

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF ORĂȘTIOARA DE SUS, HUNEDOARA COUNTY

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Abstract

The development of rural communities is a process in which the community is actively involved, with the aim of mobilizing all initiatives to capitalize on its own resources for the social and economic benefit of the community. The authors of this paper propose an analysis of the existing resources on the territory of the Orăștioara de Sus commune, Hunedoara county. In this study, both types of tourism presented above are demonstrated in the commune of Orăștioara de Sus. Rural tourism can be carried out strictly through the involvement of the community in this field, and agritourism can include services carried out by the inhabitants of the area where the authorities are involved in cultural tourism and mountain sports. The methodology used in the research consists of the collection and processing of statistical data, graphic interpretation, as well as the analysis and synthesis of information regarding the development of the rural area from the specialized literature in the field. After completing a SWOT analysis, the authors determine the main directions the locality should go in terms of development.

Keywords: rural tourism, Orăștioara de Sus, rural development, tourist projects, resources

Introduction

The rural area is the land area where predominate crops, forests and green areas, that relies on a predominantly agricultural society. Etymologically, rural comes from the Latin rus, meaning crop, fields, land that is occupied, inhabited, worked and managed by man (Mateoc-Sîrb et al. 2014). Rural areas are an important component of the overall evolution of the Romanian economy (Cristina et al. 2015).

The development of rural communities can be described as a process in which the community is actively involved, with the aim of mobilizing all initiatives to capitalize on its own resources for the social and economic benefit of the community.

Sustainable development is defined as that development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the possibilities of future generations to meet their needs (Mateoc-Sîrb–Mănescu, 2012).

Sustainable development is conceived in the vision of reconciliation between the economy and the environment as a new way to support human progress not only in a few places and for a few years, but for the entire planet and for a long future (Preda, 2002).

The development of rural tourism can represent a possibility for the sustainable development of rural communities, especially for those in the mountainous areas of the country, but the main challenge for small businesses in rural areas is the lack of entrepreneurial education and strategies to promote tourism resources in Romania (<https://www.zf.ro>). Although Romania has great potential for developing rural tourism to contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities, the infrastructure prevents this from happening.

Rural tourism and agritourism are identified to a certain level, they have a common denominator, which highlights the elements of identity, and inclusion, as well as different elements that lead to differentiation. Rural tourism offer defines all the tourist offers in the countryside that are not related to the peasant household: holidays in households, stays in holiday homes and private houses. It's important for tourists to learn about rural traditions, culture, and nature, spend their holidays in a natural environment, enjoy regional products and specialties, and enjoy a peaceful, clean environment while practicing sports and hiking. (Chisu, 2008, Bujdosó-Szűcs, 2012)

To clarify the terms rural tourism and agritourism, there are two trends in their definition. In the first category, rural tourism, the definition criterion used is the share of the income from the tourism activity that benefits the whole community or a part of it. In the second category, agritourism, the differentiation criterion is based on the weight of the different constitutive elements of the tourist offer. Under this aspect, the term rural tourism includes the culture, history, and traditions existing in the rural area which, together with the specific ones of the peasant household, constitute components of the tourist offer (Buciuman, 1999: 39). Agritourism is a form of rural tourism that uses only guesthouses and agritourism farms for accommodation and meals, benefiting from an unpolluted and picturesque environment, natural tourist attractions and cultural-historical values, traditions and customs present in the rural environment. (<https://www.creeza.com/afaceri/turism/definirea-agroturismului218.php>)

Rural tourism in its pure form should be located in rural areas (Manta, 2019). Tourist activity specific to the rural environment represents an area with potential for future growth (Ciolac, 2022); statistics show that tourism in rural areas, year after year, has gained more and more followers (Dobra et al. 2021).

In the municipality of Orăștioara de Sus, which represents the object of study of this paper, both types of tourism are available, rural tourism can be carried out strictly through the involvement of the community in this field, and agritourism can include services carried out by the inhabitants of the area, the authorities being involved in cultural tourism and mountain sports.

