

A NETWORK APPROACH TO STUDYING RURAL TOURISM IN THE MUREȘ COUNTY RURAL AREA IN TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA

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Rural tourism exerts a positive influence on the welfare of both local communities and guests, by creating jobs, providing an incentive for local businesses to operate and grow, repopulating rural areas, revitalising local crafts, arts and traditions, thus preventing the decline of the rural areas where tourism takes place, as long as the principles of sustainable tourism and development are applied in the area. At the same time, local touristic attractions in rural areas benefit from rural tourism, by means of increased visibility, notoriety and funding (through donations, tickets sold or government funding) and at the same time provide an incentive for tourists to visit rural areas, creating a positive feedback loop.

This study aims to examine rural tourism in the Mureș County, by comparing the number of accommodation units, accommodation capacity, tourist arrivals, total nights spent, average length of stay and occupancy rate for 35 villages and rural townships during the last ten years, which will be considered dependent variables. Corroborated with this approach and attempting to provide an explanation for the variance in the dependent variables studied, a database of touristic attractions located around the studied villages and rural townships was created. This database includes distances, time required to travel to the touristic attraction using a car (or alternatively by walking), Google Maps review score and number of reviews (as a proxy for notoriety of the attractions). A gaussian graphical network was modelled using this data in order to assess the impact of attractions, proximity to the major urban areas, access to the highway network, demography and other variables of interest.