

The Romanian rural tourism. Actuality and perspectives in the context of innovation economy.

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Abstract: Recent years have revealed major changes in the approach of the concept of leisure. Rural tourism is an important issue, but slightly neglected tourism in Romania. The purpose of this paper is to make a review of the defining components of Romanian rural tourism and to try to position the benefits of rural tourism in Romania. In order to achieve its objectives, the research will take into account the rural tourism offer, trends in tourism mobility as well as the future directions for the tourism valorization of Romanian rural area.

Keywords: tourism rural, sustainability, TQM, innovation in tourism

1. Introduction

Daily cycle flows have led to major social phenomena, namely recording a significant increase in urban population, per capita income growth and not least an increase in average life expectancy to about 75 years. All these elements have competed in increasing the individual's availability to travel and to spend time outside his residence, transforming it into "homo turisticus".

This willingness to travel slowly starts acquiring new connotations. Mass tourism practiced no longer provide its needs fully, following the trend of refuge from the busy areas of everyday lives "industrialized" contributed significantly to the emergence of alternative tourism.

Under the impact of urbanization, major changes in rural areas, facilities and improvements to increase production capacity of land and rural habitat modification (Chiriac, L., 2011) occur simultaneously.

"Homo turisticus" that by his desire connect with nature has led to the development of a very valuable segment which has long been poorly valued, rural areas.

The 20th century is the one who brings profound changes in rural areas. Incidental factors such as requests for holidays focused on a better quality environment, changing leisure options for the weekend, the

economic crisis and the crisis involving agriculture, have led to a repositioning in the period 2011-2016, in the tourists' preferences, to rural tourism.

Gradually flows of tourists have turned increasingly to the areas where overcrowding is not present and where cultural and environmental diversity are elements of real wealth. Rural tourism becomes a "drug" tourist soul.

The complexity of the peasant village happy with "new entity the right sacred" (Nistoreanu, P., Ghereș, M., coordinators, 2010), contribute directly to "divine healing" of individuals eager to discover new cultural and spiritual trends. From these positions, rural tourism has become "King of tourism".

2. Theoretical foundations

Rural tourism is based on its rural building. This is a heterogeneous human -geographical space (Bordet, G., 1966) which are found in addition to agricultural and industrial activities, crafts and trade areas.

Under the impact of intense urbanization processes occurring in the second half of the 20th century, rural areas experienced extensive structural changes.

Expansion of urban space, migration to the city of villagers (the inhabitants of the villages), the introduction of new techniques and technologies in processing land, infrastructure development are all defining elements of traditional values of rural transformation

In "Agriculture and the Romanian rural area of sustainable development perspective", published under the auspices of the Romanian Academy (Gavrilescu, D., 2006) states that "rural areas socio-economic structures are diverse and complex, including villages, small towns, farms, forests, plants, small shops, trade and tourism, natural landscapes and cultural traditions".

According to *Adrian Militaru* „is a rural settlement and rural population are distinguished in the field of global society through specific demographic characteristics (population structure density of the residential area), economic (the nature of the work, the relations of production, the structure of income sources, socio-cultural (cultural models, norms and dominant values, traditions)." (Economic Information and Documentation Centre, 2005)

We note that rural areas offer a multitude of interpretations, due to its complexity, economic, geographical, sociological, and historical factors, which led to a strategic orientation of sustainable rural development policies at EU level.

The EU attaches great importance to rural development stating that „rural inland or coastal zones which include villages and small towns, where land is used for agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries, but also economic and cultural activities of the people in those areas (crafts, industry, services, tourism, leisure, etc.). [6, p. 656]. In different EU countries rural should not be confused with the agriculture. But the village is considered to be the foundation of rural area" (Chiriac, L., 2011, p.16).

This, as a human community, is the space where agriculture is practiced in addition to economic, social, cultural, scientific, political, etc.

All these approaches lead to the idea that the countryside is a concept of physical, economic, social and cultural urban opposite. As a result, the concept of rural space is generic expressing different realities, being essentially a multifaceted concept, integrator and interdisciplinary investigation (Alexander, C., Davydov, I., Gavrilescu, D., 2003, p 651).

Rural Space connection – rural tourism has generated various approaches, but a widely accepted definition for rural tourism in the European Union has not yet been formulated. Understanding the WTO and many European associations of rural tourism is a form of tourism which includes any activity organized and led in rural area by the local population, by making use of local tourism resources (natural, cultural, historical, and human) as well as facilities and tourism structures, including hostels and farms.

