

Romanian Rural Tourism Market: Attractiveness and Deficiencies

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Abstract: Rural Areas of Romania have also attached the uniqueness feature, supported by the various forms of relief, unpolluted natural and not crowded area and the multitude of cultural elements - folklore, monuments, customs, traditions through the image de multisided offer which may satisfy a vast variety of preferences and motivations of tourists, including all categories de income.

For Romania, rural tourism, through its features, represents an opportunity in the context of global economic recession, and the upstart of the development in this sector depends both on the de specific measures adopted, and also on the measures initiated and applied at the level of the Romanian tourism. The existence valuable touristic resources is not sufficient, and turning into account the Romania's touristic potential does not nu se produce automat, but through the capacity of investment and management of the agents in this sector, through the generic strategy of the state in the tourism field, but especially in the field of rural tourism, which comprises small and inexperienced entities. Encouraging the development of the Romanian rural touristic market needs public subsidies and fiscal facilitation measures.

In order to attract an important segment of the world touristic rural market, within the context of the global economic crisis hardly overcome it is necessary:

- To facilitate the collaboration between the bodies and the organizations implied in the development of rural tourism in Romania (i.e. ANTREC) and similar bodies in the other European countries (ex:) with a traditional rural tourism;
- To support the association to the European and international field bodies (EUROGITES);
- To participate in international activities and to invite representatives of the international bodies in the activities organized inside the country.

Promotional activities in the field of rural tourism are meant to ensure a clear image of the touristic rural market in Romania, both for its touristic potential and for its social, cultural, psychological characteristics specific to Romania.

Key-Words: Rural tourism, touristic market, world economic crisis.

1 Introduction

In Romania, tourism was offered new values by practicing rural tourism, a form of a tourism specific to our era, by developing it in rather unpolluted undisturbed areas, inhabited by traditional communities, satisfying various necessities: the necessity of breaking out for diminishing pressure, which is usually accompanied by an active or passive participation in developing touristic activity, the necessity to maintain and recover good health, the necessity of belongingness and love, the necessity related to the desire to visit relatives and friends, the necessity of beauty and unusual things, etc. However, in Romania, practicing rural tourism in an organized manner has begun since 1989, especially in mountainous region, whose population

number rises to around 1,7 million inhabitants and counts 600 thousand family households.

Market offer of the Romanian rural tourism, within the context of the global economic crisis, is considered a powerful market and projecting some market launching strategies and commercializing the named products, represents the opportunity of this sector to stand out.

By its projection, rural touristic market has certain specificity in so far as its elements:

- the tourist, in its capacity of customer – aims at not only acquiring and consuming regular merchandise, common place and generalized at the level of the whole population, but also the suggestion of individual satisfactions according to his expectations and whims, which are engendered by the activities in this sector;

- The place of the offer also coincides with the consumer place, and with the place of the demand formation;
- The touristic offer is perceived by the applicant as pictures formed by the accrue of all the information received, directly and indirectly, by each touristic potential;
- The seasonality of the touristic demand and offer deeply influences the whole activity of the agents working in tourism etc.

For all these considerations, touristic market is heavily laden with risk factors, requiring detailed marketing and management studies (the tourism remains a close yet unknown domain).

Rural touristic offer identifies with the rural touristic product, which is now ever demanded for on the touristic market. The components of the rural touristic products include traditional elements specific to the local rural area, so that their characteristics mould on the basis of the local touristic patrimony, of the labor force resources and of the services implied in developing the touristic activity, under the terms of abiding to the principles of the on-going development.

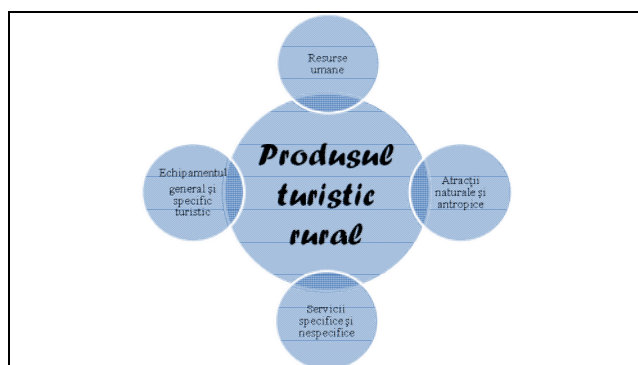


Fig.1 The elements of the rural touristic product

2 Problem Formulation

In Romania, there are 2.714 villages with 10,13 million inhabitants (46,6% of the total population) and most of the villages (60,6%) count between 2.000 and 5.000 inhabitants, 20,3% have between 5.000 and 10.000 inhabitants and 1,2% have over 10.000 inhabitants. As compared with the agriculture, which remains the main activity of the villages, rural tourism constitutes a complementary activity and not an alternative or its substitute. Rural tourism mainly contains all the types of touristic services present in all the regions, being advantaged by its higher and much more diversified increase potential.

