

## PERSPECTIVES OF DURABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN COVASNA COUNTY

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**Abstract:** *The competitiveness of the Covasna County tourism industry is closely linked to its sustainability, as the quality of tourist destinations is strongly influenced by their natural and cultural environment and their integration into the local community. Long term sustainability requires a balance between sustainability in economic, socio-cultural and environmental terms. The need to reconcile economic growth and sustainable development also brings in an ethical dimension. This article is developing a theoretical introduction and presentation of concepts, principles and development strategies in sustainable tourism.*

**Key words:** *tourism planning, sustainable development, alternative tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on destinations. Sustainable tourism development attempts to find a balance between these impacts to create an improved quality of life for the host community and the destination.

The WTO defines sustainable tourism as follows: “Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.”

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The World Commission on Economic Development (WCED) describes sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This session further describes some of the principles that have been proposed to ensure that the tourism industry of the future is characterized by rewarding and sustainable travel experiences. These principles include:

- Environmental sustainability to ensure that development is compatible with the maintenance of essential ecological processes, biological diversity and biological resources;
- Social and cultural sustainability to ensure that development is compatible with the culture and a value of people affected by it, and maintains and strengthens social and cultural identity;
- Economic sustainability to ensure that development is economically efficient and that resources are managed so that they can support future generations. There is no widely accepted definition of sustainable tourism, but all the many definitions share some commonalities.

The definitions of sustainable tourism emphasize the following important features:

a. Quality – sustainable tourism provides a quality experience for visitors while improving the quality of life of the host community and protecting the quality of the environment.

b. Continuity- sustainable tourism ensures the continuity of the natural resources upon which it is based and the continuity of the culture of the host community with satisfying experiences for visitors.

c. Balance- sustainable tourism balances the needs of the tourism industry, supporters of the environment, and the local community. Sustainable tourism also emphasizes mutual goals and cooperation among visitors, the host community, and the destinations. These goals include the following:

- To improve the quality of life of host communities
- To preserve the environment and natural resources for future generations
- To protect the quality of the environment by maintaining biological diversity and ecological systems
- To ensure the cultural integrity and social cohesion of communities
- To provide a high quality experience for visitors.

The following are general guiding principles for sustainable tourism development:

- Tourism planning, development and operation should be part of conservation or sustainable development strategies for a region, a province (state) or the nation.
- Tourism planning, development and operation should incorporate several different sectors, involving different government agencies, private corporations, citizen groups and individuals thus providing the widest possible benefits.
- Agencies, corporations, groups and individuals should follow ethical and other principles that respect the culture and environment of the host area, the economy and traditional way of life, the community and traditional behavior, leadership and political patterns.
- Tourism should be planned and managed in a sustainable manner, with due regard for the protection and appropriate economic uses of the natural and human environment in host areas.
- Tourism should be undertaken with equity in mind to distribute fairly benefits and costs among tourism promoters and host peoples and areas.
- Good information, research and communication on the nature of tourism and its effects on the human and cultural environment should be available prior to and during development, especially for the local people, so that they can participate in and influence the direction of development and its effects for the individual and the collective interest.
- Local people should be encouraged and expected to undertake leadership roles in planning and development with the assistance of government, business, financial, and other interests.
- Integrated environmental, social and economic planning analyses should be undertaken prior to the commencement of any major projects, with careful consideration given to different types of tourism development and the ways in which they might link with existing uses, ways of life and environmental considerations.

Throughout all stages of tourism development and operation, a careful assessment, monitoring and mediation program should be conducted in order to allow local people and others to take advantage of opportunities or to respond to changes.

The diversity and value of the recreation touristic potential as well as the continuous development of the specific structures has brought the Covasna County as an important touristic destination in Romania.

In the Covasna County there are more types of rural tourism: tourism for recreation and rest, the cure-spa tourism, the ethnographic tourism, the religious-cultural tourism, the sportive tourism, the ecological and scientific tourism.

In the tourism activity in the Covasna County a broad range of touristic forms and arrangements are practiced, determined by the tourism needs, by the conditions of achievement of the balance between demand and offer, by the travel organizing particularities.

Having in view the multitude of tourism resources in the Covasna County there are more types of rural tourism:

**Tourism for recreation and rest** – that hold the highest percentage, as for their holidays many persons prefer the country-side, which is much more relaxing offering larger possibilities of meeting people of enriching one's cultural horizon. This form of tourism has developed in the Covasna County, especially in the villages close to the bigger towns of the district Saint George, Tg. Secuiesc, or next to some lakes, as Reci and Tufalau close to the lake Reci, Moacsa and Pădureni close to the lake Pădureni.

