

## Studies on the Rural Tourism Marketing Made in Romania's Villages through Traditional and Gastronomical Events

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to bring in the foreground some of the Romanian rural tourism achievements during its existence. Before the celebration of two decades of existence we will draw the line and we will attempt to analyze the progress made throughout this period. One of the rural tourism promotion strengths, much less supported by the national authorities than the mass tourism, has been the way of doing it. Achieving own marketing strategies has made the holidays in the countryside to overcome the barrier of infrastructure shortcomings, at the beginning even the ones in services and staff training. Punctually, we refer to the traditions, customs, agricultural activities, costumes and gastronomical products, which are emphasized instead of being ignored, while everything that signifies the essence of the life in the village is sustained and promoted. One of the initiatives of the Romanian rural tourism and newly established guesthouses was represented by the partnerships initiated in order to support the villages' significant events organization, each one with different characteristics and particularities. As conclusions for these actions are the results obtained over the time, as well as the notoriety given to a new movement that appeared in Romania at the end of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.*

**Keywords:** rural tourism, marketing, traditions, festival, gastronomy

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### Introduction

Not few were the rural tourism experts who considered that Romania is one of the European countries with the greatest potential in terms of rural tourism opportunities. However, for this to become a reality some common efforts have to be made.

In holidays, the townsman wants to do something else than what he usually lives each day in his noisy, polluted and crowded city (Nistoreanu, 2003), which represents an advantage of rural tourism, villages generally being quiet environments, suitable for the mentioned above demands. Differences also exist in this environment, and their number is not reduced at all.

The tourist features a huge variety of offers, which makes its decision difficult and gives rise to the well-known competition.

Each guesthouse or touristic area has a unique story to tell. The combination between products and services becomes an experience that determine the "story" that visitors will tell their friends when they return home (Comen, T.).

ANTREC Romania, as association, supports regional partnerships, particularly those of guesthouses-authorities-guesthouses-traders-associations-institutions, plus other factors, where appropriate.

What exactly means this combination of terms? It is about a close collaboration between all these organisms in order to develop the region. In this way the individual marketing is replaced by a generalized one, able to attract a larger number of tourists. So everyone will have only to win. We can say that guesthouses have learned to work together, ceasing to be competitors with each other.

The concept has not yet managed to be implemented everywhere, but efforts are being made in this regard.

Let us imagine how less accessible it is to a guesthouse to take part in a national tourism fair, not to mention an international one. But the newly-formed community from a well developed region, with its 20-30 guesthouses, will be easily able to send a representative.

Equally, it is easier to implement a marketing strategy for an event than it is to do the same thing for a guesthouse with a few rooms, while the impact will also be greater. About this marketing strategy we will discuss further.

## Methodology

As a methodology it will be used ANTREC Romania own database, as an organism which introduced this concept in Romanian tourism.

Chronology will be conducted according to the mentioned events. The exemplification will be made through own photographs and graphics that will highlight their impact on local communities.

Please note that all the information are real and can be found on the websites [www.antrec.ro](http://www.antrec.ro) or [www.vacantelatara.ro](http://www.vacantelatara.ro), where there are also annual calendars for the events that took place throughout the country.

The analytical part was performed by collecting the necessary data from the Romania's National Institute of Statistics, which were processed to prepare tables and graphs in order to explain the development of rural tourism in the country.

## Discussion of results

The opportunity provided to the villages and to the locals by adopting a new activity to complement the agricultural one, was hard enough understood and implemented. However, the main challenge at local level was represented by two types of opinions.

On one side it was the old and reticent population from rural areas, who wanted quiet, just to keep unaltered their habits and lifestyle. On the other side it was the money part, presented to them as a present, but that they couldn't perceive like that because it seemed a shame to ask payment for something that it's in the nature of things.

Imagine how hard it is to convince some hospitable people that they can get profit from providing accommodation and food for visitors wishing to spend a few days in the area or to those who are just passing through. "– Why is that?", "–How to ask money for what it is an honor to the host?".

Discussions like that took place about 20 years ago, when the villagers were very surprised by these suggestions.