If the first rural tourism was intended to have a social and economic role limited to the family, gradually it underwent profound changes due to the psychological, social, geographical and urban planning.

Economical determinations of rural tourism have led to the need to address it as a starting point in revitalizing Romanian tourism and the economy as a whole.

3. Problem solution

3.1. Hypotheses of the research

Launching of rural tourism in Romania is necessary and fully justified in view particularly valuable tourism potential available to it, the multiplicative effect that it generates tourism activity as a whole and the new orientations of tourism demand, moving especially the rural areas, the "*green tourism*".

Romania, like many European countries, believes that the challenges facing rural areas in relation to the new tourism policy, is a real opportunity. Innovation in rural tourism development comes as a solution to its recovery, thus achieving the transition from "paradigm based on agriculture" to "rural tourism paradigm based on economy". The economic component of the rural approaches provides profound phenomena that take place in this community.

Under the impact of changes seen in the village, there is a need to reorient its inhabitants to restore balance and to develop the rural space as a cradle of spiritual values, cultural and unique materials.

We must not forget, however, that rural areas are characterized by the predominance of agricultural activities, the processing industry and traditional activities. In this context it is important to make a distinction between agricultural economy and rural economy, including "all the economic and social processes in rural communities." (Alexander, C., Davydov, I., Gavrilescu, D., 2003, p. 653).

3.2. Means and research tools

The methodological basis of the research knowledge is dialectical philosophical method, device and systems theory, general categorical comparative analysis method.

3.3. Results of the research

Although tourism is a sector in slight increase, according to data provided by Eurostat, by 10.3% in 2017 compared with 2016¹, mass tourism is faced with some difficulties. This is a real opportunity for rural tourism, designed to create a structured offer rural tourism products targeting consumer needs.

The problems of mass tourism in Romania and the other Member States of the European Union rather demonstrates the inability of tourism products to offer tourists simple, soothing and comforting things

Individuals are seeking for itself a personal response to their desire for emotional and social recognition. They seek first simple emotions in a simple world. Village, nature, countryside rural and sacredness are elements that contribute to customers' dreams.

Starting from the needs and aspirations of tourists, a diagnostic analysis of the Romanian rural tourism can lead to an accurate assessment and targeting new strategies for its development, with direct implications on current and future economy of Romania.

3.3.1. Diagnosis analysis of Romanian rural tourism

Global tourism demand grew for the eighth consecutive year in 2017, as the number of trips to European destinations increased in each of these years. Global tourism demand grew for the eighth consecutive year in

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/vto/country-fact-sheet?geo=RO&time=2016>

2017, with rising travel to European destinations in each of these years². If at the EU level in 2016 the tourism industry contributed with 624.3 billion euro of GDP³, tourism consumption was 112.299 mil. Euro compared to 86.767 mil. Euro in 2011, in Romania it amounts to 1.568 mil. Euro in 2016 of 1,019 in 2011, up 53.87%. Rural tourism consumption accounts for only 18.46% of the total, respectively 290 mil. Euro in 2016 compared to 2011 when it amounted to 137 mil. Euro. The 2011-2016 periods was taken as a milestone when tourism started to recover from the global economic crisis, which has severely affected this industry. As far as the tourist expenses are concerned, they reached 88% of the value of the revenues in the EU in 2016, up by 11.69% compared to 2011. Romania respects the EU-28 trend, registering a decrease of 15.17% in 2016 compared to 2011, but overall the volume of tourism expenditures is very high, reaching 123% of revenues collected in 2016. Reported at the level of rural tourism, the proportions are not respected, with a positive difference in income compared to expenditure.. Also, if we relate both spending and tourism revenues to GDP, in 2016, Romanian tourism has a revenue contribution of 0.9% of GDP compared to 0.8% in the EU28, and 1.1% in terms of expenditure as a percentage of GDP, as against 0.7% as at EU level. On the whole, the contribution of tourism in Romania as a percentage of GDP in 2016 was only 1.5% compared to 2011 when the value of 1.9% of GDP was recorded according to the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC)⁴

Key figures:

Table 1. General Indicators (2011/2016)

Features	Rural area		Other spaces	
The Romanian territory	87,1%		12,9%	
Anul	2011	2016	2011	2016
Receipts from tourism	12%	18,46%	88%	81,54%
Expenditure	15,8%	17,8%	84,2%	82,2%
% of GDP	0,9	0,68	1	0,82