Infrastructure investments are needed to support these forms of tourism since access to the points of maximum interest must be easy. At the same time, the historical monuments intended for visiting must be capitalized through coherent marketing strategies and preservation in good conditions. Partnerships between the state institutions and the local community are also necessary to ensure a favorable investment climate for winter sports and agritourism. These partnerships would propose:

- projects to support entrepreneurs in order to access European funds;
- development of the necessary infrastructure for mountain sports;
- concession/lease of land owned by the state for the creation of accommodation units, amusement parks, campsites, and slopes for practicing winter sports;
- advertising on tourist attractions, area traditions, and leisure opportunities (Andresoi, , 2022).

Material and method

This work was carried out in the commune of Orăștioara de sus, Hunedoara county, focusing on the main aspects of rural tourism and agritourism. Agritourism and rural tourism development in the studied area were also assessed for their impact on the quality of life of the population. (Mateoc-Sirb – Manescu, 2012)

The research carried out was oriented on two parts: Part I - includes the bibliographic study, of theoretical documentation in the strict field of the topic addressed and Part II of the own research. Theoretical documentation: consists of consulting the literature according to the selected bibliography, researching documents in the field of rural tourism. For the theoretical documentation, the analysis and synthesis of the specialized literature in the field was used. Own contributions: consist in the analysis of the municipality of Orăștioara de Sus carried out with the help of multi-criteria analysis: the physical-geographic criterion, the cultural criterion and the economic (tourist) criterion and the SWOT analysis method, which consists in identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Results

The geographical location

The geographical location of Orăștioara de Sus commune is in Romania's Hunedoara county and includes the following villages: Bucium, Ludeștii de Jos, Costești, Ocolișu Mic, Strugari (Ludeștii de Sus), Stânișoara (Costești Deal) și Grădiștea de Munte.

Located in the central part of Romania, in the southern part of Transylvania and the eastern part of Hunedoara County, historically, it is included in the very central part of old Dacia, including within its borders the ruins of the capital Sarmizegetusa Regia, as well as its defense fortresses from Costești, Blidaru and the Fețele Albe. (<https://www.comuna-orastioaradesus.ro>)

Within the county, Hunedoara borders the commune of Beriu to the north and northeast, Mărtinești to the west, Boșorod to the southwest, and it borders the mountainous region of Șurianului to the south, its extension in the mountains evolving up to the Titianu Mare mountains, Jigoru Mare, Șinca, Sâpcea and Batrâna.

From the perspective of the geographical, cultural-economic structure, the villages of the commune are divided into villages located at the foot of the mountains, along the Grădiștea river valley (Costești, Ludeștii de Jos, Orăștioara de Sus, Bucium), also called "river" villages, then a single village, Ocolișu Mic, located in the pre-montane hilly area between Grădiștei and Luncanilor Valleys, being part of the category of "delureni" villages and three mountain villages: Strugari (Ludeștii de Jos), Stânișoara (Costești Deal) and Grădiștea Muncelului, being part of the category of "border" villages. (<https://www.zf.ro/companii/comunitatile-locale-se-pot-dezvolta-prin-turism-rural-dar-lipsa-20400104>)

The infrastructure of the commune is made up of the county road that accompanies the Grădiștea River from the entrance to the commune (Bucium village) to Tâmpu (the southern part of Grădiștea de Munte village). There is asphalted road along its entire length, and the last 20 kilometers were asphalted between 2014 and 2016.

An important network of cobbled side roads, mostly under the administration of the Forest Ring Road, runs along: Valea Făeragului, Valea Rea, Valea Anineșului and Valea Albă.

Paths, forest roads, and ridges connect Margineni, Strugari, and Stânișoara with the rest of the commune, as well as roads used by shepherds in transhumance to reach mountain pastures. Until 1971, a forest railway network operated on the Grădiștei valley and the main longer valleys (Valea Rea, Valea Anineșului, Valea Tâmpului), which was decommissioned after that year. (Gro Harlem Brundtland, 1985)

The main distances between the component localities of the commune of Orăștioara de Sus are:

- Bucium – Grădiștea de Munte: 35 kilometers;
- Ludeștii de Jos – Ocolișu Mic: 5 kilometers;
- Costești – Stânișoara: 1.5 kilometers;
- Ludeștii de Jos - Strugari: 3.5 kilometers.

All the villages of the commune have electricity networks to which all households are connected.

