

Heritage as an Alternative Driver for Sustainable Development and Economic Recovery in South East Europe

The Implication of International Cooperation in the Sustainable Valorisation of Rural Touristic Heritage

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Abstract

Sustainable development, perceived as a main trend in the entrepreneurial field, has become a concept with extended applicability in the daily activities of economic entities. Although, initially, the concept has been only theoretically tackled, nowadays the necessity of putting it into practice is fully recognized and understood. The values of the Romanian rural environment, very little known and recognized at international level, are fundamental cornerstones for the exploitation of socio-economic development opportunities which are very much needed by the Romanian rural environment. The present paper aims to undertake a study that will analyze the advantages of international cooperation in the maintenance and valorisation of rural touristic heritage. The study starts from the premise that the rural touristic heritage sustains the socio-economic and cultural development at regional and national level. In compliance with the requirements of sustainable development, we believe that it is a duty to pass on the touristic heritage to the future generations in an improved state which is beneficial for the socio-economic progress. The study is concluded on the following stages: the presentation of rural touristic values from the North-East Development Region, the highlight of actions supported so far for the reconstruction of rural environment, the identification of the most efficient ways of international cooperation for the valorisation of touristic identity of the rural environment as well as a set of proposals of the regional rural tourism through valorisation mechanisms of the available touristic heritage.

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development represents a priority in the strategic trends of the present economic world since the need for a balance between economic development and the conservation of factors which sustain economic development is much stronger felt. In the context of the need to ensure a sustainable development, to follow up simultaneously economic, social, ethical and ecologic objectives is not something new for the entities involved in socio-economic activities.

One of the fundamental elements which contribute to support the sustainable economic growth is represented by the heritage of the rural environment. Thus, the analysis of the rural heritage has been a priority in the national research and it is a current basic preoccupation as a theory in the practical studies. Starting from the premise that the rural world is characterised by simplicity, perennity and force of truth (Rusu, 2012), we believe that in order to identify the valorisation

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trends, the highlight and analysis of the elements composing the Romanian rural heritage represent a much needed approach for shaping a viable model of sustainable development.

The Romanian rural space, known as the support of the socio-economic evolution at national level, has remained, prevalently after the 90s, one of the minor urgent priorities at strategic and decisional level, from multiple reasons, among which we can mention: globalisation effects, modernisation and emancipation of rural population, lack of necessary funding for the support of rural heritage values, ignorance regarding the importance of existing heritage values, economic downturn, wrong perceptions about the value of the rural space etc. In the last 25 years, the Romanian rural environment has gone through numerous fluctuations which compromised its development rhythm and have affected the appreciation of inherited values and those available in the present.

The present study aims to highlight the heritage touristic values of the Romanian rural environment, in the context of the need for recognition and valorisation of the touristic heritage at international level. Satisfying these needs could be performed inclusively through an efficient international cooperation, namely by putting into practice the strategies specific to sustainable development, at national and regional level.

The Romanian village is a fundamental pillar of the cultural heritage through the conservation of traditions and customs, of trades, of churches, archeological sites and historical remains, having a rich traditional culture, a diverse architecture and a lifestyle based on authentic material and spiritual values. One of the economic sectors with a high level of functionality is tourism, presently being recognised as a dynamic and active sector within the rural environment. (Ciupagea, 2006) There is a vital connection between rural tourism and the heritage held by the rural space.

The tourism performed within the Romanian rural background is on a superior position, being surpassed only by agriculture. Given that the statement that says that the Romanian rural space holds multiple and valuable touristic heritage elements, still insufficiently capitalized on, is highly used, the current paper aims to identify the best practices of valorization of the heritage elements of the rural space, under the circumstances of the need to ensure a sustainable economic development.

In the Romanian economy belonging to the rural space, the most important touristic fields which can be listed as touristic industry are: agritourism, mountain tourism, spa tourism, circuit tourism, touristic events, gastronomic tourism etc. Under this circumstance, we may ascertain that rural tourism represents a real opportunity for the development of sustainable economy both at regional and national level. Even if the Romanian rural economy is prevalently agricultural, the culture and local tradition, alongside natural and anthropic heritage elements, exist mostly in rural areas. Of the multiple solutions applicable to ignite the touristic activity in the Romanian rural space, through the sustainable valorization of the heritage elements, we believe that an essential role is played by international cooperation, seen under various forms: mutual experience exchanges, use of functional models adjusted to domestic conditions, financial help, flexibility in the exchange of touristic products, identification of best practices of behavior in touristic services etc.

2. Literature review related to sustainability and rural heritage values

The literature focusing on the analysis and study of terms related to sustainability and rural heritage values is extremely rich and valuable, both at national and international level. The basics for the study of the terms we are using abundantly in this paper are both theoretical and practical.

The sustainability term, used sometimes abusively in various contexts without understanding very clearly its significance, is a fundamental pillar in ensuring the balanced socio-economic development of the rural space, on condition that at entrepreneurial, strategic and decisional level, the principles of a real sustainable development should be perceived and understood. Contrary to the numerous statements in the literature, according to which the definition of sustainable development belongs to the Bruntland Report (1987), we believe that at internal level, sustainability has been recognized since earliest times, with the specification that at that stage the concept was not scientifically defined and recognized.

Thus, from the statement: "Moldova is not mine, but it belongs to the descendants of your descendants." (Prince Stephen the Great, 1500) we may understand the need and requirement to preserve and conserve the heritage held by the Romanian rural space prevalently in Moldova around the year 1500. Nowadays, in compliance with the requirements of sustainable development, we think that it is a duty that the rural touristic heritage should be come down to future generations in an improved state, beneficial and necessary for the socio-economic progress.

At international level, the most known authors for the research of the sustainability term are: Meadows, D.H., D.L. Meadows, J. Randers, and W.W. Behrens - *The Limits to Growth* (1972), Daly, H. E. - *Towards a Steady State Economy* (1973), Stivers, R. - *The Sustainable Society: Ethics and Economic Growth* (1976), Barbier, E. - *The Concept of Sustainable Economic Development* (1987), Von Weizsacker, E.U. - *Doubling Wealth, Halving Resource* (1998), Brown, L. - *Plan B.2.0.* (2006), Dasgupta, P. - *The idea of sustainable development* (2007), Barbier, E. - *Natural Resources and Economic Development* (2007) and many others. In the Romanian literature, the most famous authors who dealt with the research of

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