

## RURAL AREA OF MARAMUREŞ SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE OF VARIOUS FORMS OF TOURISM

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**ABSTRACT.** – **Rural Area of Maramureş Support for the Development and Practice of Various Forms of Tourism.** In Maramureş the tourist can find a comprehensive tourist offer based on the diversity of tourism potential, natural and anthropogenic, which can be exploited throughout the year regardless of the season for all age groups. Here are all types of tourism (recreational, cultural, curative and mixed), conducted under various forms, the importance of this is variable spatial and temporal through the volume of tourists and socio-economic effects induced. The predominant types of tourism are cultural and recreativ tourism, this are associated with most forms of tourism (rural tourism, sports tourism, religious tourism, school, etc.).

**Keywords:** *Maramureş, rural area, form of tourism, development, entrepreneurs.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to differentiate between the various forms of rural tourism as this type of tourism itself cannot be defined through one single type of activity. The number of variables used in this endeavour is relatively high, including intensity of practice, location, management, community integration etc. In addition to this, many forms of tourist activities are suitable both for rural and urban settlements. On the same day, tourists can take both rural and urban activities. In the rural area the extended availability of space makes possible for tourists to have activities of intermediary character (urban-rural): ski, fishing, sports which require an artificial semi-natural infrastructure (tennis, football etc.), educational and school activities, ecological activities, acquaintance with heritage elements, trips, or specific urban activities (conferences, reunions etc.).

The review of the activities and types of tourism from rural areas has a guiding and inevitable character. The tourist activities with a generally rural character are: trips around the village, mountaineering, climbing, "explorations" of wild areas, rafting, cross-country skiing, ski on courses of low and medium difficulty, strolls on vehicles drawn by animals, cycle tourism, horse riding, nature observation, photo shooting (vegetation, fauna), landscape viewing, acquaintance with rural heritage, acquaintance with rural inhabitants and holidays, fishing, hunting, nature sports (tourist orientation, delta paragliding, zip-line gliding etc.).

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## 2. TOURISM FORMS OF MARAMUREȘ

In the analysed area one can find all types of tourism (recreational, cultural, curative and mixed) having various shapes and with spatially and temporally variable importance, according to the tourist volume and its socio-economic effect. The predominant tourism types are the cultural and recreational tourism, which include the majority of tourism forms which are being practiced or are practicable in the near future (extreme sports tourism, religious tourism, school tourism etc.).

### 2.1. *Recreational tourism*

On general terms, the recreational tourism capitalises on the attractive factors of the landscape which vary spatially inside the Maramureș County. It can be practised in every season and the natural potential of the area enable its development. This form of tourism mainly capitalises on the aesthetic characteristics of the tourist resources included in this natural environment. It rebuilds a connection between man and nature, giving the former the possibility to free himself of the daily pressure in a new environment. This type of tourism combines the characteristics of nature tourism and health tourism (Pompei, C., 1999). Recreational hikes can take place both in the summer, on foot, on carriage or only on horseback, and in the winter, on foot or on horse-drawn sleigh; in the autumn these hikes offer the magnificent view of a multitude of colours while in the springtime the tourist is filled with the energy of the nature's rebirth. However, this type of tourism still needs a number of new paths to be opened and marked on the hills and the mountains from the area, while the old ones need to be maintained and special places for picnic need to be created where fire can be controlled. In addition to these, the building of medium-sized holiday cottages for the development of weekend tourism is also necessary.

In Maramureș the recreational tourism is practised in a non-organised form and is represented by the activities related to spending a part of or the entire holiday individually or with the family, in a form of accommodation which is available in the rural area (acquired in various ways: by inheritance, by renting it for varied periods of time, or by being accommodated by friends or relatives etc.).

### 2.2. *Cultural tourism*

Being considered the main type of tourism in the Maramureș region due to its rich cultural and historical legacy received from our ancestors, the cultural tourism involves various age and social categories and can be practiced both individually and as a group. A large percentage of the people practicing this type of tourism are represented by young pupils and students.

