

TOURIST ORCHARDS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TOURISM IN ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL FRUIT GROWING AREAS

R. G. ALBU¹ C. E. DAVID²

Abstract: *The Romanian traditional fruit growing areas are spaces that, given the transition from a centralized economy to a market economy, have accumulated multiple dysfunctions, whose solving requires the identification of viable solutions, matching local potential and preserving traditional specificity at the same time. The article analyzes how the tourist orchard model, developed successfully in China could be implemented in Romanian traditional fruit growing areas. Also the evolution of the Chinese tourist orchard is presented, highlighting the stages of its development and paying special attention to the current stage that witnesses the solid consolidation of the extant niche of tourist orchards, as part of the Chinese tourism. This consolidation has led to several large metropolitan areas (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen) in China standing out on the international market.*

Key words: *sustainable development, tourist orchard, rural areas.*

1. Introduction

Tourist orchard is a new type of industry organically linked to agricultural production and tourism service. It is the place for tourists to achieve recreation activities. It has enhanced economic efficiency through the fruit orchard production and delivery of travel services.

The tourism development of the tourist orchard is based on different elements: location, economic base, the superior agriculture industry, festive events, community support, etc.

The tourist orchard is a combination of tourism and orchard culture. This comprehensive concept integrates

sightseeing, recreation, ecology, the local economy and science popularization.

The development of tourist orchards combines improvement of the fruit industry, expansion of leisure time activities in rural areas for urban citizens, and the promotion of the local tourist industry. With its tremendous multiplier effect, it can boost the prosperity of local economies. [9]

Tourist fruit picking has become an important recreational activity in many metropolitan areas from Asia.

The goal of this research is to understand whether and how tourist orchard can be a tool for rural development in a specific area: the Romanian traditional fruit

¹ Dept. of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

² Master School in Business Administration in Tourism, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

growing areas. It first implies to find out if the traditional orchard has the sufficient potential to develop tourism. After this research, it will be interesting to know the extent to which the tourist orchard can be a tool for rural development. This second question will lead to the identification of the problems of traditional orchards and of the means to solve them. After defining what local development is and what the stakes in the discussion topic are, the secondary data research gives a point of view on the way in which the tourist orchard can be used as a local development tool within the Romanian traditional fruit growing areas.

The research is carried out on the basis of secondary data sources. The secondary data research aims firstly at defining the terms related to the research and secondly exposes the different experts' points of view about tourist orchards as a tool for local development. A series of factors will be brought forward in order to check the conditions under which the tourist orchard can be a tool for local development.

2. A Short presentation of the tourist orchard in China

Fruit are among the earliest plants cultivated in China and are precious for their diversity and beauty.

Visiting orchards for touristic purpose has become an important activity in large metropolitan areas (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen). Although a huge market for tourist sites exists in China, only 20 out of the 203 "National Agricultural Tourism Demonstration Plots" recognized by the National Tourism Bureau involve orchards [12].

Data from the Beijing Fruit Tree Association indicate 533 public tourism and picking orchards in Beijing, with a total area of 19 thousand hectares.

The National Tourism Bureau in China developed *Inspection Standards of*

National Industry and Agriculture Tourism Demonstration Tests in 2002. In 2004, about 340 departments in 31 provinces applied for national inspection. Based on the results of this national inspection, 203 attractions were named "National Agricultural Tourist Orchards" by the National Tourism Bureau, although less than 20 included the word "orchard" in their names [12].

Some examples are the Taoyuan World Eco-Agricultural Tourist Attraction in Feicheng, Turfan Grape Ditch, Xinglong Town Ten Thousand Mu Tourist Orchard in Chengdu, Hongyang Chinese Gooseberry and Green Tea Base in Du Jiangyan, Mengzi County Ten Thousand Guava Orchard in Yunnan, Nanfeng Luoli Sweet Oranges Ecoorchard in Jiangxi.[10]

Although sightseeing combined with fruit picking has been increasing in China with considerable physical and financial resources expended, many orchards are still not built up to standard, with poor accessibility and facilities, lack of diversity in products and programs, substandard service. Also the tourist orchard management has serious problems. Some managers appear to be unaware of the national inspection, or if they know about it, they pay little attention to it.

Currently, most of the Chinese tourist orchards are developing on the basis of traditional orchards. Although the ownership of some tourist orchards has been transferred to individual owners, most of them are still managed by farmers or specialists in fructiculture.

As it can be seen in the table below, there are many differences between the traditional and tourist orchards (Figure 1). The first one are mostly interested in cultivating fruit trees and the revenues of the products are limited and the second one mainly focus on the tourism experiences.