The greatest disadvantage of the rural tourism in Romania represents, for the moment, its

rudimentary infrastructure. Currently, in Romania there are about 4,000 classified rural touristic housing structures, with 32,300 rooms of over 68.000 housing places. Besides all these there are touristic housing structures in the rural area which are not classified.

The Romanian traditional hospitality, a characteristic specific to the Romanian villager, becomes an offer of the rural tourism, in terms of its channeling towards the direction of the activity for preparing a village a household to be able to reach the level of a commercial offer.

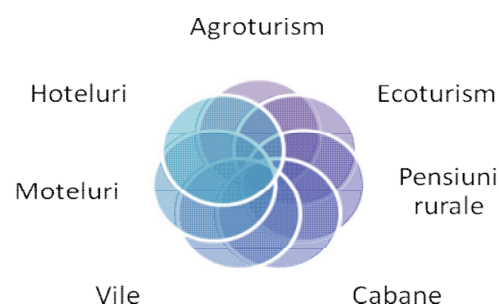


Fig. 2 The component of the rural tourism offer in Romania

Each householder has to be assisted and supported to obtain the household certificate to be able to offer touristic services, thus granting him the title to be entered in the data bank and implicitly in rural tourism network, which become famous. The main organization in the field of rural the tourism in Romania is ANTREC (the National Association of Rural Ecological and Cultural Tourism, in Romania), which was set up in 1994, has 34 county subsidiaries (of the 41 counties in the country), a number of 3.500 members, over 2.500 de touristic pensions and agrotouristic homologated pensions which have 7.500 rooms and touristic and agrotouristic pensions, in about 1000 Romanian villages. According to the ANTREC data it proves that in about 70% of the pensions they speak English, in 10% , 46% French, 4% Russian, 6% Italian or Spanish, and in 10% of all these they do not use a worldwide spoken language.

ANTREC offers managerial structure and technique which supervise the preparation of the commercial offer of the households, ensuring the connections between the rural tourism offer in Romania and tourists – consumers of the rural tourism programs.

The activities for the preparation in detail rural touristic products, of the households and of the economic agents, can be implemented only by integrating a functional management and marketing, both local and global. Intertwining local

management and marketing with the global ones is further presented through their components in the grid below:



Fig.3 Basic components of the rural touristic market

3 Problem Solution

Turning into account the rural touristic market in Romania is to be performed by means of the rural touristic offer in all its aspects, by the unification and harmonious merge of natural, material, spiritual factors, both according to the host's viewpoint, and of the tourist's. Harmonization of these resources is implemented in the rural touristic offer of Romania, which, by marketing-assisted programs will attract important tourist segments. The assessment of the market potential for the local rural tourism is achieved by estimating the area from the point of view of the existence of minimum infrastructure and of an in-built framework, harmoniously integrated in the natural environment, of the identification and achievement of holiday and leisure programs, which might activate traditions and craftsmanship, which might constitute attraction elements for tourists. Thus, the local household constituted in a touristic offer will be promoted within some agencies or organizations with the purpose of complying it to the area of origin of the national and international network. By facilitating the contact with the internal and external partners, at all levels, horizontally and vertically, represents a necessity of adopting some standards concerning the assessment criteria, the way they perform the advertisement, the publicity and the signs used etc.

As we all know, rural tourism represents one of the development solutions from the whole rural area in Romania. Its emergence and development in the rural area offers new sources of income for the population, especially when the area is provided with special potential, good human resources, as well as proper infrastructure. The guaranteed success can be performed through global development of the rural area, based on a moderate increase in time and to the benefit of the rural area, as rapid and chaotic development of the rural tourism can deteriorate the environment, and affect the environment of the local population.

Each product of our folklore represents a part of the diversity of a certain model being considered a unique element and it becomes collective as it includes the sum of elements expressed by a whole community. The folklore of the Romanian rural areas, respectively of the Romanian village, is generally, the best preserved, coherent and balanced and ensures the identity of each geographic area of Romania.