**Figure 1. An agrotouristic guesthouse (farmhouse) room in Romania – original**

Thereafter, the biggest difficulty was the lack of a specific legislation for these new types of tourism introduced in Romania, that is why at the beginning have only been touristic guesthouses, later resulting in the division according to their profile: touristic, agrotouristic and eco guesthouses (Table 1).

Not even today the eco guesthouses doesn't constitute a special category, being part of the agrotouristic ones.

So, in the first 5 years (1994-1998), all guesthouses had their own farm and they were offering products obtained right in the household, these being the same old houses of our grandparents.

### The evolution of touristic and agrotouristic guesthouses number in Romania (1994-2012)

Table 1

Year \ Type	Touristic guesthouses		Agrotouristic guesthouse	
1994	116		-	
1995	128	▲	-	
1996	200	▲	-	
1997	319	▲	-	
1998	482	▲	-	
1999	322	▼	226	
2000	201	▼	400	▲
2001	244	▲	536	▲
2002	271	▲	682	▲
2003	328	▲	781	▲
2004	461	▲	892	▲
2005	597	▲	956	▲
2006	702	▲	1259	▲
2007	736	▲	1292	▲
2008	783	▲	1348	▲
2009	878	▲	1412	▲
2010	949	▲	1354	▼
2011	1050	▲	1210	▼
2012	1247	▲	1569	▲

Source: National Institute of Statistics

In Table 1 we showed how the number of guesthouses from Romania fluctuated, exemplifying the trend up or down through the green arrows (for increase) and red (for decrease). It worth mentioning that the agrotourism emerged from rural tourism. This explains the fact that in 1999-2000, due to occurrence of agrotouristic guesthouses, a regression has been registered in the number of touristic ones.

The situation was quickly straightened because investments in the countryside tourism appeared, most often materialized in constructions that couldn't have been considered as traditional, so far from being integrated in the agrotouristic concept.

At the moment 1994 it was quite difficult to achieve promotional campaigns. There weren't available the needed funds for posters or advertising spots. The Internet was very little used in Romania at that time, so the impact would have been quite low.

A solution considered appropriate it was the inauguration of the thematic events in Romania. The first was the culinary festival called „International Festival of Stuffed Cabbage”, in Praid, Harghita County (Stoian, M., 2011).

Here were gathered together participants from the whole country and from abroad, competing in skill when it came to prepare various types of stuffed cabbage. Because many of the participants were representatives of the guesthouses, they somehow gave the direction for the following years. Now, the festival is at its XVIII<sup>th</sup> edition.



**Figure 2. A rural locality from Romania (original)**

After the Praid pattern, more and more places have started to reveal original aspects of local rural life. In figure 3 we customized the map of the country, pointing out the counties where, at the moment, took place all sort of events, organized by guesthouses in collaboration with local authorities and, where it is possible, with companies who have chosen to support events in the countryside through various forms of sponsorship.



**Figure 3. The 42 counties of Romania, with marks for the ones that host festivals in rural areas (original)**

The events immediately attracted the attention of the townspeople by being something else. At the beginning it was about attracting tourists from big cities located near villages, we could say that they were some kind of regional feasts.

Now, in addition to the theme of the festival or fair itself, we find here a number of manufacturers, with all sorts of objects or dishes. The magnitude first increased nationally, then even internationally, this title being mentioned in the festivals name: „National Trout Festival”

(in Ciocanesti, Suceava County), „Alms Pig International Festival” (in Balvanyos, Covasna County), National Day of Rural Tourism (Fundata, Brasov County) etc.

The year 2012 was one in which Romania was still in economic crisis, but rural tourism passed well throughout this period, even becoming a more powerful movement and focusing on what it's important in the development of a specific activity. It should be understood that, in time, those who do not fit into the touristic landscape of the area were somehow excluded from this family, which made them lose ground and, eventually, to be forced to cease their activities.

