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**SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRY OF HAȚEG - RETEZAT THROUGH RURAL TOURISM**

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**Abstract:** The unparalleled density of historical vestiges, from ancient-Dacian and Roman to medieval, churches with the oldest documentary evidence in Romania, the existence of the dinosaur geo-park, national parks and scientific reserves, ethno-folkloric and gastronomic customs and traditions, particularly well preserved and preserved, make Tara Hațegului one of the most attractive tourist areas of our country. The authors of this paper present development possibilities in the Hațeg - Retezat area, based on the exploitation of the natural and man-made resources of the area from a tourism point of view.

**• Introduction**

Classifications regarding the typology of the tourist potential (offer) can be found in the literature: ethno-folkloric tourist villages, artistic and craft tourist villages, climate and landscape tourist villages, fishing and hunting tourist villages, vineyard tourist villages, pastoral tourist villages, sports tourist villages or in a paper about the rural territory of Hațeg Country: pastoral agro-tourist villages, agro-tourist orchard villages, agro-tourist mixed profile villages, scenic tourist villages, cultural-historical potential tourist villages, tourist villages as a base for departure to mountain ascents, villages as a support for holiday home dispersion areas, villages as a support for transit tourism (mountain, alpine, etc.), economic objectives of tourist interest villages

**• Material and method**

Researching literature, it was found a conceptual and methodological "vacuum" regarding the two fundamental components of rural tourism:

1) monitoring and evaluation (quantification) of the complex tourist potential of rural localities (rural tourism) and, on this basis,

2) managing the optimization of the rural tourist offer (routes, circuits) of an area.

This is the reason that has led to consider the methodological conceptualization of monitoring and quantifying the tourist potential of rural settlements (Rs), in different tourist zones (areas) (Ta), starting from two basic requirements of the field:

- ✓the sustainable (prioritized) development of areas and villages with natural and human potential for rural tourism and agritourism;
- ✓the optimisation of the management of rural tourism and agritourism activities in rural settlements and tourist areas.

**• Results and discussions**

**SWOT analysis - Rural tourism in Hațeg Country**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Particularly large natural and anthropogenic tourist potential with development possibilities;</li> <li>- Nature reserves in the nearby area: Retezat National Park, Grădiștea-Muncel Natural Park, and Dinosaur Geopark;</li> <li>- Attractive area from a tourist and landscape point of view, the mountain area being suitable for the development of trails and slopes;</li> <li>- Points of attraction, reservations, historical monuments, etc.;</li> <li>- Craftsmen (and crafts) and keepers of customs and traditions;</li> <li>- Restoration works of historical monuments that can be presented as models of good practices (e.g., Mălăiești Citadel);</li> <li>- Prislop Monastery, the famous tomb of Father Arsenie Boca, currently the most important place of religious pilgrimage in the country;</li> <li>- Numerous archaeological sites in the area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tourist potential not properly exploited;</li> <li>- Routes with high tourist potential undeveloped;</li> <li>- Weak promotion of cultural heritage, landscape, various tourist routes, etc.;</li> <li>- Short duration of the tourist season, although the natural setting would allow a continuous flow of tourists;</li> <li>- Small number of places for recreation, entertainment, various sports in the rural environment;</li> <li>- Large number of historical monuments in an advanced stage of decay;</li> <li>- Uncertain legal regime of historical monuments;</li> <li>- High costs of maintenance and restoration of historical buildings;</li> <li>- Insufficient promotion of historical monuments focused only on a few monuments of interest (Sarmizegetusa, Densus);</li> <li>- Low level of investment in restoration works.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increasing the level of information in accessing European projects;</li> <li>- Possibility of developing agrotourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism, especially in areas with unexploited tourist potential;</li> <li>- Framework conducive to the association of local tourism operators to promote services and the area;</li> <li>- Possibility of urban development of the area respecting strict rules regarding the construction regime;</li> <li>- Support framework favourable to the arrangement and development of rural family guesthouses;</li> <li>- Possibility of introducing and practicing sports tourism;</li> <li>- Possibility of superior exploitation of the fishing and hunting potential.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decrease in the active workforce qualified for tourism;</li> <li>- Difficult absorption of European funds;</li> <li>- Absence of a long-term plan of tourism development;</li> <li>- Absence of qualified personnel in tourist services and not giving due importance to this aspect, which leads to the discouragement of tourists;</li> <li>- Decay of historical monuments;</li> <li>- Complete destruction of archaeological sites following restoration works;</li> <li>- Multiplication of art and decorative elements in bad taste;</li> <li>- Significant degradation to the stage of ruins of some historical monuments and impossibility of reconstruction.</li> </ul>

**• Conclusions**

Hațeg Country, although it has a sufficiently developed network of rural tourist guesthouses, is not yet supported by a policy of promoting local agri-food products through local gastronomy, which is particularly rich, presented in all restaurants, guesthouses and „La doi pași” shops of local products with the brand “natural product,” “ecological product” or “mountain product” from local producers. The policy of promoting local products, although currently absent, could have multiple economic effects, both on agricultural producers and traders, but also important effects by promoting local food products (especially mountain products and products from local households) healthy for the consumer, thus contributing to the implementation in Romania of the requirements of the European Ecological (Green) Pact “from farm to fork” or short food chains.