Undoubtedly, in time, Romanian oral culture, traditions and folklore have undergone powerful influences, caused by the progressive process of the inevitable socio-cultural changes, but, in spite of all this, we can say that the Romanian village has successfully gone through less harmful historical periods, preserving, to a great extent, virgin the purity of its ancient culture.

Extremely dynamic modern society, will ever promote new cultural values and new creators of spiritual values. But for the respective values to be enduring, it is necessary that all those people who create them should have the skills and accurate and intricate predictable information, and the oral culture should retain as perennial products only what it means real necessity.

Romanian rural architecture is having in its turn some difficulties it faces. The village, as an important element of the administrative structures, is the outcome of the social and historical progress. Rural households are, as much, the work of the various communities and of the time. They have to be preserved as a cultural legacy of the humankind.

In case of ever growing industrialization, after the second world war, all over the world, the rural population's exodus to the city has massively grow,

what caused urgent issues concerning the preservation of the rural habitat.

The issues concerning its preservation fall within a framework which is larger than the policy for preserving the quality of the area where building lies. It is obvious that the inhabitants of the villages should desire to get profit from modern life progress. As a result, the characteristics of the villages change from day to day, man trying to integrate in his era. The consequence of such a state is the conflict between tradition and modernity, between preservation and progress, evolving differently according to the conditions of each geographic area.

With a view to solving this conflict we have to keep in mind both the integration of these buildings within the traditional sites, and their spiritual continuity.

The Reactions in favor of their preservation can be seen all over the world, irrespective of the reason and they caused a public support internationally.

For the areas where the habitat preserves itself as in its traditional shapes, there appear the imperatives: on the one hand, the necessity to preserve the villages and the nature with all the elements which compose coherent environment, and on the other hand, a maximum effort to awake the conscience concerning the inestimable cultural legacy to preserve the cultural identity.

Reactivating the rural habitats, the passage from traditional architecture to modern architecture, without contradictions, represents a difficult effort which requires analysis, time and funds; they stated as a solution to reactivate the villages to introduce them as part of the large tours. In this respect, we have to take some measures and even intervene with enacting and implementing a legal framework, which might enable some villages or parts of some villages to be declared sites protected by law, as some groups of tourists are not oriented towards getting to know and to respect rural civilization, causing thus partial or total demolition of the monuments.

In this respect, we have to consider the following aspects:

- enacting some priority and future programs, concerning the preservation, the restoration of the ensembles and monuments of rural architecture;

- including them in international touristic projects;
- creating certain local associations which can participate in preserving the monuments and supervise their exploration;
- Publishing monographies to contribute to values comprehension;
- Representatives of the regional and local administration getting involved;
- The population support to achieve some projects of houses and buildings, by using the documentations regarding the local specificity, preserving traditional architecture, etc.

All these preservation and rehabilitation programs have to be conceived in the cultural development and in relationship with other aspects of the social and economic development. A separation between the traditional architecture and the new buildings, is out of the question, without approaching the issues concerning the way, at the level of the regional cultural identity – represented by architecture – there appear their specific features, only from this perspective, preserving the tradition becomes part of the development programs where the rural area, the economy and the culture develop, creating a link between the preservation and the development of the old architecture and the new modern field trends.

As far as the diversity of the activities performed in the rural tourism, extends towards favoring the small-size unpolluted industries, of the craftsmanship production, acting on the administrative and fiscal procedures and with a view to supporting the rural field tourism. They also act so as:

- to turn into account the local resources;
- to promote alternative and regenerative energies as well as ameliorating the heating systems of the buildings to obtain superior profits by using the wood refuse and other secondary resources.
- to stimulate the field research in biotechnologies, the economy, ecology, sociology and in the cultural domain.
- to preserve the richness and diversity of the patrimony for protecting traditions and the forms of expression, the links in the area consolidating the people's cultural identity and stimulating associative life.

The role of management and marketing in the rural tourism is that of reuniting all the individual initiatives to connect them to the national and international, to ensure their implementation into regulations and easily accessible standards, both for the board and for the rural tourism offer.

The well-defined organizational and legal framework represents the start point of intensifying rural tourism in Romania. They have enacted the norms for classifications of pensions and the agrotouristic farms and have adopted regulations regarding the tax exemption for agencies which practice rural tourism.

However, they have to adopt other regulations regarding the improvement of the rural infrastructure, of the access routes and roads, ensuring running water for the respective villages, signalization of the touristic villages, publishing some promotional materials concerning the rural tourism, etc.