Targeted products	• Mainly farmers
Major activities	• Fruit
Activities	• Production
Time for activities	• Seasonality
Life cycle	• The cycle of fruit trees
Ultimate profit	• Sales revenue on fruit
Traditional orchards	
Targeted products	• Non-farmers and urban dwellers
Major activities	• Fruit, orchards, experience amenities
Activities	• Management of tourist activities
Time for activities	• All seasons
Life cycle	• The tourist cycle
Ultimate profit	• Sales revenue on fruit and visitor expenditures
Tourist orchards	

Fig. 1. A comparison of traditional and tourist orchards [12]

Tourist orchards need to be constructed and managed as a tourist attraction, not as an agriculture activity.

Tourist spots in China are rated in five categories, from A to AAAAA (best), and have at least one planning document. Integrated planning plays an important role

in directing and controlling tourist sites to guarantee their sustainable development.

Appropriate planning positions the nature, function, and product of the tourist orchard and includes transportation systems and facilities based on tourists' expectations [12].

It is very important for the tourist orchard business to implement sound management systems. The key points for the tourist orchard model are the good tourism specialists involved in the business and managing the business using the tourism industry approach. The reason for the success of the tourist orchard lies in the concept of active involvement.

Visitors should experience activities such as planting, pruning, grafting, in addition to harvesting fruits in order to feel fully engaged in agriculture production activities, which is now a very different experience from their urban life. Managers must understand this desire of tourists, and arrange opportunities for them to experience and fulfill different production tasks [12].

3. Models of orchards

The models of orchards in China are the following:

- The Traditional Orchard;
- Rural Landscape Style, known also as The Citizens' Orchard;
- Theme Park Style Orchard;
- Eco-recreation Style Orchard;
- Tech-education Style;
- Comprehensive Recreation Style [12].

3.1. Traditional

The traditional management model for tourist orchards involves only harvesting fruit in the orchard.

Currently, most Chinese orchards belong to this category.

3.2. Rural landscape style (citizens' orchard)

This style attempts to fulfill the psychological enjoyment of tourists during the travel process. It combines the tourist orchard with a village setting. The Qingqing tourist orchard in Shenzhen belongs to this category. Because this type of orchard is specialized for city residents, it is also called a "citizen orchard" [12, 13].

3.3. Theme Park Style

The most important feature of a theme park style is the development of a series of thematic activities depending on products and services.

For example, tourist orchards could present juicing machinery, brewing and fermenting operations, and fruit science education.

3.4. Eco-recreation Style

This style tries to create a wonderful natural environment by planting trees in a natural way, similar to that found in an arboretum. A series of facilities will be set up in these orchards so that tourists could enjoy leisure activities in a well-protected eco-environment.

3.5. Tech-education Style

This style is also referred to as an experimental orchard. The major function lies at cultivating and planting excellent fruit trees, and at the same time exhibiting the new technology in fruit tree growing in order to educate tourists.

3.6. Comprehensive Recreation Style

This style of orchard is designed from the perspective of tourists combining orchard and related leisure activities. This style, which involves extensive facilities, combines travel and relaxation.

4. Opportunities for Romanian traditional growing fruits areas to implement the Chinese orchards' models

Romania is one of the most important horticultural producers from the European Union, with a total cultivated surface ranking 6th (after France, Spain, Poland, Italy and Germany) and accounting for about 5% in the total EU production volume. Even on a descending trend from levels before 1990, the agriculture played an important role in Romania's economic transition mainly as an occupational "buffer" absorbing a large part of the labor force laid off from industry as a result of post communist restructuring [15].

The country has a long tradition of family farming interrupted during the communist regime. In this period, traditional farms were replaced, in most areas, by state-controlled administrative structures. The inhabitants of rural areas gradually became employees of the state, paid in cash, or in cash and agricultural products. After 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the nationalized lands were gradually returned to their original owners.

The area cultivated with vegetables in 2008 represented 2.9% of the agricultural surface, while fruit trees accounted for 1.7%. The private sector controls approximately 98% of the total surface, the 2% balance being state property (horticultural research centers or directly under State Domain Administration) [5].

The fruit tree patrimony (orchards and nurseries) used to cover 290,000 ha in the 1980's, representing 2% of Romania's agricultural surface at that time. After 1990, the fruit tree patrimony has constantly diminished, to as low as 142,300 ha in 2010. Currently, the surface covered with fruit trees represents 1.7% of the total agricultural surface, respectively 2.2% of the total cultivated surface.

The big socialist orchards of 200-300 hectares/unit were fragmented by land restitution and gradually diminished due to the lack of resources and knowledge of the private owners. As a result, the number of viable orchards is currently very low, with a generally aged tree patrimony and a low regeneration rhythm. Each year, 2,000 ha are newly cultivated with various fruit trees, while over 30 times as many ha are in decline [15].