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=File:Travel_receipts_and_expenditure_in_balance_of_payments,_2011%E2%80%932016.png

Offer:

Table 2. Accommodation capacity in tourist structure

Types of tourist accommodation	Evolution 2016/2011 (%)			
	No. structures	No. places	No. structures.	No. places
Year				
2011	1210	20683		
2012	1569	27453		
2013	1598	28775	67,60	80,79
2014	1665	30480		
2015	1918	35188		
2016	2028	37394		

Source: Statistical Summary 2012-2017, Romania, NIS

² European Tourism in 2017: Trends & Prospects (Q4/2017), Brussels, February 2018 ETC Market Intelligence Report

³ <https://www.statista.com/topics/3848/travel-and-tourism-in-europe/>

⁴ World Travel and Tourism Council 2012, 2017

Table 3 Movement of Rural Tourism 2011 and-2016

Indicators	2011		2016		2016/2011 (%)	
	Romanian tourists (thou tourists)	Foreign tourists (thou tourists)	Romanian tourists (thou tourists)	Foreign tourists (thou tourists)	Romanian tourists	Foreign tourists
Arrivals of tourists	33	25	622	51	1884,8	204
Overnight stays	680	61	1256	113	184,70	185,24
Indices of net using the touristic accommodation capacity in operation (%)	13,8		15,1		109,42	

Source: Statistical Summary 2011-2016, Romania, NIS

*** The data exclusively provide indicators of tourist traffic at the level of agro-touristic boarding houses. This is due to the fact that there are no clear statistics in the national database for rural and urban touristic boarding houses

Conclusions:

1. Rural tourism in 2016 compared to 2011 registered a slight increase in both income and tourism expenditure.
2. The tourist offer registered 67,60% of the number of reception structures and of the agro-touristic pensions, compared to 2011, while the number of seats increased by approximately 80,79%.
3. Most tourists who practice rural tourism are Romanian citizens. If in 2011 the percentage of Romanian tourists was 56.89% it reached 91.8% in 2016. The same upward trend is also observed for foreign tourists who have chosen as a tourist destination the rural area, reaching 43.10% in 2016 compared to 8.9% in 2011.
4. Compared to income from rural tourism is an increase of about 53,36% in 2016 compared to 2011, leading to the conclusion that rural tourism is a real chance for Romania's tourism recovery.

3.4. Measures for the development of rural tourism

The opportunity offered to hold a large rural area is an aspect not to be neglected. The extent of Romanian rural tourism, which has seen growth in recent years, leads us to the idea that rural tourism recovery is one of the keys to solving economic and social deficiencies.

Starting from the concept that "no one should be left out" must be taken from the bottom up with a strategy to make major changes and provide an alternative to rural life. Rural tourism should be seen as a political problem. Without a political vision can not develop rural tourism because we must have strategies to capitalize on what is there and to build what is missing.

Also it should be seen as a form of making profit but you must realize that profitability of rural tourism differs from that of a company. If the latter refers to money, for rural tourism we are talking about numbers of people brought in tourist areas.

Target markets, offering diversification by asset value in rural areas (air, nature, food,) not only the life of the village, offering integrated products (accommodation, scenery and services) are all elements that contribute to rural tourism as a permanent anchor viable alternative to the present.

A complete and complex vision of the revival of Romanian rural tourism stakeholders must be based on the following chapters of action: resources, stakeholders, policy and strategy, the integrated system of management of quality, innovative offer, and multiplicative effects of rural tourism.

The variety of natural and anthropogenic elements, their value, and mythology, the sacrum and the Romanian village of Christianity is the invaluable tourist products. The interweaving of these elements of natural and human creation in order to exploit through the creation of new tourist products triggers a comprehensive process of "awakening to life" the Romanian countryside. Romanian village is the scene of a large cultural events, spiritual and material as *Ioan Simion* said "the Romanian village cannot exist outside of history is a living being who lives through people".

Present times require actions to revive and develop the Romanian rural area. Although Romania has a relatively large number of tourists accommodation, a vertically and horizontally development is necessary, but taking into account the elements of sustainability and cultural heritage. Medium sized hostels building, maintaining local architectural elements are measures that should be considered in the development of rural infrastructure. Simplicity needs to lead to a harmonization of rural tourism products in agriculture and crafts, simple things by their existence.