Although it is the most frequent form of rural tourism from the county, the tourist infrastructure is precarious and suitable tourist offers are absent, making it an exclusively transitory tourism. However, the traditional customs associated to various occasions and holidays represent an important context for the practice of cultural tourism by mainly external but also internal tourists. The specific activities of this form of tourism are: participating at cultural festivals (the festival "Câte flori pe Iza-n sus"/

“All the flowers up on Iza Valley” – Dragomirești, the festival “Floare mândră de pe Iza”/ “Beautiful Flower in the Iza Valley” - Șieu, the “Wedding festival” - Vadul Izei); craftsmanship activities (evening sittings, crafting workshops); educational activities based on heritage acknowledgement (visits, contests, study case analyses etc.); culinary activities (during festivals, parish fests and other local celebrations); the activities associated with different customs across the year (Christmas and New Year’s Eve customs, Cheesafare Sunday, going ploughing, Saint George’s celebration, Tânjăua-agrarian celebration, the Milking of the Measure). These festivals are highly important for economically, socially, culturally and touristically revitalising the communities.

A cultural animation can also be performed in the cultural tourism with the purpose of getting acquainted with and educating the tourists, by a large variety of activities: visiting museums and memorial houses, participating at various cultural events and local craftsmanship activities, religious pilgrimages, tourist tours connected with the life and activity of various well-known people from the county, historical tours etc. The cultural animation represents one of the most largely spread tourist-accessible activities, regardless of the tourists’ educational level and whereabouts.

### ***2.3. Curative tourism (spa tourism)***

Tourism and health are always connected so that, together or separately, they represent an important indicator of the region’s social politics, as health is not only a human development indicator, but also an important resource of economic growth, by stimulating the tourism sector, with a capital role in the survival and economic development of a region.

The practice of curative tourism in the rural area is currently very successful as medicine encourages the natural or light therapy. After the glorious period of chemical products, we are nowadays witnessing the employment of natural means for health restoration: medicine plants, internal and external mineral water treatment, acupuncture, hydrotherapy, physical activities, music etc. In this respect, the rural area offers a privileged territory for practicing this type of health-connected tourism. For the elderly, this type of tourism is also a useful way of avoiding loneliness. Their daily isolation from the society could be avoided by practicing this type of tourism for a longer period of time in the rural area. In this way, three aspects would be harmoniously combined: health, social activity and tourism. In time, it might be possible for the curative tourism in the rural area to amplify (with the help of social institutions, retirement homes, mutual help institutions).

The act of therapeutically using natural factors dates from times immemorial in our country, although the knowledge of the physical and chemical qualities of water resources had only an empirical character. In time, other regions have also had rudimentary spas, some of them now completely disappeared, others reborn and successfully used even today. This situation also characterises the Maramureș County, a region with an old tradition in using mineral waters for curative purposes, in the following settlements: Săpânța, Breb, Botiza, Glod, Câmpulung la Tisa, Crăciunești, Vișeu de Sus, Văleni-Feredeaua, Ieud, Crasna, Șugău-Feredeaua, Băile Usturoi, Apa Sărată, Cărbunari, Stoiceni, Dănești etc. A moral duty for the Maramureș tradition makes it necessary to mention a resort which disappeared but had a high historical importance, the resort from Breb.

The plethora of curative natural resources which enriches the county of Maramureş offers numerous possibilities of capitalisation. However, some of the current treatment facilities do not rise to the standards of usage and others are not used at all.

The existence of chemically varied hydro-mineral resources with curative value had contributed to the initiation of tourism in Maramureş, however they were eventually abandoned and nowadays they are being used only by the locals which know their benefits by experience. Countless mineral springs from the entire county are not being capitalised for tourist treatment, except for three settlements (external treatment: Ocna Șugătag, Coștiui, Dănești). In addition to these, the carbonated mineral springs from Baia Borșa are used for mass production, being bottled and sold in the county, but also at national level. However, the trading company responsible for this is currently in insolvency.

Other constructions for the therapeutic use of mineral waters are present in some other traditional settlements which were old balneo-climateric resorts, however they do not rise to the minimum functional level and are highly degraded (Poienile de sub Munte, Dragomirești, Crăciunești). In the last years some work was invested for revitalising a few settlements with historical use of mineral waters for treatment, for the moment only at local level and less through tourism, however with promising perspectives for being introduced in the category of tourist destinations (Botiza, Câmpulung la Tisa).

An incipient form for the development of this type of tourism is represented by the small resort from Botiza. Beside this development centre, other balneo-climateric resorts could be developed in Bârsana, Oncești, Slătioara and Glod, in competition with the present resorts Ocna Șugătag and Coștiui. However, the settlements which own natural resources for balneo-climateric tourism have insufficient facilities for attracting foreign tourists.

