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**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES IN ROMANIA'S RURAL  
COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY APPROACH**

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines sustainable tourism practices in Romania's rural communities through a case study approach. Through the integration of sustainable principles into tourism development, rural communities manage to reshape their local economies, emphasizing ecological and cultural preservation simultaneously. The research employs a combination of document analysis and secondary data review to assess economic impacts, environmental conservation strategies, and the socio-cultural transformations occurring in these regions. The selected case studies reveal that local heritage, traditional knowledge, and abundant natural resources serve as key catalysts for promoting tourism. Additionally, the study highlights the critical role of community-driven initiatives in advancing sustainable practices amidst evolving tourism dynamics. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited stakeholder collaboration, and insufficient regulatory frameworks continue to constrain the full potential of these initiatives. Based on these findings, the paper advocates for enhanced policy support, targeted capacity-building programs, and improved coordination among stakeholders to secure the long-term resilience and sustainability of rural tourism in Romania.*

## • Introduction

Sustainable tourism is playing a growing role in rural development by striking a balance between economic growth and environmental and cultural preservation. In Romania, rural communities hold significant potential in this regard, offering rich local heritage, traditional practices, and natural landscapes. As demand for responsible tourism rises, understanding how these communities adopt sustainable practices is increasingly important. While promising examples of community-led initiatives are evident, structural challenges, such as fragmented stakeholder engagement, limited infrastructure, and regulatory shortcomings, hinder broader implementation. This research aims to inform future policy and planning efforts by highlighting both the achievements and constraints faced by rural communities as they strive to align tourism development with sustainability objectives.

## • Material and method

This paper employs a case study approach, combining document analysis and secondary data, to examine sustainable tourism in Romania's rural areas. It assesses economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts, emphasizing community-led efforts and their role in promoting sustainability. Despite notable progress, challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited collaboration, and weak regulations persist. The findings support the implementation of targeted policies and enhanced coordination to enhance the resilience of rural tourism.



**Fig 1.** Viscri Village, an example of successful agritourism development

## • Results and discussions

The analysis of sustainable tourism practices in Romania's rural communities reveals several noteworthy initiatives that have successfully integrated ecological, cultural, and economic sustainability:

• **Gura Râului, Sibiu County:** This mountain village exemplifies best practices in sustainable rural tourism. A study involving 360 tourists indicated that Gura Râului is increasingly attractive to rural tourism enthusiasts, serving as a model for other mountain villages in Romania.

• **Sâncraiu, Cluj County:** This Transylvanian village has implemented transformative rural tourism strategies that contribute to sustainable development. The community's efforts have been recognized for promoting local culture and traditions while enhancing the quality of life for residents.

• **Via Transilvanica Trail:** Inaugurated in October 2022, this 882-mile trail traverses Romania from Putna Monastery in Bukovina to Drobeta-Turnu Severin by the Danube. Designed for hiking, cycling, and horseback riding, it aims to promote ecotourism and revitalize over 400 traditional communities that have been impacted by depopulation and economic challenges.

• **Viscri and Mălâncrav, Braşov and Sibiu Counties:** These villages have benefited from restoration projects initiated by the Prince of Wales, which focus on preserving traditional Saxon architecture and promoting sustainable tourism. The restored guesthouses provide authentic experiences while supporting local economies.

• **Mureş Floodplain Natural Park:** Established in 2005, the park promotes eco-tourism through activities such as guided canoe trips and bicycle rentals. It also emphasizes cultural preservation by protecting historical monasteries within its boundaries.

Despite these successes, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited stakeholder collaboration, and insufficient regulatory frameworks continue to constrain the full potential of sustainable tourism initiatives in Romania's rural areas.

## • Conclusions

Sustainable tourism in Romania's rural communities demonstrates significant potential to support local development, preserve cultural identity, and protect natural environments. Case studies, such as Gura Râului and Sâncraiu, and initiatives like the Via Transilvanica trail, highlight how community-led efforts and the strategic use of heritage and landscapes can drive positive change. However, persistent challenges—such as weak infrastructure, insufficient policy support, and fragmented stakeholder coordination—limit broader implementation. To ensure the long-term resilience of rural tourism, targeted investments, stronger institutional frameworks, and enhanced local capacities are essential.