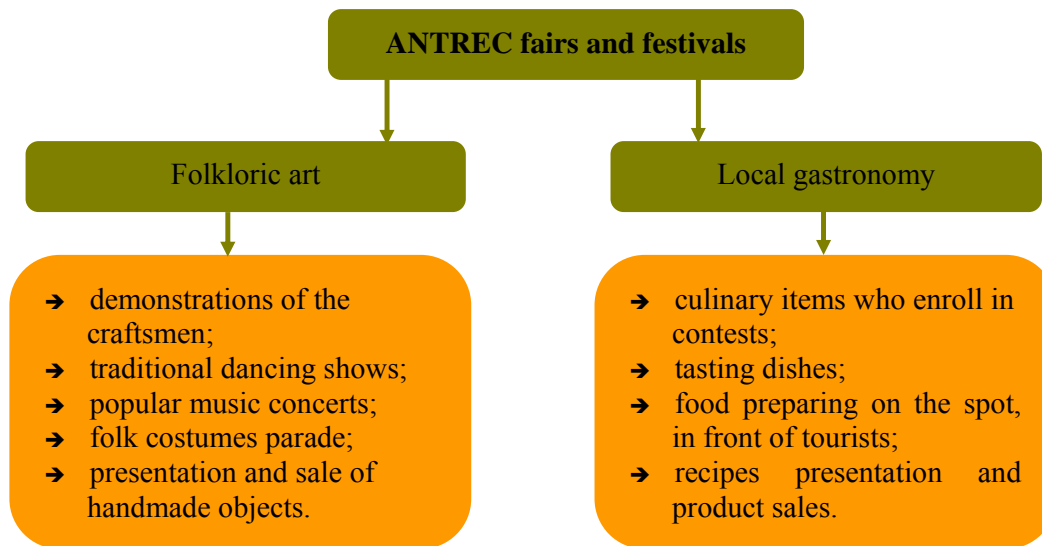
Below we list some of the other events that occur annually and have a notoriety – "a tradition of the traditions", without false modesty.

- „Pancakes Festival” – Prejmer, Brasov County;
- „Traditions and Customs Festival” – Salciua, Alba County;
- „The lambs weaning” – Varlaam, Buzau County;
- „A table in a plate” – Dambovicioara, Arges County;
- „Gastronomic Festival” – Turia, Covasna County;
- The Festival „Milk measure and meeting with village children” – Sirnea, Brasov County;
- „The Reaping Festival” – Ampoita, Alba County;
- „The Pie Festival” – Oituz, Bacau County;
- „Forest People Feast” – Poienita Voinii, Hunedoara County;
- „The Harvest Day” – Poiana Marului, Brasov County;
- „The Householder Parade” – Sapoca, Buzau County;
- „Ravishing Sheep - The cheese and pastrami festival” – Bran, Brasov County;
- „The Hribe Festival” – Vama, Suceava County;
- „Expopastoralis – The Cheese Story” – Rucar, Arges County;
- „Festivalul Cârnașilor de Pleșcoi” – Berca, Județul Buzău;
- „The Inns Festival” – Tupilati, Neamt Festival;
- „The Danube Delta Cup at Pike” – Crisan, Tulcea County;
- „The Aspic Festival” – Tismana, Gorj County.



**Figure 4. Pictures from the fairs and festivals in various parts of the country**

The sum of several elements it what makes the delight of these Romanian rural areas meetings. In Figure 5 we have synthesized the attractions categories that lead tourists to walk long distances to take part in fairs taking place in various parts of the country.



**Figure 5. The specific of the events organized in Romania's rural areas**

All the hard work during these years has resulted in the fact that Romania was, in 2012, the host of the EUROGÎTES Congress, being in the center of Europe rural tourism community.



**Figure 6. The banner of the 4th EUROGITES Congress held in Neamt County – Romania (8-9 October 2012)**

Prominent representatives of all the countries came to Romania for a rural tourism Congress after a break of 4 years, and this fact can only make us honor.

### Conclusions

As a result of our experiences in rural tourism, we reached to some conclusions that are very suitable to the current conditions from Romania:

1. A very appropriate and handy marketing method is the one through thematic festivals;
2. Romanian rural tourism would have been developed into a much lower rhythm without taking up these events;
3. Replacing the guesthouses competitive process with a close collaboration it was in the benefit of everyone involved in the rural tourism industry;
4. Public-private partnerships, involving local authorities, but also some prestigious companies in supporting the marketing of rural areas led to what we know today under the name of sustainable development;
5. We hope that in the future all the actions of profile associations and guesthouses to have a higher impact, directly proportional to the efforts made, in order to support the villages and preserving the customs and traditions.

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