The curative therapy can also be employed through the use of fresh and natural food products which can be found in every house in the county, through sports and hikes which make use of the ionised air of the broad-leaved and coniferous forests, eating wild berries.

#### ***2.4. Religious tourism***

Maramureş has a high potential of developing the religious tourism due to its numerous traditional churches and monasteries and the accommodation facilities which developed in their vicinity (ex: Bârsana, Ieud, Săpânța) and allow the expansion of this type of tourism. The religious tourism can have an important influence on the development of rural tourism as it is favoured by the existence of important and well-known religious attractions: the monasteries Bârsana, Săpânța-Peri, Moisei, Rohia, as well as the smaller Dragomirești, Hera, Rohița, Boiereni, Suciul de Sus, Șatra, Dumbrava etc. The parish fests associated with these locations annually attract numerous visitors from the rest of the county, but also from entire Transylvania and even from extra-carpathian regions.

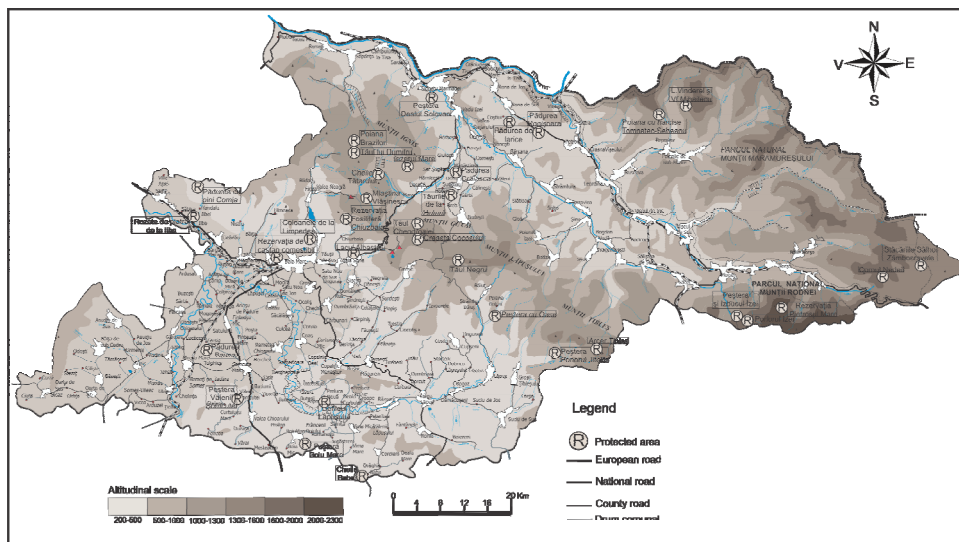
#### ***2.5. Scientific tourism***

Due to the presence of a multitude of protected areas, natural reservations and scientifically valuable morpho-hydrographic components, the ecologic and scientific tourism has a large opportunity for development in rural areas.

According to the classification adopted by Romania (IUCN<sup>2</sup>), all types of protected natural areas can be found in Maramureș. Depending on the protection, usage and management regime, one can identify the following:

- 3 scientific reservations: Pietrosu Mare, the Fossil Reservation "Răzvan Ghivulescu"-Chiuzbaia and Piatra Rea – 1st category IUCN;
- 1 national park: The Rodnei Mountains National Park – Reservation of the biosphere – 2nd category IUCN;
- 17 nature monuments: Creasta Cocoșului, Iezeru Mare, the stone rosette from Ilba, Blue Lake, Tătarului Gorges, the cave from Vălenii Șomcutei, Cave with Bones-Poiana Botizei, the rocks from Sălhoi-Zâmbroslavele, Vlășinescu Marsh, Dumitru's Pond, Babei Gorges, Boiu Mare Cave, the columns from Limpedeia, the cave from Solovan Hill, Tăul Negru Marsh, Iza Ponor (dolines) and Iza Cave;
- 13 natural reservations: Crăiasca Woods, Bavna Woods, Ronișoara Woods, Arcer-Tibleș Reservation, Cornu Nedeii and Ciungii Balasani, Morărenilor Lake, Poiana Brazilor Marsh, the larch woods from Coștiui, edible chestnut trees from Baia Mare, Lăpușului Gorges, pine woods from Comja, Farcău Peak - Vinderel Lake - Mihailecu Peak and the narcissi's clearing Tomnatec-Sehleanu;
- 1 natural park: the Natural Park of Maramureș Mountains, with 10 areas of special conservation.