**The cure-spa tourism** has a special value by stressing and enforcing the value of the mineral waters or of a climate with real therapeutic atmosphere. The most important value is that of a calm surrounding, of the lack of pollution, stable negative air-ionization, the presence of some mineral water springs. These natural remedies may be associated in bee-keeping product - or phito-therapist treatments also. The cure-spa treatments can be applied in small unit capacities, very comfortable ones and without and throng. Under this type of tourism we can mention the place Biborțeni, Malnaș-Băi, Ozunca-Băi, Vâlcele.

**The ethnographic tourism** relies on the existence of some values of ethnographical tradition, on a variety of popular creation. The preservation of the old trade's mainly popular trades of some feasts linked to the play of important moments in the people's lives and of the agrarian cycle or expressions of the religious beliefs are very interesting. The formation and evaluation of the rural civilization, conditioned by geographical historical, demographic, cultural factors - grants a specific identity to the rural communities, which thus receive touristic traits.

**The religious-cultural tourism** relies on the existence of some old traditions which have the value of architectural monuments which may have public, private or religious functionality. In the rural space there may be old historical places which have the role of preserving houses with traditional architecture; besides these there are also wooden churches or walls of church, monarchic ensembles, memorial houses, museums or other cultural institutions. Here we can mention the places Bățanii Mici, Micloșoara, Ghelița.

**The sportive tourism and that for pleasure** deserves to be praised as at the level of the rural surrounding - it offers varied and original means, totally different from the classical, standardized ones. In the Covasna County there are possibilities, the tourists can practice nautical sports, mountain-climbing, sportive hunting and fishing.

**The ecological and scientific tourism** – on the territory of several rural communities there are different natural reservations – geological, speological, botanical, forest, animal or natural monuments which deserve to be known by the tourists not only by the local people – Reci - “The Birch Tree Reservation” – Balványos – The Cave Puciosu Turia, Vârghiș – “The Glade of the Daffodils”, The Cave Almasi, at Sâncrăieni – a vegetal reservation Tinovul Luci – The phosiles point Aita Seacă – a paleontological reservation.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

The recovery of Covasna County tourism potentials can be expressed synthetically through next statistical indices: touristic accommodation capacity, arrivals and overnight stays. The table below renders the evolution of these indices between 2005-2012.

**Table 1**  
**Touristic accommodation capacity and activity in Covasna County**

Years	Touristic accommodation capacity				Arrivals (thou)	%*	Overnight stays (thou)	%*
	Existing (places)	%*	Operational (thou places-days)	%*				
2005	3664	100	976.9	100	54	100	490.9	100
2006	3735	101.9	803.5	82.2	51.4	95.1	457.7	93.2
2007	2592	70.7	766.6	78.4	52.5	97.2	429	87.3
2008	2832	77.2	869.2	88.9	62.6	115.9	486.8	99.1
2009	3293	89.8	939.1	96.1	62.4	115.5	452	92.1
2010	3638	99.2	962.6	98.5	60.9	112.2	409.2	83.3
2011	4050	110.5	1236.4	126.56	91.4	169.2	532.4	108.5
2012	4836	131.9	1313.4	134.4	79.1	146.4	492.8	100.3

Source: <https://covasna.insse.ro>

\* These percentage data represent reductions (-) or increases (+) as compared to the base year (2005 = 100.0)

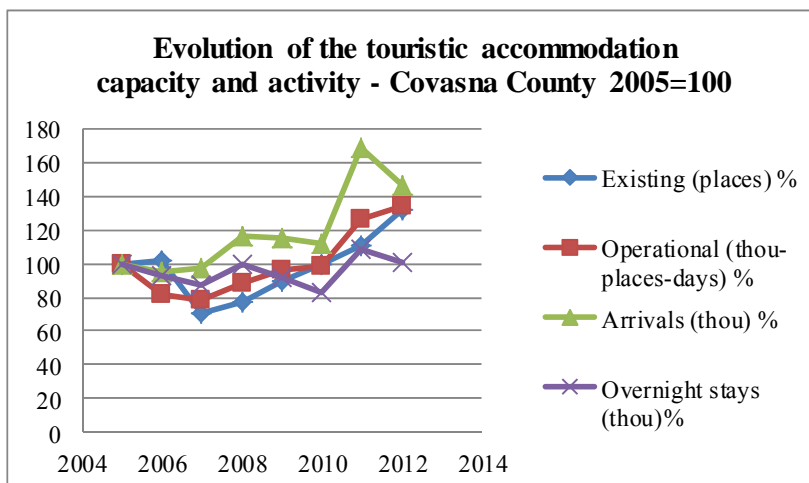
The existing touristic accommodation capacity in Covasna County recorded during 2005-2012 contradictory developments: it increased until 2010, declined until 2011. As compared to 2005, the growth recorded in 2012 was significant, by 31.9%.

