The Concept of Rural Tourism and Agritourism

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Abstract

Between rural tourism and agritourism there is a whole-to-part, agritourism being one of the components of rural tourism. Agritourism is, however, mostly practiced in relatively isolated areas with a diversified agricultural vocation, which require the assurance of necessities for living through one’s own forces, or where there is a deep specialization, creating monopoly positions with regard to the production of certain appreciated and demanded food products.

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Europe is currently facing numerous issues, out of which we can only enumerate a few concerning the area of rural tourism: the assurance of a harmonious regional development, the difficulty in achieving between economic development and environmental protection, the implementation of rural policies exceeding the framework of agricultural policy and comprising all issues of rural areas etc.

Consequently, in its current phase, agriculture cannot confine itself to providing food for an increasingly numerous and urbanized population, but it must also contribute to the maintenance of a rural environment, which represents an indispensable support for rural tourism. Thus, one can assert that there is no countryside with agriculture and no durable tourism in a degraded environment.

Rural tourism is a topical and ancient phenomenon at the same time. The interest for health recovery in the rural environment began to grow during the 19th century, as a response to stress caused by the expanding urbanism and industrialization. The important fact is that rural tourism in our era is different if we refer only to the number of tourists involved, which has increased significantly, and the tourism that developed in all types or rural settlements, without being limited to areas of an exceptional beauty. (Mitriache et al., 1996)

The notion of rural tourism as a touristy form being carried out in the rural environment is considered to be incomplete because this definition does not include the complexity of this activity and the different forms and acceptations developed in various countries.

According to a broader tradition, “rural tourism includes a series of activities, services, accommodations offered by farmers, peasants and inhabitants of the rural environment, in order to attract tourists to their area, which generates additional revenues for their businesses”.

By this broader concept, rural tourism does not only comprise farm tourism or agritourism, but also activities regarding vacations in the midst of nature, trips to rural areas, as well residential tourism, in which services include, apart from accommodation, also social events, festivities, outdoor recreation, production and sale of manufactured products and agricultural products, etc.

Thus, the term of rural tourism has varied meanings, often depending on the national territory. (Bran et al., 1997)

In Finland, for example, rural tourism usually means the rental of cabins or the supply of services in the rural environment, such as food or transportation.

In Hungary, the term of “village tourism” is used, implying that the only activities and services provided

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In villages are included in this type of tourism, namely: affordable accommodation, involvement in agricultural activities or in other types of local activities.

In Slovenia the most important form of rural tourism is farm tourism, where guests either live with farmer families, or in guest houses, while visiting the farm in order to have their meals or to explore the farmyard.

In the Netherlands, rural tourism means, first of all, camping in farms, where the majority of services provided are route-related, such as: cycling, horse riding/walking etc.

In Greece, rural tourism means accommodation in traditionally furnished rooms, with a traditional breakfast – most often made with homemade products.

In most countries, complementary activities – consisting of restaurants, recreation facilities, organization of cultural and entertainment activities in the national territory – are incipient.

Nevertheless, rural tourism is one of the main priorities of touristy development in many European countries. Romania is no exception; tourism, in general, including rural one, is one of the most important branches of national economy, which aims to develop tourism in the rural environment, in a tight correlation to local economy, as there is a strong connection between tourism and the other branches of local economy, particularly agriculture.

Regarded from this point of view, rural tourism is a particular, more complex form of tourism, comprising both the actual touristy activity (accommodation, boarding house, touristy circulation, programme development, performance of basic and additional services), and the economic, usually agricultural activity, practiced by tourists’ hosts (productive activities of agricultural products processing within the household and commercialization of these products to tourists or through commercial networks), as well as leisure activities.(Alecu et al., 2006)

It can be concluded that rural tourism is generally regarded as including a wide range of elements referring to accommodation, activities, events, sports, rest and recreation, air treatments, instruction and education, treatments in bathing resorts etc., all these being developed in an area characterized as being rural. Consequently, it is a concept including all touristy activities performed in extra-urban areas. Therefore, this “rural” concept does not have the same significance in all countries of Europe.

The main consequence of this aspect appears in connection to the attempt at measuring, for example, the social and economic impact of the development of tourism in rural. The absence of any European agreement on the concept of “rural region” makes it difficult to compare with different countries.

In connection to this problem, Lane Bernard, president of the Rural Tourism Unit of Bristol, England, said: “Does rural tourism feature any special intrinsic characteristics, or is it merely a type of tourism localized in the rural environment? Which characteristics should rural tourism have in order to be truly rural?”

The list of objectives includes: contact with the nature, absence of urban agglomerations, quietness and a non-mechanized environment, personal, direct contact, in opposition to urban anonymity, a sense of continuity and stability, of an old and live history, the possibility of thoroughly knowing an area and the people inhabiting it. Local control and preservation of one’s own identity are, likewise, characteristic of an original rural tourism.

