

## RURAL TOURISM AS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INCOME FOR SOME RURAL PLACES

*Lecturer Ph.D. Raluca ZORZOLIU*

*Lecturer Ph.D. Student Mariana IATAGAN*

*Spiru Haret University, Faculty of Marketing and International Business, Bucharest, Romania*

### Abstract

*Tourism is the most important economic branch, worldwide, owning 12% of all areas of activity and revenue of approximately 530 billion dollars per year. In the past 10 years we could see an increasing demand for rural tourism and ecotourism, many of the international travel agencies offering ecotourism packages. Our country is attractive from the perspective of international travel agencies, due to unpolluted nature, the authenticity of traditions, the Danube Delta, old forests and not least, the Romanian hospitality.*

*Rural tourism had been practiced for a long time in Romania but for the past 15-20 years, it was casual and without any form of organization. Tourism activities in rural areas are carried out when agricultural activities take place and contribute to the welfare of rural communities that practice it.*

*The development of tourism activities requires attention to the quality of the environment by preserving and developing the quality in the areas that have entered the tourist circuit, controlling the activity quality for a rational use of tourism resources.*

*Our country benefits from EU funding through several programs including SAPARD, taking one of the measures, Measure 3.4, which is called the development and diversification of economic activities that generate multiple activities and alternative incomes.*

*A deciding role in the development of rural tourism is held by the general infrastructure, requiring subsidies from the budget for tourism attraction areas for sustaining, by public administrations, programs to support tourism in rural areas.*

*Rural tourism contributes to the sustainable development of the Romanian rural environment by proper use of local resources, establishing youth in rural areas, reducing the number of unemployed, women's involvement in economic and social life of rural settlements, raising living standards, growth in household rural areas, increasing the industry's contribution to the formation of gross domestic product.*

*Ecotourism is a business opportunity, a market segment growing rapidly, having an important educational component, by teaching respect for the natural environment.*

**Key-words:** *ecotourism, tourism, sustainable development, financing, SAPARD, unexploited potential.*

**JEL classification:** *Q01, Q013, Q2, Q26, P2, P25, P28, R58*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism can provide the necessary income to protect national parks and can be a source for generating revenue and economic development in areas where there are alternative activities. All ecotourism can lead to higher levels of education of tourists and convert them into supporters for preserving the natural environment.

Tourism requires significant human resources and creates jobs for the unskilled or semi qualified and, it can provide what is needed in rural areas with an older population. Tourism development plays a major role in improving quality of life, not only for tourists but also for the local population. The appeared facilities may have a significant effect on the confidence and the self-respect of people in poorly developed rural areas, leading to self-financed projects and economical growth.

Variety and richness of tourist attractions, natural, cultural and historical puts Romania on one of the best places in Europe. The location of Romania at

the crossing of several European roads facilitates access here by all transport means - by plane, car, train or ship. Moreover, you can visit all these places taking advantage of the comfort offered by more and more hotels and restaurants, the international transport network, enjoying culinary specialties and regional wine.

### 2. ROMANIAN AGROTURISM

The architecture, the handicrafts and the cuisine of Romanian popular tradition is a living culture with a unique value. One must admire scrupulousness with which the wooden gates are carved in Transylvania, the wonderful wooden church, the variety of traditional costumes, different from one region to another, the simplicity of folk art objects, and ceramic objects.

Holidays, customs and habits were preserved with all their authenticity and often with greatness, only in the countryside. It is normal because they were

born there. Because there are not any months of the year without few events of this kind, their picturesque expending an irresistible charm, nothing was more natural that this "calendar" to be adopted, to the smallest details, by rural tourism. There are, of course, some other arguments for the stressed modern man who doesn't need too many invitations. Imagine, for example, sitting and looking a sky full of stars, seeing things we cannot see anymore in the cities, waking up one morning in grass, filled with dew and enjoying the aroma field flowers.

