

POTENTIAL OF RURAL TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The tourism industry plays a more and more important role in the world economy, and is generally acknowledged to represent a significant source of economic growth for the European Union. In the present Romanian tourism losing the competitiveness face to demand of international market, moreover tourism contribution to the growth of the national economy is very low. This paper presents aspects of the rural tourism and analyses the Romanian tourism potential that holds a giant attractive heritage and Romanian rural tourism creates the conditions for preservation of structural and spiritual identity of the Romanian village. Modern human preferences are increasingly to rural tourism, because the villages are more accessible, more beautiful and original than many resorts suffer from smoothing.

Key words: *Natural capital, Sustainable use, Rural tourism, Protected areas, Tradition, Romania.*

JEL classification: *L83, Q57.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Great changes in global products led to the increasing number of urban population, growth per capita income, development of transport, increased leisure, elements that supported the tourism; therefore the individual became a "homo turisticus" in his desire to travel and to spend free time outside his place of residence. Like any activity that evolves the "tourism" notion has been a subject of research and can say that has become a phenomenon of our time.

Tourism is defined by some authors as "all relationships and phenomena resulting from the movement and settlement of persons outside of their residence as long as movement and settlement is not motivated by a permanent stability or any gainful activity."

Tourism can also mean one side of the tertiary sector of the economy, where work is performed to organize and conduct trips or recreational trips to different persons, Congress meetings, including all activities required meeting the tourist need for consumption and services.

At EU level, by signing the Maastricht Treat it shows that strengthening of the Union will not be achieved without the development of tourism. The proposed measures were discussed and the Meeting of member countries in Athens in 1994, where it has been underlined that tourism will become one of Europe's economic priorities. All resolutions issued by the European Parliament shows that the tourism industry supports economic growth and reduce regional disparities. EU representatives have shown that Tourism is a multidisciplinary field of interdependencies among economic, social, cultural, environment sectors, which requires greater legislative support

Actually European Union's tourism holding 53% of the market and maintains its role as a leader in world tourism being considered important for the economic growth and employment (it offers 6 % of the total work places).

2. RURAL TOURISM CONCEPT

Interest in countryside recreation grew in the nineteenth century as a reaction to the stress and squalor of the expanding industrial cities. Rural tourism is tourism which takes place in the countryside. But, on deeper consideration, a simple definition of rural tourism is inadequate for many purposes. Equally, it is difficult to produce a more complex definition which applies to all rural areas in all countries.

Over the past 50 years, the tourism industry has created very powerful forms of expression concentrated in the resorts and tourist towns, valorising a tourist "standard" offer of industrial type.

In the last period numerous factors as: globalization, industrialization and urbanization process, amplification of pollution, stress increasing have created the premises to return to village world.

Direct contact with authentic values and goods, closer to traditional occupations and customs make the holidays an active process for obtaining personal satisfaction that give emotional utility individually.

Based on these considerations it can be argued that this form of tourism began to develop in recent years especially in developed European countries. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) and many European rural tourism associations define the rural tourism as a form of tourism that includes any tourist activity in rural areas organized and run by local

people. At its beginning, was intended to have a limited social and economic role in family areas, but gradually diversified its offer, and became a key component of regional and local development policies of rural communities.

According to the WTO definition the rural tourism is determined by the following aspects:

- Rural settlements;
- Keeping the areas functionality;
- Preservation of rural infrastructure;
- Preserving the traditional lifestyle;
- Preservation of specific cultural identity.

All these elements have become core components of rural tourism, and a fundamental requirement is keeping of them as much as possible.

Moreover, in defining the concept of rural tourism also contributed a number of other elements which made the size and value that has gained rural tourism in the last decades of the century as highlights:

- Psychological dimension which relies on human need to enjoy moments of rest and recreation and generate some new closer relationship between hosts and tourists that are missing in other forms of tourism;
- Social dimension through residents city come into contact with a special world much closer to nature, a simple lifestyle, relationships that are born between locals and tourists are more tolerant with opening to know each other;
- Geographical size has many implications for the major components and characteristics as climate, hydrology, soil quality, flora and fauna;
- Urban dimension which refers to the spatial organization, size of population of rural settlements, the level of the infrastructure.