The production statistics point out that the main fruit tree species in Romania are plums, apples, cherries și viand sour cherries. The plum tree is still having an extensive presence of up to 50% of the existing orchards (used to be 70-80% up to

the Second World War), with local varieties cultivated mainly for distillation use.

Crops systems are still *extensive* (for example apple trees are cultivated with densities of 800-1,200 trees/ha as compared with western standards of 2,500-3,000 trees/ha) and high productivity varieties are used at very low levels (for example, grafting rootstock, generally used in Europe, is seldom present in Romanian orchards).

The Romanian fruits are of inferior quality, up to 35-50% being used for processing.

From the point of view of the areas and total number of trees, the largest concentrations of orchards are in:

- the sub-Carpathian area of Oltenia and Muntenia (Argeș, Vâlcea, Prahova, Buzău, Dâmbovița, Olt and Dolj counties);
- North-Western Transylvania (Bistrița Năsăud, Sălaj, Satu Mare, Maramureș and Bihor counties).

The zoning of orchards, based on the tree species criteria, is as follows:

- **apple trees:** mid sub-Carpathian area (Argeș, Vâlcea, Dâmbovița, Prahova counties), North Moldavia and North-West of Romania (Bistrița Năsăud, Maramureș, Sălaj, Cluj, Satu-Mare, Bihor counties);
- **plum trees:** widely cultivated in most of Romania: Argeș, Vâlcea, Olt, Prahova, Buzău, Caraș Severin, Hunedoara, Dâmbovița, Mehedinți, Arad, Sălaj, Bihor, Cluj;
- **cherry and sour cherry trees,** most often found in the following counties: Iași, Vaslui, Botoșani, Bacău, Neamț, Vrancea, Argeș, Giurgiu, Dolj;
- **perpear trees,** less cultivated in Romania, located in: Argeș, Prahova, Buzău, Dâmbovița, Vâlcea, Dolj, Mehedinți, Caraș-Severin, Timișoara,

Arad, Bihor, Neamţ, Bacău, Suceava, Botoşani, Iaşi, Mureş;

- **apricot trees**, mostly found in Southern Romania: Dolj, Giurgiu, Călăraşi, Constanţa, Ialomiţa, Tulcea, Olt, Teleorman;
- **peach trees**, mostly found in the south and west of Romania: Dolj, Constanţa, Giurgiu, Olt, Mehedinţi, Bihor, Arad [14].

As it can be seen, most of these traditional orchards described above are located in rural spaces. The World Tourism Organization considers that the rural cultural heritage is a key feature of tourism products. The specific feature of rural tourist products consists in that tourists are offered customized contacts, they benefit from the human and geographical environment of the rural space and participate, as much as possible, in the activities, traditions and lifestyle of the local population. [8]

Rural tourism has been identified as a vehicle for safeguarding the integrity of the countryside resource, enhancing the rural economy and maintaining rural ways of life, especially of disadvantaged rural areas [7].

Rural tourism takes authenticity as the core attraction for sustainable development.

The rural tourism management has to be focused on competitive advantages and socially-responsible tourism business, given the possibility for all citizens to participate in tourism activities (job opportunities, improving their business skills, advice for starting a business, etc.). An important opportunity for tourism between 2007-2013 is represented by structural funds, which are allotted for the development of two operational programs of the Romanian Government. After Romania's integration in the European Union, tourism has benefited from important nonreturnable funding, in the form of structural funds; there are numerous possibilities for attracting European finances, be it in the form of direct investment in the infrastructure, in order to increase the quality of tourist services, the training of the personnel in the field, or the development of leisure services, as well as the capitalization, protection and preservation of the natural heritage [6].

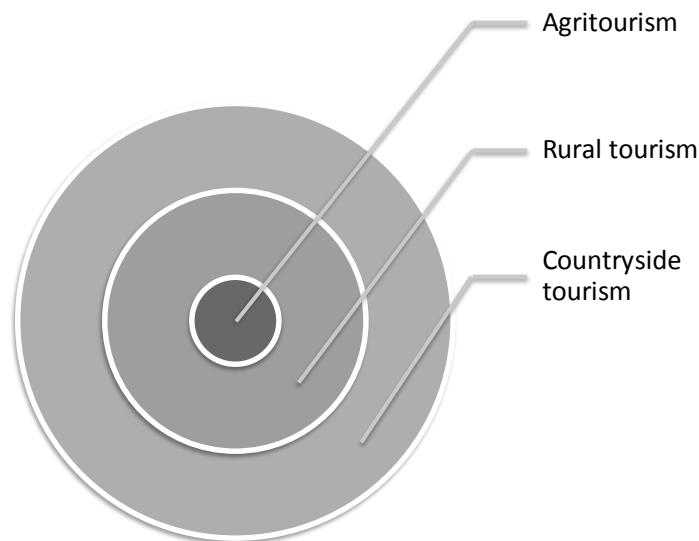


Fig. 2. Agritourism, Rural tourism and Country side tourism [6]

The local community obtains more benefits when the circle is smaller [6].