Rural tourism is, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon. For a long time – even decades for many European countries – touristy activities have been practiced in the country either spontaneously, or in an organized manner. The novelty, however, refers to the dimension of the phenomenon in the rural area. This expansion is determined by the existence of two motivations for rural tourism, one being a form of alternative tourism to the traditional (classic) mass tourism.

For this reason, the rural regions of Europe successively include tourism in their future policies of local development.

As part of global economy of tourism, rural tourism is defined as being the touristic valorization of:
- rustic areas, natural resources, the cultural patrimony, rural houses, village traditions, agricultural products;
- trademark products, illustrative of regional identity, which would cover consumers’ needs in terms of reception, food, recreational activities, entertainment and diverse services;
- a durable local development an adequate response to the need for recreation in modern society, in a new city – village social vision;

Although they both act in the rural zone, agritourism and rural tourism are two concepts which, to some authors, represent the same thing, and to others are two different notions.

Practice shows that these categories are identical up to a certain level, they have common denominator, which emphasizes the elements of identity, of
inclusion, as well as the different elements leading to separation and differentiation.

As a whole, rural tourism includes a wide range of accommodation possibilities, activities, events, festivities, sports and pastimes, all of which occur in a typical rural environment. Nevertheless, an accurate definition of the term of rural tourism, which would be unitarily used on the entire European continent, faces numerous specific problems. Such a definition might be the following: “Rural tourism is a concept including all tourist activities being performed in the rural environment”.

Synthetically, rural tourism can be considered as the form of tourism targeting the rural environment, using households and agritouristic farms as structures of touristic reception.

An alternative to the above definition also eludes the geographical aspect: “Rural tourism is a concept comprises touristic activity organized and led by the local population and which is based on a close connection to the surrounding natural and human environment”.

This definition, considered to be more comprehensive and which can be accepted by a majority, lays emphasis on rural tourism with respect to the touristic activity being performed at the seaside, in cities or in winter resorts, places where tourists themselves and the nature of their activity constantly exclude any significant with relations local population constituting the human environment.

Thus, rural tourism is a form of tourism practiced in the rural environment, which uses (as structure of touristic reception) the agritouristic household with all its facilities. This form of tourism is performed in the rural environment, using local touristic resources (natural, cultural and human), as well touristic equipments and provisions, including boarding houses and agritouristic farms. It uses various accommodation spaces: inns and rural hotels, shelters, holiday villages etc, and takes on various forms of sojourn, with a wide scope of motivations: itinerant for transit, with cultural – cognitive valences etc.

Rural tourism is an alternative to traditional, classic tourism, carried out in resorts and touring centers, and to the ‘standard’, industrial touristic supply.

Agritourism is a form of rural tourism practiced in the rural environment which uses (as structure of touristic reception) the agritouristic household with all its facilities. As such, this form of tourism only uses tourist boarding house and agritouristic farms for accommodation and meal provision, benefiting from and unpolluted and picturesque environment, from natural tourist attraction and cultural – historical values, from traditions and customs present in the rural environment. It is the most efficient way of valuating existing local resources in the rural environment.(Bogdan, 1995)

Agritourism is regarded as a more limited concept, making reference to several forms of tourism concerning agricultural activities and/or agricultural facilities. This particular form of rural tourism is organized by farmers, usually as a secondary activity, agriculture remaining their main occupation and source of income. Sometimes, distinction is also made between agritourism and farm tourism, which refers to the use of former peasant households as structures of reception, which can be rented to tourists or arranged as health clubs.

Consequently, the scope of rural tourism includes agritourism or farm tourism activities. Rural tourism concerns all forms of tourism practiced in the rural area, i.e. outdoor activities (horse riding, fishing, hunting, walking or cycling, thermalism, health tourism), knowledge tourism (churches, fortresses, various historical vestiges), tourism for discovering the natural environment (flora, fauna), for knowing and understanding local culture (folklore, folk traditions), gastronomic tourism etc.

The rural space, through its components, meets a wide range of demands: rest and recreation, knowledge, culture, sport exercise, air or water treatments, hunting and fishing, providing agritourism with a large scope of leisure possibilities.

In the Romanian and foreign specialized literature, using the notion of agritourism better expresses its scope, i.e. an economic activity that is complementary to agriculture in a rural settlement.(Istrate et al., 1995)

By this, agritourism is a means of integral valorization of the rural environment, with its agricultural, touristic, human and technical – economic potential.

In can be shown that agritourism displays some features differentiating it from traditional, standard tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

Agritourism is spatially placed in the rural environment, therefore being integrated entirely within rural tourism. This results in the broader scope of the rural tourism concept than that of the agritourism concept, whose scope is more limited.

Both concepts regard a form of tourism which is fundamentally different from classic, commercial
tourism, principally based on hotels and restaurants: the tourist coming to the rural world (settlement or agricultural exploitation) directly enters into contact with this world, with its material, cultural, natural, economic, social values etc.

Rural tourism and agritourism are not only a touristic alternative, but an essential factor of economic development of the rural environment at large and of agricultural exploitations in particular.

REFERENCES