Tourism development is both an economical and social necessity in the rural environment, contributes to the village economy through:

- The possibility of creating a policy that will lead to its long term development, in conjunction with other regional policies; agriculture, infrastructure, environmental protection;
- The possibility of becoming a supporter for new businesses and jobs and to establish a new local and regional development;
- By encouraging local traditional activities, especially craftsmanship but also those which can determine the development of a specific trade and also create new jobs;
- The increase of income for the inhabitants of rural settlements generated by the capitalization of local resources, ecological agro - food products for tourist consumption or marketing and the existing tourist.

Rural space reflects the stronger and the real dimension of real human beings and nature and specific forms of organization. In conception of many specialists, tourism is a “real engine” of development in rural areas.

3. RURAL TOURISM IN ROMANIA

Defining Romanian village may be made from several points of scientific approach. Diversification of rural settlements is not just the possibilities of modern knowledge, but is an expression of genuine diversity. Therefore the village has a homogeneous structure is not static and repeatable phenomenon but has its own physical, geographical and economical history.

Rural tourism has a broader scope than agrotourism, having a structure more complex of services. As the evolution of rural community began to take shape the function of tourism, which has started since the middle Ages and Modern era. The rural tourism is practiced in Romania since the '20s - '30s but only between 1973 - 1974 there have been attempts to try to revitalize it through the identification of 33 “tourist villages” from all the ethnographic areas and the homologation of the peasant households, but the action was stopped for political reasons.

After 1990 actions were initiated to promote the rural tourism at an organizational, legislative, formational, research and international cooperation level. Thus The Commission of the Mountain Area was established, which also had the tasks of organizing and promoting tourism in the rural environment, and after that the specialized economic agents appeared. Also was promoted and published Ord. 62/1994 and Law No. 45/1994 which has facilitated the development of rural tourism in the mountain area.

An important role is the establishment in 1995 of the National Association for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC) gave a new impulse to this kind of tourism, through the creation of 10 district branches with almost 800 agro-tourist farms and boarding houses and the annexation of other households from the country (from 10 districts), in the season of 1995 approximately 1240 of such tourist unites functioned.

Romania holds a giant attractive heritage intended to capitalize the following items: architecture; traditional costume; popular music; artistic and crafty creation, with specially equipped workshops where tourists lead by popular experts and artists can initiate in: sacred image paintings on glass, naive painting, ceramics etc.; attractions of fishing and hunting interest; climatic and landscape conditions from the villages on hills or mountains with scattered households, ideal for those who love peace and solitary walks. The various forms of relief spread

harmony throughout the country, the climate is also beneficial to practice all year tourist. Though the species of flora and fauna, by museums and collections, our country can actively contribute to meeting the domestic and international tourists' motivations.

Moreover, rural area of Romania holds a generous touring potential, resulting from the fact that about 90% of the Romanian territory is rural administrated. At the level of year 2007, more than 45% of people of the country were established in rural areas and more than 32% were involved in rural activities.

Rural settlements located in extremely varied places, in terms of landscape and the way in which resources and household areas are used, may facilitate the structuring of various tourist products and clientele segmentation, depending on preferences. Diversity of rural households and originality, if they are brought to an acceptable level of endowment and comfort, represents a potential factor of attraction.

A series of factors (excessive centralization in agriculture and economy) led to loss of individual initiative and widening disparities between city and village which didn't support rural tourism. Despite of socio-economic aspects less favourable, it can be said that there are many factors that give us as much as possible future development of rural tourism, mainly are:

- Complex structure of contemporary society where the present man, who lives at a rate of 60-70% in urban areas, is subject to a lifestyle and work very stressful. Application of the new achievements of science and technology, make the physical effort to be as small and more common. In this context, in vacation is remarks general tendency to spend time in nature, to make as much movement, and to broaden knowledge, to gain more independence and physical and mental relaxation. Hence the motivation of tourists to escape to rural areas and natural tourist landscape increased.
- The fact that rural tourism has proved a more attractive alternative than the classic and more affordable has made more and more Romanians to prefer this form of rest.
- Increased level of education and cultural training, thus society understood that hardness towards nature is not a way to support a sustainable, flexible development in the direction of combining economic and ecological criteria.