The total number of protected areas from Maramureș is 34 entities. Some of these, and the most important are streamed on Fig 1.



**Fig. 1.** The most important protected areas from Maramureș

<sup>2</sup> IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature or the World Conservation Union is an international organization founded in 1948 to encourage the preservation of wild fauna, natural environment and living resources. Its members include non-governmental and governmental organizations. The Union's purpose is to promote the research of endangered species preservation, ecology and supporting the development of environmental legislation. <http://www.iucn.org>

The presence of such a large number of protected areas represents an important advantage for the development of the scientific tourism in the region. The parks and the natural reservations have been created out of concern for the nature and for the preservation of the endangered species of plants and animals, for scientific research and recreational purposes. However, raising the awareness of the local population towards their scientific value and the necessity to protect them is of utmost importance.

### ***2.5. Cynegetic tourism***

Hunting is today a recreational activity. However it is also an ancestral manifestation of the human instinct as it was the main method for providing food in the primitive period. The development of fishing and hunting tourism facilitates a direct connection between tourists and nature, satisfying the tourists' need to relax outdoors in a unique way. This type of tourism requires a few adjustments regarding the multiplication of the number of hunting species from the surrounding woods and the rivers running across them.

The cynegetic tourism requires a detailed preparation and a continuous monitoring of the fauna species, knowing the behaviour of each species for the protection of the hunters, identifying the mating time and areas, the feeding habits and locations, preparing special places for animal observation (with a dual purpose, for "photo hunting" - birds and mammals).

The importance of this activity must not be seen only through the glass of economic benefits, trophies, furs, meat, but also through the perspective of indirect benefits, recreational and aesthetic, which can be gained by practicing this type of tourism: outdoor physical exercise in the unpolluted air of forests, away from the hectic life of large cities, freeing oneself from the daily stress etc. (Dezsi, Ș., 2002).

The variety of cynegetic resources depends on the variety of high landforms (mountain forms are predominant), on vegetation altitudinal zonation and the degree of anthropisation.

Even if the fauna from this county is diverse and numerous, the game is represented by a reduced number of species, including 5 large categories (Dezsi, Ș., 2002): furry non-predator game (common deer, black goat, rabbit, wild hog), furry predator game (bear, wolf, fox, wild cat, wolverine, otter, mink, ferret), feathered non-predator game (mountain rooster, birch rooster, pheasant, dove, grouse, partridge, quail, turtledove, fledgling), feathered predator game (vulture, eagle, lesser kestrel, hawk), night predators (owl, long-eared owl, tawny owl, little owl).

The economic efficiency of this type of tourism for the rural tourism is highly important, both at the level of rural settlements but also at county level, due to hunting fees (reaching quite a high amount). As an example, for authorising the bear hunt in Maramureș in 2014, a fee of 4.000 – 6.000 €<sup>3</sup> was required, and the number of killed animals was limited to two, due to the low number of bears in the county (76 bears, according to the County Association of Hunters and Fishermen from Maramureș). The financial advantages as well as the high demand for this sport can act as encouraging factors against poaching and for the increase of game number (wild hogs, red deer, deer, bears, wolves, foxes, wild cats, rabbits) for tourist purposes.

The high costs and restrictions (permits and authorisations, rules for possessing fire arms as well as their costs) make this sport an elite one, therefore it can be practiced only by wealthy persons who represent a reduced segment of the society.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.etransilvania.ro/maramures-asociatia-judeteana-a-vanatorilor-si-pescarilor-maramures/>

## 2.6. Other forms of rural tourism

Business tourism (team-building, workshop, congress, reunion etc.) is still undeveloped in rural areas, but has good perspectives, especially in the existing resorts. In Ocna Șugătag there are two centres for development and recreation, one was created by the Education Union and the second by the Greek-Catholic Archbishop. In Poienile Izei, La Domnița bed & breakfast includes in its offer the possibility of practicing business tourism by adapting its available space for business dinners, this thing being also possible in the majority of accommodation facilities which own a suitable dinner serving area.

By including the possibility of organising meetings through presentations of the available services (suitable, well positioned, large meeting area, image projector, flipchart, projection screen etc.), the accommodation facilities from the rural area of the county would contribute to the use of the tourist infrastructure and would promote tourism in the region. This aspect is favoured by the fact that the business tourism is not conditioned by specific seasons and most of the business activities take place in the periods avoided by mass tourism. This important characteristic should be observed and valued as business trips and business tourism have acquired an increasing importance. Furthermore, business tourists are known to return with their families in the places they have visited.