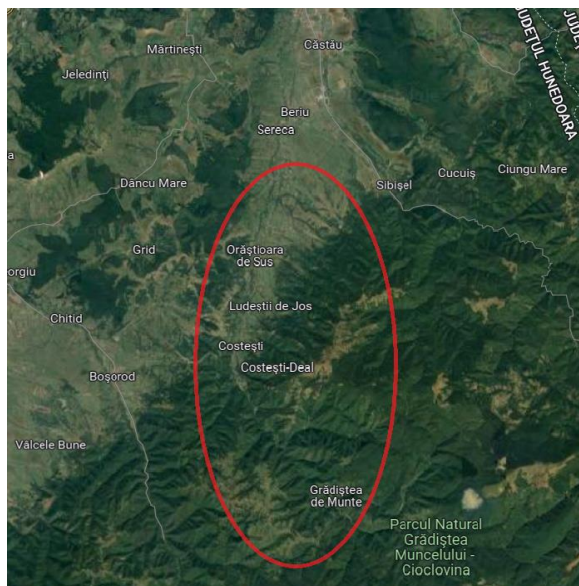


Figure 1. Illustration with the satellite image of the geographical area of Orăștioara de Sus Commune

Source: Personal processing of the authors after www.googleearth.com

Cultural life

Traditions and customs of the villages were brought into social life much more often in the past, but the Orăștioara de Sus commune keeps a steady rhythm of the customs of the area, especially during the holidays.

In terms of religious faith, Most of the inhabitants of the commune circumscribe themselves to the Christian-orthodox rite. Six churches operate in villages with access roads that are distributed in three parishes. Residents actively participate in their community's religious life, and their attachment to the church is evident in their daily lives, their behaviors, and their attitudes. Local customs associated with clothing, culinary, and cultural customs mark religious services as an important social event in the community. (Buciuman, 1999)

Other events that take place annually, on fixed dates, are the “nedei”. Various events are celebrated during these large gatherings, such as great religious holidays, sheep transhumance ends, or commune days. (<https://www.ideipentruvacanta.ro>)

At the level of institutions, in Orăștioara de Sus commune there are:

- City Hall (legislative activity is carried out by a Local Council);
- Romanian Orthodox Church;
- Schools for primary classes and a school for secondary classes;
- Municipal library;
- The communal police station;

- Montana Gendarmerie;
- Postal office;
- Human medical dispensary;
- Veterinary medical dispensary;
- Ocolul Silvic Grădiștea Muncelului;
- Ocolul Silvic Privat;
- School camp from Costești.



Figure 2. Representative illustration for the mountain villages of Orăștioara de Sus commune

Source: Personal archive

Tourism - the main method of sustainable rural development of Orăștioara de Sus commune

The Orăștioara de Sus commune is located at the foot of the Șureanu Mountains, between the hills of Orăștioara, and is crossed by the Grădiște River. This commune is characterized by the presence within its radius of many Dacian fortresses, Roman camps, and archaeological sites that have played an important role in Romanian history. In addition to the historical elements of the commune, there is also an impressive natural relief, still wild, that shows nature in a very good state of preservation. Furthermore, the social element of the area is noteworthy, with the local population being a good example of an archaic society that maintains traditional cultural values of a remnant area that is thousands of years old. (<http://www.madr.ro>)

Because there are no strategic, applied, or future plans implemented for the development of the commune, there is a problem with its sustainable development. The Orăștioara de Sus commune benefits from a number of resources that can be better exploited, thereby improving living standards and attracting young people to an area that has experienced significant depopulation in the last twenty years.

Analyzing all the resources that the commune benefits from and prioritizing the plans for sustainable rural development according to the efficiency in this area, tourism is observed as the main starting point in the development of the commune.

Considering the natural factors that favor rural, recreational, mountain tourism, or even agritourism, with the support of the county and local authorities, the commune of Orăștiora de Sus can develop rural, recreational, and mountain tourism, something that in this area lacks investors and marketing.

