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**RURAL TOURISM AS A VECTOR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND
CONTRIBUTION TO THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN RURAL AREAS OF ROMANIA**
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Abstract: *This paper explores the relationship between rural tourism and the circular economy, focusing on how sustainability principles can be applied in rural areas of Romania. The study aims to highlight the potential of rural tourism as a driver of sustainable development by promoting local resource use, waste reduction, and community engagement in circular economic practices. The work includes a theoretical analysis of the concepts of rural tourism and the circular economy, followed by a case study in the Apuseni Mountains region.*

• **Introduction**

This paper aims to analyze rural tourism as a phenomenon and explore how it can become a catalyst for the transition to a circular economy, with applicability in rural areas in Romania.

• **Material and method**

The objectives of the paper refer to the analysis of the concept of rural tourism and its potential for sustainable development, the investigation of how rural tourism can integrate the principles of the circular economy, the study of the applicability of this model in rural areas in Romania, as well as the identification of good practices and the formulation of recommendations for the sustainable development of rural tourism, which we will accomplish by applying the multi-criteria analysis method through existing information.

• **Results and discussions**

The situation of rural tourism in Apuseni

Current situation	Opportunities for integrating the circular economy	Concrete recommendations
Accommodation mainly in family guesthouses and rural households	Short supply chains, local consumption	Promoting local products in guesthouse menus, creating tourist cooperatives
Uneven tourism infrastructure (roads, utilities)	Implementation of green infrastructure (solar energy, composting)	Accessing European funds for sustainable infrastructure
Lack of efficient waste management systems	Composting of organic waste, local recycling	Creation of micro-selective collection centers in tourist villages
Growing tourist interest, but increased seasonality	Niche tourism throughout the year (eco, slow, cultural)	Development of thematic programs and seasonal tourist packages
Poor promotion of existing sustainable practices	Raising tourist awareness through storytelling and eco-labeling	Introducing an "Apuseni eco-tourism" brand for the units involved
The existence of isolated initiatives (eco-guesthouses, permaculture projects)	Scaling through local partnerships and replication in other villages	Local network of pilot "circular villages" - exchange of good practices
Low participation of young people in local tourism initiatives	Educational and entrepreneurial projects in the field of eco-tourism	Training and incentives for young rural entrepreneurs

SWOT ANALYSIS

RURAL TOURISM & CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN APUSENI



• **Conclusions**

Following the theoretical analysis and applied research, the following conclusions can be drawn: rural tourism represents a sector with high potential in Romania, especially in mountainous areas such as the Apuseni Mountains; the circular economy, as an alternative model of sustainable development, is compatible with the specifics of rural tourism, as it encourages the use of local resources, waste reduction and community involvement in production and consumption processes; in the Apuseni region there are already specific initiatives that apply circular principles (renewable energy, local products, traditional practices), but they are still insufficiently integrated and promoted as a generalizable tourism development model.