Sea are represented by 325 species. The ichthyological fauna (about 130 species) has an economic and tourism interest, with fish classes differentiated by the aquatic environment (fresh, brackish, saline).

Dobrugea has 85 protected areas, including integral protection areas from the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and the Măcin Mountains National Park: 1 national park, 53 natural reserves, 19 scientific reserves, 12 natural monuments. The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve accounts for 31.6% of the total surface of protected areas from Romania.

### **3. Tourism vocation of Dobrugea's rural space**

The rural settlements feature tourism interest depending on the natural environment factors, on the historical and cultural conditions in which they evolved; putting into value the tourism attractiveness elements is strongly influenced by the access possibilities, which most often represent an important constraint. In most villages with tourism interest, mainly in those located in zones with complex high value tourism potential, there are more than two–three potential travel motivations (villages of balneary, fishing and hunting, cultural-historical and religious, ethnographic, viticultural interest). Most rural localities have a complex tourism potential and the differences between these stem from the main attractive elements. The isolated settlements have a strictly tourism function and put into value the natural potential from their proximity.

*Two areas for the rural tourism practice* can be delimited in Dobrugea: a compact area located in the wet regions of the river plain, delta, lagoon complex and seashore, with prevailing piscicultural specificity, which is used for the practice of mass summer tourism, balneary, recreational, sport, business, cruise and itinerary tourism; a hilly and plateau area with prevailing fruit-viticultural, apicultural and agro-pastoral specificity, which use the rural tourism potential for the gastronomic, ethnographic, historical, religious and scientific tourism practice.

The rural settlements with tourism potential in Dobrugea cover the largest part of Dobrugea (72%). In the case of *Tulcea county*, 83% of the territory is represented by natural areas of high scientific and landscape value (the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, Măcin National Park, the Danube river plain) and the cultural-historical heritage (the relics alongside the Danube, Niculițel, Adamclisi, Enisala, Baia centers). *Constanța county*, by the balneary and cultural potential from the southern part of the Romanian coastline and the historical, cultural and religious resources from Oltina Plateau, accounts for 59% of the remarkable tourism potential. Tourism developments are found in the perimeter of resorts, of the urban or rural localities or on isolated basis, depending on the potential resources that require their existence.

*The tourism ethnocultural patrimony* reunites the material and spiritual culture of the past and present, which makes out of Dobrugea a genuine *museum in open air*, and many monuments, archaeological sites and architectural assemblies are included in 46 protected areas. The *archaeological relics* of ancient times can be known by visiting the remains of human settlements established by the pre-historical, Geto-Dacian, Greek and Roman civilizations or the indoor or open-air museum collections. Among these, the remains of the ancient towns Histria, Tomis and Callatis have a particular importance, completed by the discoveries from Halmyris, Arrubium, Dinogetia, Beroe, Aegyssus, Noviodunum, Tropaeum Traiani, Capidava, Carsium. The main historical objectives from the Byzantine period are the mediaeval citadel Păcuiul lui Soare (dating back from the 10th – 11th century), Citadel Heracleea from Enisala (13th century), rebuilt by the Genovese, the rupestral complex from Basarabi (10th century).

The *religious tourism* objectives include worship places and cemeteries belonging to several religions and represent attractiveness elements by the significance of feasts (titular saints), age of settlements and architectural style, location. New worship places were added to the old monasteries Cocoș (1833), Celic Dere (1835), Saon (1846), Techirghiol (1928) and Dervent (1936), namely (the Cave of Saint Apostle Andrew, Cave of Saint Ioan Casian,

Halmyris-Saints Epictet and Astion, Monastery Saint Helen by the sea) with important religious significances. In the southern part of Dobrugea, where Turkish and Tartar communities are living, there is a large number of mosques and Muslim places of worship.

The numerous *ethnic communities* created an original material and spiritual culture in which we can notice the traditional houses from reed and earth from the Danube Delta. Of great importance for the cultural tourism, we can mention the archaeology museums (Adamclisi, Istria), art museums (Limanu, Topalu), ethnographic museums (Enisala), scientific and technical museums, memorial houses (Panaghia-Babadag and Panait Cerna, in Tulcea county). The hydrotech constructions (bridges, lighthouses, the Danube – Black Sea Canal and Sulina) stand out in the landscape of the areas where they are located.

*The cultural-historical tourism* in the Dobrugea's rural area has as main objectives the archaeological sites from Adamclisi, Enisala and Histria. Yet, on Dobrugea's territory there are more archaeological sites that are not put into value from the tourism point of view. Among these, we can also mention the citadels that are part of the military fortification system on the Danube border in the Roman Empire period. On the right bank of the Danube, from Ostrov to Tulcea, the following archaeological sites can be visited: Durostorum-Ostrov, Altinum-Oltina, Sucidava-Dunăreni, Axiopoli-Cernavoda, Capidava, Ulmetum-Pantelimonul de Sus in Constanța county, Noviodunum-Isaccea, Dinogetia-Garvăn, Troesmis-Turcoaia, Aegystus-Tulcea in Tulcea county. The sight of these can be compared to that existing in many other places from Europe that are visited by tourists.