Speleotourism has many chances to become an important form of tourism in Maramureș. It represents the guided visit of a cave, including orientation activities and surpassing various obstacles. People fascinated by the depths, by the unknown, by unique challenges, having a thirst for knowledge and research, can practise their hobby in over 170 caves with different degrees of difficulty, the most difficult, but also the most mysterious and studied one being Izbucul Izei. The practice of this type of tourism does not require any infrastructure, only suitable personal equipment, as there is no possibility to rent one anywhere in the county. In addition to this it is recommended to access the caves with the help of experienced speologists to guide the expedition and who know all the risk areas. Some caves are accessible without any special equipment on certain parts, depending on the cave length, the width of the entrance cavity and its difficulty degree.

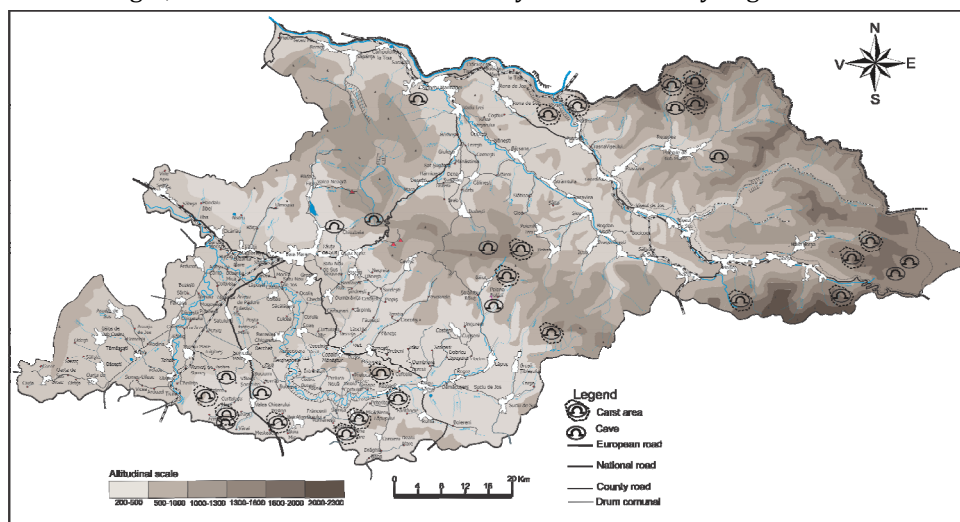


Fig. 2. Regions with a speleotourism potential

In Maramureş there are two organised entities which offer speotourism services and the possibility of renting basis equipment (Montana and Ex-Motion speology clubs). The people practicing this type of tourism have been, until now, Romanian and foreign professional speologists. Besides them, the caves also attract biologists through a vast number of species, among which the most often encountered being different species of butterflies (hibernating) and bats. Caves can also be used for various cultural purposes, like organising musical events.

School tourism can be practiced in natural environments and therefore the large spaces of the rural area can facilitate it by developing suitable accommodation and recreational facilities. At present there are no such facilities available in the rural area and the young tourists can only be accommodated separately in different locations from a rural settlement. There are, however, accommodation facilities of large capacity (for one coach), but they do not provide any sun, adventure and relaxation services for school children. The only exceptions are represented by some closed-circuit facilities created by religious organisations where some minimum requirements for school camps are fulfilled (accommodation, meals, organised areas for sport and cultural activities).

The development of school tourism can be facilitated by organising children camps on differentiated age categories, with specific rural themes (ecologic thematic camps, crafting camps, sports camps etc.). The accommodation infrastructure must also be adapted to this form of tourism with numerous accommodation facilities (for at least one coach), recreational areas, camping areas and sanitary services. There are only a few locations in the county where this type of tourism can be practised, depending on the accommodation capacity: Acriş Lodge, Izvoare Resort, Fereşti, Ocna Şugătag, Glod. In addition to these the other settlements can be used only as areas for rural camping.

The presence of ethnic minorities and their history in Maramureş (the history of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Jews, and Ukrainians) represents a valuable opportunity for the development and diversification of the rural tourism in the form of ethnic tourism. This type of tourism is starting to develop in the county because of many people with emotional or blood "roots" in these areas, like Jews or Hungarians, but also Romanians who reside in other parts of Romania or in other countries.