Basically more and more tourists prefer a return to nature, reason applies to all categories of age, profession, social status, because of needs for recovery and relaxation. Desire to meet new curiosity in the village, appreciation and understanding of old customs

and traditions, the need for beauty, harmony is elements that make tourists to prefer rural houses.

All these factors present today shows why the tourist is looking for ideal vacation in universal rustic wishing even for a short time to remove of stress of city life.

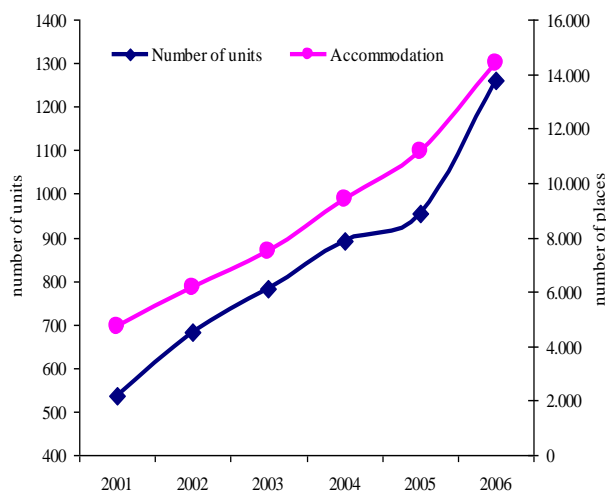
Romania has been a successful destination in the international tourism. In the '70s, Romania was well known by the main European countries, especially Germany, England, France, and Belgium and important to note, it started began to develop rural tourism focused on understanding of custom and popular art.

In present Based on World Bank development indicators and on United Nations data, World Travel and Tourism Council reports, eight countries are considered competitors on the tourism market for Romania: Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine). Compared to these countries, the average tourism competitiveness index in Romania is 58.91, lower than the registered values in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland and Slovakia, being higher only in relation with Ukraine and Serbia.

Table 1 - Average tourism competitiveness index

Country	Competitiveness index
Hungary	78.44
Czech Republic	74.47
Bulgaria	68.57
Croatia	68.04
Poland	66.03
Slovakia	62.84
Romania	58.91

Expansion of tourist guesthouses in recent years reveals the growing interest for rural tourism. Rural guesthouse it almost tripled in last year.



Source: National Institute for Statistics

Figure 1 - Trends of guesthouse units and accommodation places

Increasing the capacity of the main categories of accommodation in recent years is significant. Data on employment of rural housing units is generally not available but the average occupancy of holiday accommodation units is generally low, between 20 and 25%.

According to Master Plan for Tourism development of rural tourism it faces with the follows challenges:

- Promotion of protected areas for a better knowledge and facilitation of access to more visitors without jeopardizing the environment;
- Informing visitors about the opportunities of rural areas, including accommodation, activities, attractions and events;
- Assistance of rural tourism providers (often micro-enterprises) to enter on international market in terms of cost efficiency;
- Traditional advertising of events, customs and crafts that interest the tourists.

European financial assistance can be a chance for development of rural tourism by Regional Operational Programme is sustained development of regional and local tourism, with a share of 15% of total public expenditure, from European Regional Development Fund and state budget.

This priority is based on measures focusing on: the restoration and sustainable use of cultural patrimony as well as the creation / development of related infrastructure; the creation / development / modernization of specific infrastructure for sustainable use of natural resources and the increase in the quality of tourist services; promotion of tourism potential and creating the infrastructure needed to raise Romania's attractiveness as tourist destination.

4. CONCLUSION

Rural tourism is a reality today and moving to rural tourism is a continuous ascent. This form of tourism is a valuable component of the Romanian tourist industry, but besides the general features of this activity, shows some specific aspects. All these human settlements beyond the natural environment, demographic, economic aspects which influences are individualized by the richness of folk architecture elements, traditions and customs. Romanian rural area is part of the European space but is individualized by variety, tradition and culture. Romanian rural tourism creates the conditions for preservation of structural and spiritual identity of the Romanian village. Rural tourism is one of the most efficient solutions for harmonization tourism demands and environment preservation and sustainable development rules.

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