Balanced management of natural resources particularly for the conservation of biological diversity and environmental protection should be priorities in rural life.

These measures should be implemented taking into account the tourist market actors, i.e. operators, tourists, professional organizations, and not least local and national governments. Observe the correct interaction of these actors in creativity and development of rural tourism, taking into account the particular tourists.

Tourists must provide "a story". They are the ones who come to the travel agents if they have what to "discuss" the latter becoming the "trolls" that build the story for tourists.

Currently they have a difficult task, given the poor legislation in the field of rural tourism because are few bridges that help offered by local governments.

It appears necessary to support both practical and efficient by providing a framework based on real and concrete directives and supporting the establishment of organizations that bring together the small entrepreneurs in rural tourism under the same objects and visions.

Public - private partnership appears as a viable solution to this. Policy and rural development strategies must be designed to meet European rural development policy.

Rural areas deserve special attention, that's why at the level of tourist destinations requires a comprehensive approach, focusing on tourist satisfaction and based on principles of sustainable development, namely an „*integrated quality management*" (TQM).

Rural tourism as an integral part of tourism raises problems of identification of the quality requirements. Without a harmonious and an active engagement of all stakeholders involved in rural tourism quality cannot be achieved.

The result can be measured by customer satisfaction and by the social, economic and environmental aspects of tourism activity involved. Activities for achieving quality may be discontinuous because the desired result is temporary expected.

Basic quality characteristics suggest that there should be irrevocable quality criteria that are vital for the consumer, regardless of category or class of product, tourist accommodation or service. These qualities set the

minimum level of consumer protection in the absence of that quality or total quality is impossible to achieve. The lack of such a basic element will significantly reduce the quality of tourist experience.

Authenticity is the determining factor of the quality, the most difficult to achieve due to the subjective component of quality. This factor has a size of competition and marketing. . Authenticity is culturally determined and one of its results is to make your product on the market to be distinct from other similar products. Authenticity must meet consumer expectations. It diminishes the product loses its natural tourist and cultural ties. Thus the cultural heritage acquires new meanings, becoming the pivot of preserving authenticity.

The integrated system of management of quality should be so designed as to take into account the context of tourism, rural tourism strategy in the importance given to quality, leadership and partnerships, initiatives in marketing and development of innovative products, the impact of tourism development in rural areas and the quality of human capital in this area.

In view of the European Union, quality is a concept that customers are satisfied and this satisfaction requires: correct, complete and accurate information; a favorable first impression, meeting with staff travel, obtaining a result as expected, a reasonable price, clear and accurate billing, consistent with what has been consumed; availability to the customer in all cases, priority treatment to customer requirements, tend to achieve levels of excellence.

A sensitive chord in the Romanian rural tourism represents staff in this area. The right and duty to educate it appears as a reality which must be harnessed as a real contribution to the quality of rural tourism. The role of training associations becomes major. All segments of education (from students to seniors between the ages of 40-50 years) should be considered in. The creation of specializations, training centers, adapted to the specific situation of the Romanian rural tourism comes as a solution to an efficient qualification, thus removing unnecessary financial efforts.

Under the circumstances, we consider the role of tourism associations should expand its boundaries and should actively act on behalf of owners of guesthouses, through the organization of regular meetings during which should be discussed and found viable solutions to the problems they face in direct relationship with the customer.

In the present time in Romania, we have noted the efforts of the Ecoturs Association, which is the only one who has managed to develop a system of certification in ecotourism „Eco-Romania” and to implement sustainable tourism criteria at the global level, the situation in Romania. Certification in ecotourism „Eco-Romania” applies to programs offered by tour operators or ecotourism guides (max. 15 participants), of small-scale accommodation in rural and natural areas (eco-lodge). It guarantees a much higher level of service quality and, at the same time, confidence on the international market of ecotourism in Romania.

Having regard to the conceptual elements of quality in tourism and rural tourism, we can affirm that in the rural tourism quality is reflected into safety and security for tourists, tourism product should meet the dream to offer the tourist "a story", there is a fair quality-price ratio, to provide professional services by professionals, and not least to ensure *“the tourist’s smile”*

Another way of approaching the Romanian rural tourism recovery is the innovation in tourism. Starting from the idea that innovation is a creative human activity that generates social progress, innovation in tourism is only the means by which it can achieve real development of the Romanian rural area. Innovative ideas must travel deep into the actual aspects of rural tourism and come with direct solutions for diversification and development.