Rural tourism, especially ecotourism offer food that meets the environmental requirements that are in competition with producers of processed food.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism based on nature and culture involving traditional knowledge of the natural environment, administrating it in an environmentally friendly and durable way. Organic farming and ecotourism participates in the management of protected areas and improves relations between local communities and responsible factors.

Organic food is an important asset for ecotourism having positive effects on:

- Improving the health status of eco-tourists;
- Correcting the imbalances in the food;
- Environmental protection, by protecting natural ecosystems, maintaining soil fertility, limiting pollution;
- Development of organic products.

At a rural tourism house, instead of prepackaged and ready-to-eat part meals you get fresh milk, eggs, home baked bread, fruit that you can collect yourself, homemade pies and cookies. Christmas and Easter holidays have their own charm in picturesque areas from carol singers to the impressive religious services.

Not less interesting are the fairs transformed into popular festivals, that can occur weekly or with the occasion of religious holidays.

A part of the rural tourism activities is found in the form of rural tourism, green tourism or ecotourism. Rural tourism as a quite new concept refers to the forms of tourism that are in direct connection with farming activities, being based on accommodation in the peasant household and providing meals in the same space. Owners from the rural areas practice rural tourism as a secondary activity, agricultural activity is the main source of income.

Romanian rural tourism can be quite attractive and has a dose of authenticity, evidenced by:

- Most of the domestic activities are done by hand;
- Home cooking;
- Craft activities;
- Customs and popular traditions;
- Diversity of landscapes and natural monuments, etc.

Since, at present, vacations in a rural area are very appreciated with all the specific customs and

holidays, it can be a very successful choice for the western tourist, where its urbanization and the civilization put seal on rural life.

For this kind of tourism, we will be amazing to find in Transylvania women working with wool spinners like in middle ages, making drapery with the old loom, to see, in many villages, the ancient dances and old villagers wearing the national costume as all community wore it, in the past, on Sunday at church, or on holidays.

Modern houses, the rustic decor adapted with refinement are not missed from the rural tourism offer which is in full expansion and has grown faster in Transylvania, in the regions of Bukovina and Maramureş.

Rural tourism development in some rural areas may have both positive and negative effects. Among the positive ones, there is: the development of activities related to small manufacturing and services, creating new jobs, establishing youth in the concerned rural areas, the emergence of utilities due to the development of rural tourism, such as water, sewerage, telephone etc.

The rural areas that are developing tourism activities are not exempted from the negative effects like the following: the degradation of the landscape, pollution, changes in consumer habits, etc.

For rural tourism there have been established 15 rural regions: plain region and the western hills, Bukovina ridges, Oas tourism region - Maramureş, Apuseni Mountains region, Transylvania plateau region, Poiana Rusca mountains region, Banat mountains region, central region group and eastern Carpathians Sub-Carpathian of Moldavia, tourism region of Moldova plateau, curved Carpathians region, tourist Carpathians region, Sub-Carpathian Getica region, Romanian plain region, Dobrogea plateau region, Danube Delta region. [1]

### 3. ABOUT RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Whose mountainous microclimate benefits of therapeutic properties, along with the attractive natural setting, may constitute the starting point in developing of rural tourism, which generates revenue that cannot be ignored.

Rural tourism in Romania is expanding quite slowly because:

- There are no models of development to be followed and not too much tradition;
- A coherent legislation to stimulate and protect this sector is still expected;
- Rural areas are characterized by poverty, the possibility of funding are weak;
- Investors showing interest in this kind of activity are not from the rural area.

Some interest was shown by the branch after the founding of the National Association for Rural

Tourism, Ecological and Cultural in Romania. Rural tourism does not require considerable infrastructure investment, does not produce agglomerations and contributes to the economic development of rural areas through:

- The revaluating of local resources;
- New jobs;
- Increasing and diversifying rural incomes;
- Development of multifunctional rural space, the development on the base of sector development policies: agriculture, rural tourism, infrastructure, environment protection;
- Increasing population stability in rural areas;
- Improving the training of the rural population, with training courses in rural tourism;
- Attracting in tourist circuit, people who have modest incomes and don't afford another kind of vacation.