Equestrian tourism can be easily practised in all the rural settlements from the county as there are many horse owners. This form of tourism is accessible both in summer and in winter.

Agrotourism is often identified with rural tourism as both are practised in the rural area, however with different characteristics. Through the means of agrotourism, the tourist comes into direct contact with village life and, at the same time, is given the chance to participate in the daily activities of the local peasant.

Ecotourism is the type of tourism which is practised in natural environments and is characterised by its main objective: environment protection. Due to the presence of large natural and protected areas in the county this type of tourism can be easily practised, similarly to the scientific tourism. There are 35 natural protected areas in Maramureş, out of which one is a national park – The National Park of Rodna Mountains – Biosphere Reservation and one is a natural park – The Natural Park of Maramureş Mountains, with an area of 1596.07 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 25.4% of the county territory.

The rural environment can represent an important space for sport activities: fishing, climbing, water sports, winter sports, tourist orientation etc. Some of these require a certain type of product management (water sports, velo-tourism and horse



riding), while others need only a minimal technical improvement to attract tourists, depending, nevertheless, on a favourable natural environment and an appropriate welcoming service (winter sports, fishing, climbing, tourist orientation, speo-tourism etc.). The sport and adventure tourism, also called active tourism, can be divided into easy and difficult adventure tourism and has numerous possibilities of development by capitalising on the natural potential of the region.

The request for active tourism activities has increased significantly over the last years by diversifying and expanding at the same time its target market. More and more people wish to spend their holidays in nature, experiencing adventures.

These types of activities are no longer reserved to professionals, their variety and difficulty degrees make the active tourism activities available for everyone. The active tourism consists of practising sports in a rural environment, relying on a sustainable management which creates compatible activities with the environment, while protecting it.

The concept of active tourism is opposed to passive tourism which is defined by mass tourism and other activities affecting the natural environment. At the same time the active tourism is tightly connected to ecotourism, ecologic tourism and adventure tourism, but also includes cultural attractions connected to history, arts, crafts and architecture. These active tourism activities can be practised individually or as part of a more complex product like the so-called multiple activities in which nature, culture and development mingle in adventure packages which are organised in a natural environment.

The active tourism requires an active involvement of the visitors, physically or emotionally. They have to interact with the environment and the culture, to learn from them and to respect them.

The advertising of sport activities made this type of tourism more accessible and attractive to many people. The request for active tourism can increase even more in the future, provided there is an increase in the number of people involved in organising and performing outdoor activities. It will thus be possible to attract a larger number of tourist typologies searching for adventure and new sensations, but especially those who wish to spend more time in the nature.

The activities included in the category of rural tourism can be classified in aerial activities (paragliding, hot air balloons), terrestrial activities (cyclism, horse riding, trekking, climbing, zip-line gliding), water activities (rafting, canoeing, canyoning) and snow and ice activities (snowboarding, ski, tubing).

The above typological classification, which naturally includes several intersections and overlays, was created depending on the specific offer of the Maramureș rural area and not according to the tourists' subjective motivation. This tourist offer currently lies at the basis of rural tourism and its various forms.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Analyzing those presented above and the current condition of tourism development in the region, we can say with conviction that it has not reached a high level of development, despite the rich and varied potential and its development prospects are promising. Based on diversified potential can made a diverse tourist offer. The famous history of Maramureș, rich cultural heritage and the biodiversity remarkable, make from this land a valuable dowry in

Romania's tourism potential. Although rural areas offers vast possibilities for leisure, this is not organized properly for maximum exploitation of the local resources, regardless of their nature.

The future of rural tourism of Maramureș is promising provided that there should be greater awareness of the public authorities and the private sector, but especially consumers, focused on diversified resources and increasing the value of the Maramureș environment.

A first step in supplementing income is the diversification of the tourist accommodation units and / or entrepreneurs to development and provide tourism services and activities. Diversification of tourism and development of thematic routes, would mean significant sources of income and especially the promotion of the region. The development of new trails with the markings on the hills nearby hills, and even mountains and maintenance of old ones, arranging special places for picnic, where the fire to be controlled, also building of tourist chalets, with medium capacity to develop the weekend tourism in the higher hills, are just some possibilities of increasing tourist traffic and income.

The possibilities of valorification the rural environment of Maramureș are varied, and the revenue would increase considerably as a result of rational management and the ingenuity of population, which they showed over time, combined with the demands and needs of modern tourism.

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