The creation of tourist products that highlight the cultural heritage of the Romanian rural area, the approach of some less known segments of rural development are elements of the property. According to the author's opinion, from Zakai's assertion that the sacred space is part of the "geographies of mind" (Zakai, 2002: p.71) promoting mental historical geography comes as an innovative solution for the implementation of the

cultural heritage value. According to *Cristian Ciobanu*, (Ciobanu, C., 2011), mental geography is nothing but the world of everyone's mind. In other words, the mental historical geography relates to the location of the mental in our case, in the countryside, old fireplaces of village (the ancient hearths of the village, churches), churches, farms disappeared over time, etc.

Related to the promotion of cultural heritage concerns in diversification and the development of this sector, "new" and "old" has the traditional Organic Producers Association of Mărginimea Sibiului which promotes authentic cuisine. Also the manufacturing work handicraftsmen in pottery, weaving, wood carving and draconomorfi (craftsmen that make masks representing devils) of the Năruja-Vrancea, Săcel-Maramureș, etc. contribute to the preservation of the cultural identity of the Romanian countryside/ rural. Romanians gift to weave joy with anger and grief, to make fun of trouble has led to some popular objects of an artistic gem especially appreciated by foreign tourists. Folk artists transpose their own feelings and experiences in the art they made „masks express my mood and are happy devils" (Vasile Șușca, village craftsmen in Săcel, Maramures)

Create customized tourism products such as "Road dinosaurs" or tourist products to address dark tourism (tourist attractions in Sapanta Cemetery, Bran Castle, Poienari, Snagov monastery where Vlad Tepes is buried, etc), tourism development based on organic products, addressing innovative tourism product sales areas (rural manifestations position at a firm) can influence tourist flows considerably.

But the fact that the Romanian rural area is an European space is also demonstrated by the transnational cooperation project „Wolf: Wild Life & Farmers" (wildlife and rural world). The objective of this innovative project, developed by Local Action Groups (LAGS) in Estonia, Portugal, Spain and Romania, is to make a consultation on environmental, economic and social development between the operators and the communities involved in the issue referring to the coexistence of wildlife, represented by large carnivores such as bears, wolves, and agriculture and livestock (GALs - in Buzau Valley, Vrancea Country, Făgăraș Country).

4. Conclusions

Ethnographic conservation and identity are essential items to relaunch the Romanian rural tourism. Romanian rural tourism is a true pivot of tourist activity with outstanding results such as: certification, classification and attestation of hosts, attempts to organize national connection to international tourism.

Although rural tourism is an opportunity in many regions, including the conditions of its success we can mention: the level of investment and profitability of professionalism in terms of hospitality and integration of local and national networks for marketing and promotion of tourism product, the development of new tourism activities in relation to other local structures.

The deficiencies and shortcomings in the national tourism have affected the rural tourism (lack or imperfection of legislation, training, etc.);

Like any economic activity, tourism represents a combination of negative and positive elements which must be estimated and directed in the sense that you want.

For tourism in rural areas, two important ideas are particularly important: integrated rural development through tourism and tourism are balanced.

Integrated rural development through tourism involves the active participation of the population in tourist reception and animation operations that must be performed under a local development group project.

To avoid damage and keeping a balanced tourism benefits can be provided through a clear concept on the development of local tourism. It lies in the need to provide basic food products directly, avoiding the crowded transport, quality assurance and initiative aimed at creating sustainable financial benefits to the local population.

For Romania, in strict accordance with EUROGITEST strategies it is recommended that:

- a) The development of local chains for rural tourism (an approach is that a large number of local manufacturers as to be practically suppliers of products / services for tourists or tourists owners.
- b) Making feed-back of the tourist experience.
- c) The introduction and widespread use of information technology (IT) in order to achieve a concentration of supply of rural tourism in a particular region or country.
- d) Increasing the role of marketing and promotion, and actual implementation of the concept of umbrella brand and sub-brands.
- e) The intensive and extensive development of professional associations of the skill of the workers in rural tourism sector.
- f) The stimulation activities in rural tourism organizations in providing support providers of products / services for tourists or tourist owners/ for those staying for tourists.
- g) Legislative changes to micro-enterprises, which would support them.
- h) Achieving widespread public-private partnerships.

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