It is essential to attract people from the community, both in decision making, and tourism activities, so they get more benefits in terms of sustainable use of natural and cultural resources. Also, the lack of education of tourists regarding environmental protection, lack of trained staff in ecotourism are problems that can be solved through implementation of these development projects by local and regional tourism.

Both the Ministry of Tourism, as well as various non-governmental organizations saw the unique chance of boosting Romanian tourism, and began conducting several activities in this regard.

Development of rural tourism in Romania is supported by projects developed under the PHARE program, as follows:

- Decentralization of activities in rural tourism;
- Development of alternative forms of tourism;
- Increasing investment in tourism infrastructure.

Measures that can support development of rural tourism should follow:

- Identifying the rural Romanian potential which can be an ideal tourist activity, the establishment of households that can be included in the tourist circuit;
- Professional training for those working in the field of rural tourism;
- Cooperation with international organizations in the field of rural tourism;
- Preparation of rural households to provide tourist services;
- Launching the Romanian tourist offers nationally and internationally;
- Formation of experts in rural tourist management at local, regional and national;
- (Accessibility to loans with subsidized interest rate).

Durable development is based on the introduction of integrated economic systems to be implemented in the rural areas.

Economic and social development and rural are based on the creation of production activities and side alternative services that will contribute to:

- Removal of phenomena and processes caused by the restructuring of socio-economic systems;
- Stop the rural depopulation;
- Improvement of life conditions.

#### 4. FINANCING THE RURAL TOURISM

Our country benefits from EU funding through several programs including SAPARD, taking one of the measures, Measure 3.4, which is called Development and Diversification of Economic Activities which Generate Multiple Activities and Alternative Incomes.

Diversifying economic activities will lead to many activities, new jobs, additional income and more involvement of young people and women.

The need to establish or extend services to the population and agricultural production will lead to efficient utilization of human resources, material and financial potential of local tourism and particularly, due to various climatic conditions and relief, allow the creation of jobs and therefore additional income.

It will also pursue the development of rural tourism, forest tourism and traditional handicraft activities to increase income and alternative employment opportunities for youth and women in rural areas.

This SAPARD measure will provide financial support for activities related to the recreational development of rural tourism, such as building and modernization of the tourist guesthouses, rural diversification in the entertainment services in the outdoors (camping areas, sporting and recreation, riding, mountain biking, etc.), mountain tourism, cycling and fishing, hunting tourism - creating farms for restocking for hunting parks, fishing tourism.

Measure 3.4 of the SAPARD program offers the possibility of full construction of guesthouses, furnishing and provide it with necessary equipment, purchase of transport for tourists, development of facilities for entertainment, such as a sport or a pool. Co-financing these projects represents 50% and the value of an investment must be between 5,000 and 200,000 euro. Rural guesthouses that need funding from the European Union through the SAPARD program must be rated at least two daisies, must have a number of rooms from 4 to 10 and maximum 30 places. Regarding modernization or expansion of existing guesthouses, these should be rated at least three daisies at the end of the funding project and must have a maximum of 20 rooms for accommodation.

Revitalizing crafts must not be ignored, creation or expansion of handicraft units, such as workshops for wood processing, manufacturing of

craft objects, ceramic, tailoring, embroidery, ironware, leather processing, rush and osier.

It is not easy to assess the tourism development strategy should be applied in Romania, but the priorities seem to be focused on three areas: rural tourism, ecological tourism and promotion of the Dracula myth. Tourist programs carried out by the government have so far pursued the following directions:

- develop and modernize tourist mountain resort for skiing;
- the improvement of infrastructure and urban planning in the Danubian ports (Cruises on the Danube);
- important wine potential (Wine Country-Romania);
- targeting tourist flows to rural traditions and adequate tourist infrastructure through the development of rural tourism (the Holiday Country);
- international recognition of the quality of the Romanian coast beaches of the Black Sea;
- the introduction of an effective system for attracting private in reaching a standard of quality corresponding to the current requirements of tourists;
- A system of social tourism and improving the tourist structures in the whole year (for all seaside, „May 1 at the seaside”, “Recover at the spa”);
- the “Dracula Park”;
- the promotion of “Romania - always surprising”;
- organizing tourist information centers, the ability to represent the national and local government in each county, in major tourist resorts and the main border points (“INFO TOURISM”);
- reorganization of tourism education in line with EU requirements and criteria.