The touristic accommodation capacity in operation was below the level in 2005, until 2010 and after declined. It was 34.4% in 2012 as compared to 2005. It is clear that such developments may indicate positive achievements in terms of exploitation of existing resources.

The tourist arrivals continuously fell up to 69.2% in 2011 as compared to 2005, they increased until 2012.

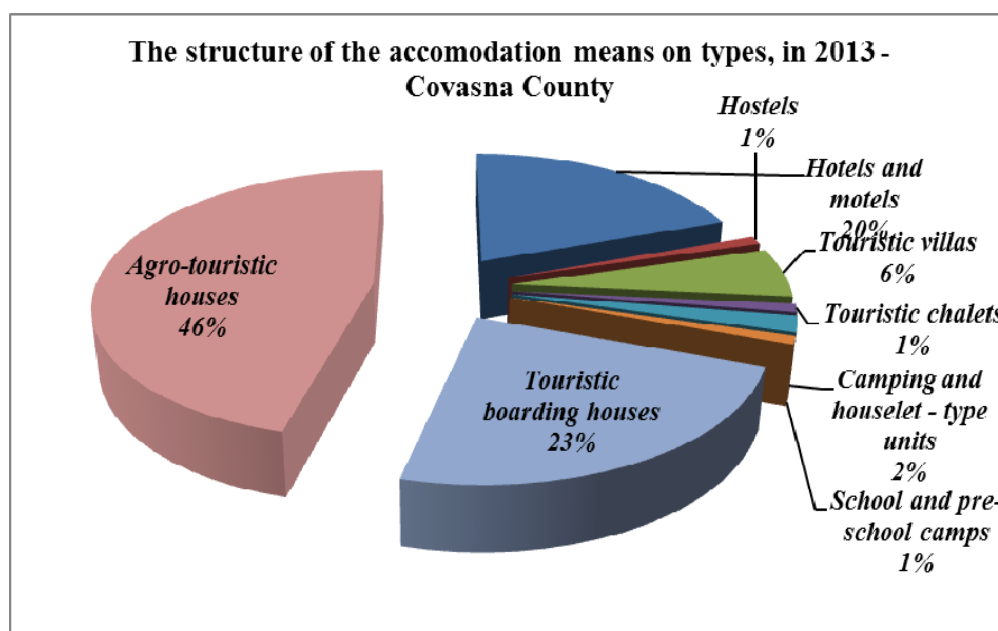
With the overnight stays index, recorded during 2005-2012 contradictory developments: it increased until 2007, declined in 2008, increased again until 2010 and then declined again until 2011. As compared to 2005, the growth recorded in 2012 was insignificant, only by 0.3%.

The following chart shows these positive, negative and contradictory developments in the whole Covasna County:



Source: based on statistical data <https://covasna.insse.ro>

Figure 1 Touristic accommodation capacity and activity in Covasna County



Source: based on statistical data <https://covasna.insse.ro>

Figure 2 The structure of accommodation on types, in 2013 – Covasna County

From the point of view of the unit type, the biggest percentage of 46% is that of the agro-touristic boarding houses.

### CONCLUSIONS

In Covasna County the EU and national funds were exploited as much as possible both by local authorities both by entrepreneurs. After the initial difficulties – the lack of institutional infrastructure and specialists, inadequate technical resources – were fought, we reached great results and the resources used by local authorities and companies is higher than the national average. Of course, there is still room to attract more resources and constantly develop our region. The 2007-2013's development period served with a lot of

lessons not only for Romania, but for all the regions and Covasna County as well. There is a growing demand for natural and local products, healthy lifestyle and bio-energy.

If tourism development is to be sustainable it must move away from its traditional growth-oriented model to one concerned with a sustainable set of goals and principles. All forms of tourism can either be considered sustainable or not. Sustainable tourism must be seen as a goal in tourism development. Achieving such a goal is a difficult task to accomplish; however, developing tourism in a sustainable manner must be an important objective in the developing process.

There are many stakeholders in the field of sustainable tourism. The major areas include; the host community, governmental bodies, tourism industry, tourists, pressure groups, voluntary sector, experts, and the media. It is essential that all stakeholders work together towards the common goal of developing tourism in a sustainable manner.

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