RURAL TOURISM AND SOCIAL-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANIAN VILLAGE

Petru Aurel DARĂU

Universitatea de Vest “Vasile Goldiș” Arad, Romania
Facultatea de Inginerie, Str. Cocorilor, nr. 57
Cod 310426, tel/fax 0257 – 251 566
E-mail: fdi_silvicultura@yahoo.com

Abstract

Rural tourism is an actual and old phenomenon at the same time. The interest for the recovery of the rural environment started to grow beginning with the 19th century, as a response to the stress owned to urbanism and the expanding industrialization. The important aspect is that the rural tourism from our period is different if we refer only to the number of tourists involved which has grown significantly and the tourism which has developed in all types of rural settlements, without being limited to areas of an exceptional beauty.

According to a broader tradition, “rural tourism includes a range of activities, services, arrangements offered by farmers, peasants and local villagers, to attract tourists into their area, action which generates supplementary incomes for their businesses.”

Key-words: Rural tourism, agro-tourism, agro-food products, tourists, peasant households.

Rural tourism expands in extra-urban areas, utilizes lodges and agro-tourist farms for accommodation and catering and has the benefits of an unpolluted environment and the natural or man made tourist attractions. As form of „loisir”, it is practiced for leisure and relaxation, air cure, sports, instruction and education, balneal/spa treatment etc.

In Romanian and foreign literature on rural tourism, the term of agro-tourism is also used, which, through its content expresses better, we believe, the sphere of comprehension, namely an economic activity complementary to
agriculture from a rural locality. As a matter of fact, in Germany and Austria, agro-tourism is practiced only in peasant farms or lodges. But, both forms of tourism are enclosed in the broader notion of “soft” tourism, the one which is practiced without disturbing the natural balance of an area.

Given the variety and the landscape value of the natural environment, the diversity and dispersion historical-cultural patrimony in the territory and especially in the rural area of, this form of tourism includes over 60% of the country’s surface, leading to the dispersal of crowded tourist areas and avoiding the degradation of the environment and of the tourist resources.

Therefore, it contributes to the introduction in the internal and international tourist circuit of various natural conditions and to the development of the traditional and contemporary cultural treasure as well as the entire cultural-historical potential of the rural environment.

Rural tourism does not require major investigations for infrastructural or superstructural developments or for other endowments and does not produce urban agglomeration, like in tourist resorts. Thus, it can become an essential and determinant agent both in the arrangement and rearrangement of the rural environment and in the attainment of the basic function inside the “loisir”, having, in this way, a multitude of development possibilities.

On the other hand, it offers the population with a scanty income the possibility of restfulness and strengthening, of spending its spare time in a vacation or week-end, in the picturesque landscape of the rural environment, from the mountains to the Black Sea’s coastline, or in the wonderful Danube Delta.

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. Later on, 13 villages were homologated, but only two of them became functional: Leresti (Arges) and Sibiel (Sibiu).

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.

The establishment 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 form the country (from 10 districts), in the season of 1995 approximately 1240 of such tourist unites functioned. Legislatively, among others, the no. 145/1994 Law was promulgated in regards to the establishment of some facilities for the development of the rural tourism from the mountain area, Danube Delta and the Black Sea Coastline (Government Order
no. 62/24 August 1994) and the Minister of Tourism Order no. 20/1995, concerning the norms and criteria of classification of the boarding houses and the agro-tourist farms.

In our view the “tourist villages” are rural settlements situated in a picturesque and unpolluted background, which present the following advantages: unaltered ethno-folklore traditions and houses with an architecture specific to an ethnographic area, rustic households (with a certain degree of comfort) which are rented to the tourists, cultural-historical monuments, museums and natural and cultural attractions, that can be used in the development of leisure, endowments of general infrastructure (power supply in the whole area) water and sewerage (almost 80% from the households), commercial, sanitary and telecommunication endowments, easy access to national roads and railways, road network, partially updated.

Complex studies were elaborated at the Ministry of Regional and Dwelling Development, concerning 10 villages, specific to some ethnographical areas, identifying the households that wish to receive tourists and making concrete proposals of tourist resources development (on a isochronal of 100 kilometers) of technical-urban arrangements and endowments, and of organization of the tourism activity and of promotion of the households throughout the locality.

It is considered that households must be promoted in ethnographic areas (if not on the “tourist villages”, which can be reconsidered in this way) because, through the display of the local and regional indigenous traits and of the traditional ethno-culture, Romania’s image in the world becomes clearer.

Tourism development is both an economical and social necessity in the rural environment.

Thus, rural tourism contributes to the economic life of the village 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 potential (for pleasure, trips, etc.).
• as an acceleration factor in the process of enhancing the quality of life in the rural environment.

But, overall, rural tourism by its seasonal and permanent activities should develop in such a way that agriculture should not be neglected, therefore, it should
be, a complementary activity, and craft workshops should not be changed into
boutiques, souvenir shops, or in the worst case in kitsch.