Feasible projects are funded by the County Bureaus for Rural Development and Fishing as part of the project “Encouraging Tourist Activity”, included in Direction III “Improving Living Standards in Rural Areas and Diversifying Rural Economy” [4]. The main goal is to develop tourist activities in rural areas, which will offer alternative sources of income, and raise the attractiveness of rural areas.

Likewise, taking into account that factors such as the decrease of working time, urbanization and development of communication means give the opportunity for other kinds of tourism to develop, many Romanian traditional orchards would become tourist objectives through this project [2].

5. Conclusions

People coming from cities want to escape from their stressing daily life and enjoy a peaceful and good quality environment during their holidays.

Due to its natural landscape and cultural heritage, Romania owns a great potential in order to develop tourist orchard activities.

The Romanian traditional fruit growing areas try to capture these customers, which can contribute to diversifying the local economy and improving the dynamism of the territory in the context of the sustainable development strategies.

The main objectives of the rural development policy are the following: solving the issues that the European rural areas face, exploiting the potential of these areas, a new approach in the Eastern part of Europe, changing the mentality – regarding agriculture, funds, partnership, community, etc [1].

The tourist orchard concept combines modern agriculture with tourism activity. Tourist orchards can attract an important number of visitors based on their infrastructures, management, and community services.

Tourist orchards can also promote the development of the local economy, as well as the income of local farmers, especially for women and young people.

In conclusion, tourist orchards could be a good sustainable tourism development option for rural areas both for China and Romania.

References

1. Albu, R., G., Nicolau, C., L.: *Sustainable Development of the Romanian Rural Areas within the Present European Context*. Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov, Vol. 4 (53), No. 1 – 2011, Series V: Economic Sciences.
2. Dinu, M.: *Geografia turismului*. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, Bucureşti. 2002.
3. Merciu, C, Cercleux, D., Peptenatu, D., Văideanu, N., Drăghici., C., Pintili, R.: *Tourism - An Opportunity for the Economic Invigoration of Rural Areas in Romania?* Analele Universităţii Bucureşti. Geografie, 2011.
4. National Strategy for Operational Programs in the Fruits and Vegetables Sector 2009-2013, MAFRD, 2008.
5. Petrea, R., Maruşca, A.: *Contemporary Rural Tourism on the Example of Crişul Repede Valley Territorial Planning Unit*. Romanian Review of Regional Studies, vol. IV, no. 2, 2008.
6. Saule, M.: *Rural Tourism as a Tool for Local Development Diagnosis of the French Area of Haute-Corrèze*. Bournemouth University, 2004,

- available at www.du.se/PageFiles/5051/Saule%20thesis.pdf. Accessed: 10.02.2012;
7. Surugiu, C.: *Dezvoltarea turismului rural din perspectiva formării și perfecționării profesionale a resurselor umane*. Editura Universitară, București. 2008, p. 12.
 8. Zhang, Yu he.: *New concepts in landscape gardening and urban landscaping*. Jiangsu Landscape Architecture, 1984.
 9. Zhou, Wu-zhong: *On fruit trees in China's gardens*. J. Jiangsu Forestry Science & Technology, 1988.
 10. Zhou, Wu-zhong, Chen, Xiao-yan: *Orchard Tourism in China*. *Chronica Horticulturae*, Vol 48, Number 2, 2008, <http://www.actahort.org/chronica/pdf/ch4802.pdf>, Accessed: 26.02.2012.
 11. Safeinherit: *Safeguarding Our Heritage, Community Development Through Sustainable Use of Resources in Peripheral Areas – Process and Demonstration*. Workshop Report: Green Tourism Engeløya, Steigen. Norway, available at [www.safeinherit.net/files/Workshop III.pdf](http://www.safeinherit.net/files/Workshop%20III.pdf). Accessed: 09.02.2012;
 12. <http://www.revista-ferma.ro/articole-horticultura/pomicultura-si-turismul-in-china.html>. Accessed: 26.02.2012
 13. http://www.dutchromaniannetwork.nl/evd/Marktverkenning%20Groente%20en%20Fruit%20Roemenie/files/romania_-_fruits_and_vegetables1.pdf