ANTREC (National Association for Rural Tourism and Cultural Environment) is recognized as a leader, both nationally and internationally, in the development of Romanian rural tourism, to encourage environmental conservation and preserving traditional culture.

ANTREC is a non-profit, member of the European Federation of Rural Tourism - EUROGITIS was founded in 1994, with 31 branches and regional tourism and rural guest-housed in 770 Romanian villages. In addition, ANTREC offers its services to tourists such as trips to villages and towns nearby, and visits to historical monuments.

ANTREC stated purpose is:

- Identification and promotion of rural tourism potential;
- Organization of training courses to host the rural tourism, through seminars, short courses and long-term exchanges of experience between ANTREC and similar organizations in the country and abroad;
- Organization of advertising campaigns for establishments rated and approved, included in the network, through the media;

- Participation in specific important events, both domestic (national and regional) and external (trade fairs and travel grants) with diversified offer.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It is essential to attract people from the community, both in decision making and also in tourism activities, so that they obtain more benefits in the sustainable use of natural and cultural resources.

Rural guesthouses not only benefit from grants but also from rural tourism complexes. SAPARD grants funding for construction and modernization of cabins, tourist cabins hunting and fishing cabins, holiday villages, camping, fishing areas for tourism. Amusement animals can be purchased.

Measure 3.4 of the SAPARD Program offers a full construction of guesthouses, furnishing and equipping it with necessary equipment, purchase of transport for tourists, development of facilities for entertainment, such as a sport or a pool.

Investments in tourism funded SAPARD are true business opportunities for the unexploited potential of Romania.

The diversification of economic activities will lead to many activities, new jobs, additional farm income and more involvement of young people and women.

There must be identified the local cultural and historical attractions, which are accessible and appealing to the visitors.

If the tourism industry should become a priority of the Romanian economy beneficial effects would occur late and would not be insignificant: the creation of new jobs, transfer of resources geographically, spatial planning, tourism is an activity complementary to the traditional agricultural – an instrument of education and knowledge modeling, leading to easier integration of our country in the European structures through tourism.

The providers of rural tourism must change preconceived ideas, to overcome prejudices and educate a favorable type of mentality for this occupation.

## Endnotes

[1] Traian Verdinas, *Introduction to rural sociology, Polirom, 2001, p. 155 (page 3 of paper).*

[2] Angela Popescu, *Rural Development, Editura Universităţii, Bucharest, 2002, p. 120 (page 3 of paper).*

[3] Nistoreanu Puiu - *Ecotourism and rural tourism, ASE, Bucharest, 2003.*

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. . Dona, J., (2000) *Rural Economy*, Editura Economică, Bucharest.
2. Nistoreanu, P., (2003) *Ecotourism and rural tourism*, ASE, Bucharest.
3. Patrichi, D., (1998) *Rural Market*, Romanian Academy, Bucharest.
4. Popescu, A., (2002) *Rural Development*, Editura Universității, Bucharest.
5. Popescu, M., (2001) *Lessons of the transition - Agriculture*, Editura Expert, Bucharest.
6. Profiroiu, A., (1998) *Local economical development*, Editura Economică, Bucharest.
7. Toderoiu, F., (2002) *Agriculture - resources and efficiency* , Editura Expert, Bucharest.
8. \*\*\* *The impact of agricultural policies on rural households*, Edited by The National Research Economic Institute, Bucharest, 2002.
9. \*\*\* *Programs of the European Union for Romania*, Edited by Delegation of The European Commission in Romania, Bucharest, 2006.
10. \*\*\* *Programs for Romania*, financed by SAPARD Agency.