The direct contribution (estimated) of rural tourism to nationwide currency
earnings, to the increase of household incomes, which leads, besides the
employment of the labor force also to an increase in household comfort and,
implicitly, to the fact that the population will benefit from a higher life style. The
technical – urban endowment of agro-tourist farms or boarding houses leads to an
economic development of the settlements (infrastructure, aesthetic appearance,
trade, water supply, sewerage, etc.).

Rural tourism can stimulate the expansion of the activity of other branches
from the rural environment: local industry of agro - food products (dairy and meat
products), the processing of forest fruits, crafts (products for interior decoration of
dwellings or souvenirs for tourists) or small industry and craft thus creating new
jobs.

All these, alongside the development of services (trade, services, and
transport), on which tourists also rely, lead to an increase in labor force but also to
a technical development of the city utilities in that area.

The diversification of activities through rural tourism also has special
implications in the spectrum of social and political life by:

- An increase in stability but also a stint in emigration, thus providing for the
  population.
- Occupational diversification of the rural population, particularly the young;
- Changing age structures and sex according to the new professional
  occupations (retaining young people in the locality, for example);
- Maintaining the existing socio-cultural patterns, folk traditions and local
  architecture;
- The possibility for the most economically disadvantaged social
  strata/sections to benefit from tourism and agricultural resources, the rural
  environment at reasonable prices;
- Ensuring alternative holidays for tourists in general, concomitantly with
  an increase of ones knowledge and appreciation for traditional rural life
- Contribution to education and training the young tourist population, but
  also other segments, given the role of cultural education and widening the
  extent of the knowledge of rural environment in our country;
- an increase in the quality of the lives of the local population but also in the
degree of its training and knowledge, establishing friendly relations
between the locals and tourists, between different localities (Romanian or
foreign) through the contact with tourists coming from areas that are
different from a socio-economical point of view but also from a spiritual
and cultural one
• Creating a favorable external image for Romania, through the contact of foreign tourists with the ethno – culture, and the natural and hospitable atmosphere of the Romanian village.

The development and the promotion of the rural tourism should be aware of the negative impact that it may have on the environment (the disappearance of some fauna and flowers’ species, of some other natural monuments, the overworking and the overtaking of the ecological support’s capacity, the disappearance of some arable and forest lands, an increase in urbanization, etc).

This requires some development and promotion strategies for the rural tourism, on a long term, which should include, among other things, the following:

• the stimulation of the complementary non-agricultural activities, especially through the creation of new economical units, logistics, agro-productive/efficient and through the capitalization on the potential of tourism and agriculture.

• the improvement of the general infrastructure on which the regeneration of the rural economy depends, including the tourism (roads, hydrographical network, sewerage, telecommunications, energy);

• insuring a long term exploitation of all the existent resources (including those which belong to tourism) and the protection of these resources along with the environment, in general.

• the financing of some training and educational programs for the future workers within the rural tourism, handicraft and craft activities’ experts, or in some other kind of complex activities.

The selection of localities specific to Romanian ethnographical areas for a phased financing of some complex improvement projects, for the rural tourism and the identification of funding sources, a more active involvement, for this purpose of the Agriculture, Forests and Rural Developing Ministry and of the Dwellings and Regional Developing.

• managing plans of modern agricultural farms, as an endowment and organization of the activity, but respecting the local architecture and traditions, thus avoiding kitsch, type design or the transfer of the urban constructions into rural environment;

• preparing complex studies to identify tourism and adjacent resources and highlight through managing and endowing projects for the practice of sports, cultural amusement and entertainment, different tourism programs, etc.;

Making a complex frame study concerning the organization of the tourism activities and the necessary endowing for the promotion: accommodation and information office, map-panel showing the locations of the management places, signaling the management places which rent and sigles/abbreviations according to
everybody’s specific agricultural activities, map-panel showing the sightseeing spots from the area and the surroundings.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Romania has high chances of developing a rural tourism that is not only possible but also very necessary in this stage.

The further incomes will lead to the increase of the Romanian village’s civilization level, and the villagers, thru their hospitality, could radically change Romania’s image in the world.

The elaboration of a clear long-term policy is necessary, regarding the development of the Romanian rural tourism, meaning to establish a precise objective and reasonably spaced in time, to which the intern and international financial resources should be lead.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**Rezumat**

Turismul rural este un fenomen actual și vechi în același timp. Interesul pentru refacerea în mediul rural a început să crească începând cu secolul al XIX-lea, ca un răspuns la stresul datorat urbanismului și industrializării tot mai mari. Important este că turismul rural din epoca noastră este diferit dacă ne referim numai la numărul de turiști implicați care a crescut semnificativ și turismul care s-a dezvoltat în toate tipurile de localități rurale, fără a fi limitat la arii de o excepțională frumusețe.

Conform unei tradiții mai largi, „turismul rural include o serie de activități, servicii, amenajări oferite de fermieri, țărani și locuitori din mediul rural, pentru a atrage turiști în zona lor, fapt ce generează venituri suplimentare pentru afacerile lor”.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Turism rural, agroturism, produse agroalimentare, turiști, gospodării țărănești