#### **4. Rural tourism routes in Dobrugea**

Dobrugea's rural tourism comprises all the activities carried out in the countryside beyond the areas covered by the beach resorts. The tourism attractions existing in Dobrugea's rural area are the following: archaeological remains, architectural and art monuments, churches, museums and memorial houses, folk and gastronomic traditions, as well as natural objectives (natural reserves, forests, geological formations, caves).

Among the rural tourism routes that are practiced, we can mention the following two, which have as starting point the old Tomis, i.e. the present Constanța, and which cross both the territory of Constanța county and the territory of Tulcea county.

*Tourism route Constanța – Murfatlar – Adamclisi – Ion Corvin – Ostrov – Ion Corvin – Cernavodă – Murfatlar – Constanța, with the objectives:* Murfatlar vineyard, Vine and Wine Museum, Murfatlar wine cellars, floristic reserve Valu lui Traian, Monastic complex Basarabi sculpted in stone, floristic reserve “Fântânița-Murfatlar”, Triumphal monument from Adamclisi, Monastery “Saint Apostle Andrew's Cave”, Dervent Monastery, Canaraua Fetiî reserve, Esehioi forest, Byzantine citadel from “Păcuiul lui Soare”, lakes Bugeac, Vederoasa, Oltina, fossiliferous points alongside the Danube (Figure 1).

*Tourism route Constanța – Istria – Baia – Babadag – Enisala – Murighiol – Tulcea – Niculițel – Măcin – Ciucurova – Baia – Constanța with the objectives:* Histria and Enisala citadels, monasteries Celic Dere, Saon, Cocoș, Uspenia, Basilica with martyricon from Niculițel, National Park Măcin Mountains, archaeological reserves alongside the Danube (Figure 1).

For each route, specific tourism packages can be provided, in which the traditions and customs are accompanied by Dobrugean cuisine preparations as well as wine tasting from the famous vineyards of the region. At the same time, in the tourism region Dobrugea, tourism programs can be established for putting into value the tourism potential in the rural areas throughout the year, with a higher frequency in the warm season for the tourists coming to the seashore.



Figure 1. The main routes with rural tourism potential from Dobrugea

Source: Popescu M., Urdea Cornelia-Maria, 2012

## 5. Conclusions

The rural tourism is a segment of the tourism sector. This includes tourism-related practices, while facilitating people's coming into contact with the beauty of nature, earth's richnesses and local people's hospitality. The natural and anthropic tourism resources of a certain area generate specific tourism forms, which complete each other within the different destination categories. The historical tourism is a niche of the rural tourism, insufficiently exploited at present. Our country's territory has a great variety of cultural-historical values (folk art, ethnography, folklore, traditions, historical relics) located in a harmonious natural environment, with a various and picturesque landscape.

The Romanian rural economy has a preponderantly agricultural character, yet most farmers are involved in part-time agriculture, spending insufficient time on farming activities. The non-agricultural economy (industrial SMEs, services, rural tourism) has a low share in rural Romania, and the rural tourism is quasi-non-existent, except for in certain mountain zones and in the Danube Delta.

One of the rural development policy objectives of the European Union has in view the *development of certain job-generating complementary and alternative activities*, in order to counteract the depopulation of agricultural areas and to strengthen the economic and social substance of rural areas; one of the principles that lie at the basis of the rural

development policy is that referring to the multisectoral and integrated approach to the rural economy, in the sense of *diversification of activities*, creation of *additional income and employment sources*, as well as rural heritage preservation.

As a multifunctional space, Dobrugea has been and will continue to be mainly a human *living territory* (rural settlements) and a *social space* (resting, recreation, conviviality/tolerance relations) for the local communities. At the same time, the Dobrugean space is also an *economic space*, providing agricultural land and other resources as production and existence means. Although at first sight the landscape from Dobrugea is rather dull, there are natural resources and objectives in the rural areas, which could be put into value for tourism purposes. An advantage could be represented by the rustic buildings, with traditional architecture, typical for this region.

A space identity results from the topographic, landscape, historical, cultural and economic identities that have to be taken into consideration in the territory management actions for tourism purposes. The tendencies of rural area development for tourism target the southern part of the seashore, the low seashore area, the localities alongside the Danube and those from the Danube Delta.

The diversity of (natural and cultural) attractive resources from Dobrugea represents the premise for the development of certain complex tourism forms and types, from classical ones (balneary, recreational and rest tourism) to specific forms (eco-tourism, rural tourism). The accessibility of resources creates regional differences that are reflected in tourists' circulation, development of specific material base and of practicable tourism forms.

The rural people, the small entrepreneurs and the representatives of townhalls from the rural localities with tourism objectives are interested in their utilization for tourism purposes and are willing to revive old customs and habits, which can attract tourists: wedding customs, local people's evening reunions with recreational purpose, vine and wine festival. If the small entrepreneurs attended free of charge courses in local traditions that were offered to them, they would find sufficient resources, funding programs and maybe sponsors who should invest more for their village to enter the rural tourism circuit.

Investigating Dobrugea's rural area, we shall find out that this is the depository and preserver of an inestimable thesaurus of architecture and art with historical monuments and relics, as well as of a high value ethnofolkloric heritage.

In this context, the rural tourism, as alternative to the seasonal seashore tourism, does not depend to the same extent on the seasonality that characterizes the classical tourism from Dobrugea and can contribute to the socio-economic development of the rural area.

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