In addition to attracting investors to the commune, the authorities have the duty to create entrepreneurial education programs with the inhabitants of the commune, to support them in the creation of family businesses, which offer various tourist services, or provide them with the necessary knowledge in order to open micro-factories of traditional products, intended for sale. All these local investments can be supported by European and national funds that would develop both the standard of living of the commune and the national economy. (<https://www.comuna-orastioaradesus.ro>; <https://www.regielive.ro>)

Starting in 2020, with the worldwide Covid19 pandemic, the demand for rural tourism has increased in Romania. People who live in the urban environment have rediscovered the benefits offered by the connection with nature, with the archaic life of the Romanian villages. At the same time, the demand for practicing sports in nature has also increased, both in the warm season and in the winter season. Despite all this, Romania is still poorly developed, the offer of tourist services being limited and, often, not equivalent to the current market requirements.

As our country's natural resources are extremely rich and the young population is increasingly eager to start businesses in the countryside, we must carry out sustainable rural development programs with the support of the European Union, which will add value to the rural environment.

Table 1. SWOT analysis on the opportunities for sustainable development through rural tourism in Orăștiora de Sus commune

Strengths		Weaknesses	
1	Exceptional tourist potential against the back-drop of exceptional natural resources	1	Poor knowledge of attracting EU funds
2	Traditional lifestyle	2	Inefficient public administration
3	The advantageous geographical position, near the municipality of Orăștiora	3	Irrelevant rural tourism development strategies
4	Well-known cultural area with well-preserved local traditions (presence of Dacian fortresses)	4	Improper exploitation of natural resources favorable to rural tourism
Opportunities		Threats	
1	Sources of financing for tourism activities	1	Affecting the tourist heritage through degradation or uninspired planning
2	Close collaboration between the population of the area and people who emigrated abroad	2	Low capacity of local accountability factors in attracting development funds
3	Sources of financing for non-agricultural activities	3	Lack of actions to support entrepreneurship in rural tourism
4	The economic development of the commune	4	Shyness of actions to promote and support tourist products/services

Source: Authors' analysis and structure; Personal processing Andreșoi Bianca Ramona, TURISMUL – METODĂ DE DEZVOLTARE RURALĂ DURABILĂ ÎN COMUNA ORĂȘTIOARA DE SUS, JUDEȚUL HUNEDOARA, Lucrare de disertație, coordonator Mănescu Camelia-Maria, 2002



Figure 3. Illustration with the representative image of a traditional agricultural practice in Orăștioara de Sus commune

Source: Personal archive

Proposals for tourist projects in the municipality of Orăștioara de Sus

As the authors presented in the paper, the commune of Orăștioara de Sus has as its main attraction the Dacian fortresses in the Orăștiei Mountains. Annually, an average number of 70,000 tourists visit the commune to see the famous Dacian vestiges present here, which many historians of past centuries have mentioned in specialty works. The favorable season for visiting these historical monuments is summer, when the climate is the most suitable for this type of activity, because one of the three large fortresses in Orăștieide Sus commune, namely, the Blidaru fortress, can only be accessed by a path intended for walking. (<http://calinjorza.blogspot.com>)

Starting in 2013, the fortresses of maximum interest came under the authorities' sights, which ensured the protection of the monuments, tourist guides, and information boards for visitors. Even if tourists visit these objectives in large numbers, their experience must be improved from year to year by bringing to light other new Dacian vestiges existing in the fortresses, for which the state must create the possibility of establishing archaeological sites.

At the same time, the creation of a museum of Dacian and Roman civilization would represent an important point of interest in Orăștioara de Sus commune, a place where visitors can discover ancient artifacts and the history of the places they visit.

Another important project that would attract tourists to this area is the creation of mountain trails usable in the summer season. These routes can be off-road experiences, by cars, on well-defined routes, or on foot, up to the peaks of the Șureanu Mountains. In support of these activities with a very high demand in the tourism market in Romania, the creation of a gondola that would facilitate climbing the mountain, in any season, is required. Its route would be on the Grădiștea de Munte - Vârful Godeanu route.