In Romania, the National Association of Rural, Ecologic and Cultural Tourism, has enacted such a management for rural tourism development, which resulted from a unique idea, it is provided with its own network at the national level. In order to professionally inform those people who want to focus on this sector, by integrating the ANTREC subsidiaries they can allow the villagers' households technical assistance, both for the development of this activity and for the extension of the types of cooperation in rural tourism. ANTREC is also involved in the professional training of people involved in activities in the area of the rural tourism, by systematically organizing courses and applications in the area.

In the field of management and marketing for the rural tourism, the ANTREC activity mainly focuses on:

- Identifying and promoting the rural touristic potential;
- Organizing courses for the professional training of the owners (hosts), rural tourism agents, seminars, forms of short or long duration;
- Achieving exchanges of experience and information with other organizations and similar associations abroad;
- Communicating useful information concerning ANTREC to the governmental institutions, public local administrations to support this form of tourism;

- Organizing active advertising campaigns for the units classified and homologated, included in the network through mass-media;

- Attracting new rural pensions in the ANTREC network and supporting them for homologation and licensing;

- Participation in the important events which develop internally and externally, at the national, regional, local level, and which include fairs, exhibitions, conferences.

4 Conclusion

In the last decades the regional development policy of the a European Union corroborated with the cu national policies of the member states has encouraged tourism focusing towards the rural areas considering their effects and positive social outcomes. From the surveys performed by the World Tourism Organization it has proved that rural tourism develops at a faster pace than international tourism on the whole.

There is a growing demand of both Romanian and foreign tourists for this rural tourism, especially for the ecologic tourism. In this respect, they have to create a complex rural touristic product, which could also include leisure activities and cultural tourism.

In Romania rural tourism not yet top-performing in exportation but has an important development potential because of the advantages and unique resources, such as: old rural communities living in an virgin environment, respecting the traditions and the rural lifestyle, a high natural potential based on biodiversity and even on the ecological biosystems unique in Europe, such as the Danube Delta, the folklore variety. In the last years they have made internal efforts (legislation, classification of complexes, potential assessment, services updating). One of the efforts benefited from the EU assistance (through financing non-reimbursable programs) and of other donors such USAID and GTZ. A special association for representing the new business communities' interests of the rural tourism (ANTREC) was set up. However, the great challenges of the rural tourism are connected with the general improvement of the services in the touristic housing structures in order to face higher international standards and the poor quality of transportation or of the infrastructure or of the services and utilities in the respective areas. But even in the areas where these challenges were overcome there is a lack of information concerning the touristic offer. According to the point of view of

the Romanian tourism sector, it should become exclusively the attraction of the natural, social and human environment, top-performing in the export and an important contributor to the on-going rural development. Romanian rural touristic product should comprise all other attractive and quality local offers in a single proposal for the consumers. Improving the efficiency of the values and using synergies with other valuable links can be a decisive factor to achieve the vision. An important condition to achieve this objective lies in the training, promoting the offer and using the synergies at the local level together with other valuable links:

- In-service training by trades of the personnel to meet the requirements of the good and hospitable services for the customers, as well as a critical success factor;
- Clear norms and regulations for classifying and assessing the touristic housing structures at the EU standards by a special law on the rural tourism;
- Local activities to stimulate private initiative in the sector: improving the infrastructure and the access in the area, measures for the area protection, etc.
- Development of the ecologic farms in the rural areas;
- Intensive promotion in the country (information offices) and abroad.
- Improving the skills of the private companies in the field, both for the exporters who are in the beginning of their activity and for those who are already developed;
- creating business associations at the local level with wine producers, craftsmen, ecological food producers or other cultural activities and common promotional programs;

Rural tourism has to hold its sector branding based on the following initiatives:

- Special trade of excellence for qualitative touristic housing structures;
- Intensive promotion abroad through catalogues, mass media, information portals, etc.
- organized events abroad and inside the country;
- Better promotion of the strong points of the rural areas in Romania such as: virgin area; old traditions, biodiversity, folklore, rare fauna and flora, etc.

Rural development integrated through tourism involves active participation of the population in touristic entertaining and amusing activities, which have to be performed according to a collective project of the local development. Avoiding harms and preserving the advantages

of a balanced tourism can be guaranteed by a clear conception regarding the local touristic development. This idea consists in the necessity to obtain food products directly from the source, adapting the local craftsmanship industries to the cultural tradition of the area, avoiding crowded transportations, ensuring the quality and any of the initiatives meant to create on-going financial advantages for the local population.

Romanian local tourism contains, in broad terms, all the types of touristic services presented in all the regions, having the advantage that it has a high growth potential and it can be diversified.

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