From the spectrum of activities that can be carried out in the summer in the commune of Orăștioara de Sus, the following project proposals stand out:

- the creation of an amusement park with a theme representative of the place, from the Dacian world and beyond, which involves activities for children (games, contests, creative workshops), but also for adults (open-air cinema, motocross circuits);
- visiting peasant households, participating in agricultural activities carried out by local people (mowing, animal care);

- the organization of nedei and sezatori (events where locals can interact with tourists through popular music from the area, and traditional food);
- the organization of the parade of the popular costume of the area, as well as the establishment of a store with traditional wear items;
- the organization of trips to the existing sheepfolds within the radius of the commune, where visitors can camp in tents and taste traditional shepherd dishes, while animal breeders can use their products (cheese, charcuterie).



Figure 4 Illustration with the representative image of a possible gondola route

Source: Processing after www.googleearth.com In the illustration above, a possible route of the gondola used for tourist purposes is highlighted with a red line. During the summer, it serves mountain bikers, and in the winter season, it can be used to transport winter sports enthusiasts.

Conclusions, suggestions

With Romania's accession to the European Union, Romania benefited from considerable aid through community financing of rural development projects. The major problem, however, is represented by the poor absorption of funds in the first years of Romania as an EU member, because of the lack of financial education of the population and, consequently, the reluctance to access these types of financing that can increase the standard of living of the population and strengthen the country's economy in the long run.

Therefore, as in many other communes of Romania where the administration has proven to be inefficient, the commune of Orăștiora de Sus is not developed to the current European standards. As this development must be consolidated and supported in several areas, the county authorities should be more actively involved in the communities they identify with high development potential and in which this development does not occur due to the poor preparation of the

factors of decisions from town halls, the lack of entrepreneurial education of citizens and the lack of the necessary minimum infrastructure.

With its unique historical elements and the special mountain relief as a support point, Orăștioara de Sus commune has a strong development potential, which is of the highest interest to the current tourism model, which focuses more on nature and on the archaic life of Romanian villages.

A further advantage is that the tourism projects described in this paper can be implemented within a short and medium timeframe in the commune of Orăștioara de Sus.

While tourists are attracted to this area during the summer and lose interest in it during the other seasons, the correct marketing and investments necessary for its development would make it an important tourist attraction in Romania.

In conclusion, rural tourism is the first option that should be considered for sustainable rural development in Orăștioara de Sus commune. It must be supported by local, county, and national authorities, as well as the residents of the area, as the objectives in this area are of world interest, UNESCO monuments, which, by attracting tourists, would enhance the value of Romania as a whole and would bring Romania closer to European tourist destinations of great interest.

Agritourism, cultural tourism, mountain tourism, and rural tourism are ways of reviving the rural area and ensuring a prosperous future for the young population. They bring to the fore the traditions, the historical heritage of this commune, the beauty of the mountains, and the archaic life of the countryside.

The autumn season, in classic tourism, most of the time, represents a period with low demand on the market and the offer is often limited. In the case of rural tourism, this fact should not apply, considering that rural life is very active at this time of the year, and the mountain trails still offer tourists the opportunity to travel them. In the commune of Orăștioara de Sus, in addition to the tourist attractions and activities undertaken in the summer season, autumn adds new opportunities, not excluding the others. The most important project, for the autumn season, which can be developed in the commune of Orăștioara de Sus, involves the creation of an association, in which members of the commune are involved, to attract tourists towards the performance of traditional activities that take place in own households.

The winter season is, along with the summer season, a very important moment in the local community of Orăștioara de Sus commune. So, the beach of tourist opportunities is very large at this time of the year. First of all, a strong point of attracting visitors to the commune is representing the traditional customs, specific to the area, which take place during the winter holidays. They take place between 15 November and 01 March and, even in the current conditions, attract many tourists who are eager to get to know them. Another project applicable in the rural development plan through rural tourism, in the commune of Orăștioara de Sus, is the construction of the necessary infrastructure for the development of a skiing area in the Orăștiei Mountains, part of the Șureanu massif. This attribution falls to the local and county authorities and would represent a huge development in the field of local tourism. Starting from the idea that the infrastructure can be developed from European and national funds, a partnership with the private sector is absolutely necessary in the development and administration of a ski area. Closely related to this project is the project that was proposed for the establishment of the gondola lift, which would serve the transport of winter sports enthusiasts from Grădiștea de Munte to Vârful Godeanu, where the terrain is conducive to the development of winter sports slopes, and the average temperatures during the winter ensure the necessary snow for the functionality of the ski area.

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