

THE CONCEPTS OF TOURISM, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ECOTOURISM IN THE U.E.

CONCEPTELE DE TURISM, DEZVOLTARE RURALĂ ȘI ECOTURISM ÎN UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ

LUCREȚIU DANCEA*, IULIANA MERCE*

**Agricultural and Veterinary University of the Banat, Timișoara, Romania*

Abstract: *The interest aroused by rural space has increased steadily these last years in the E.U., engendering specific policies. Article 130 of the Basic Treaty of the E.C. stipulates "the necessity of diminishing disparities between the level of development in different regions and back-draw of less favoured areas, including rural ones".*

Rezumat: *Interesul arătat spațiului rural de către Uniunea Europeană s-a accentuat în ultimii ani, generând politici specifice. În articolul 130 al Tratatului de bază al Comunității Europene se prevede necesitatea reducerii disparităților între nivelul de dezvoltare a diferitelor regiuni și a rămânerii în urmă a zonelor mai puțin favorizate, inclusiv rurale.*

Key words: *environmental protection, rural development, eco-tourism, sustainable development*
Cuvinte cheie: *protecția mediului, dezvoltare rurală, eco-turism, dezvoltare durabilă*

INTRODUCTION

Rural development is considered, in the E.U., a basic point of Agricultural Community Policy, particularly from the point of view of labour occupancy. Thus, they aim at applying an integrated policy of sustainable rural development that allows valorising all types of potential in the rural space.

In agrarian modernising strategies, agro-tourism ranges from Austria to Switzerland, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy. Rural space as a central point in the E.U. is considered a very important asset of the whole continental area, its development being beneficial for the whole Union. This area is more and more the focus of specialists as environmental protection campaigns showed the indestructible link between the two, harmony and balance in rural space implying also a proper protection for environment. Nowadays, rural space is considered the most important human life and culture reserve.

Analysis of agro-tourism concept shows it is a complex entity. Thus, to know this concept one should decompose and explain its component parts centring on rural household activities, i.e. agro-tourism ones.

From the point of view of accommodation, of material basis, eco-tourism is defined as a specific activity capable of valorising the excess of accommodation in rural households, prepared and arranged for guests.

From the point of view of activities going on around the rural household, agro-tourism can be defined as the set of goods and services offered by the rural household to persons coming to a rural area to relax, to have fun, to undergo therapy, to practice a hobby, to initiate in crafts, and many other activities specific to the area.

Agro-tourism means valorising natural landscape, lodging offers, and services supplied by rural households and eco-touristy farms with the aim of getting an income. Agro-touristy households get basic incomes from agricultural activities, while part of the incomes are from agro-touristy services.

Existing resources in an agro-touristy household and farm are offered through agro-tourism programmes: traditional menus from natural food and with a high biological value, participating in a series of activities in the household and in traditional customs in the locality and in the area (socials, dances, dedication days, village markets, folklore shows etc.). Agro-tourism should benefit from a management capable of harmonising natural landscape and rural household with the aim of meeting a modern tourist's requirements.

Set and maintained by the demand-offer mechanism and by a proper management, agro-touristy activity ideas to beneficial effects on both the economic and social levels.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Analysing agro-tourism activities in the E.U., we could see there are a few features that have facilitated the development of this activity:

Most states have managed to allow agro-tourism the most important share in the rural area;

- ❖ They have encouraged and promoted the development of rural households;
- ❖ They have granted facilities (credits, financial supports etc.) to rural households starting agro-tourism activities;
- ❖ They have advertised agro-tourism farms and the country-side way of life to encourage tourists to go to the area: thus, they have granted financial support (agro-touristy holiday cheques subsidised by the State or by employer's firms; e.g., Switzerland has issued "holiday certificates" that are purchased with shares in the field of tourism) to urban dwellers willing to spend their holidays in the country side;

E.U. member states also directly involved in agro-tourism by building holiday houses or by remodeling the existing ones (e.g., France and Portugal, where it was done with the help of local authorities), reclaiming dilapidated ones and turning them into modern agro-touristy farms that tourists can rent for shorter or longer periods of time, paying a sojourn fee to the community;

Agro-tourism activity diversified, which resulted in a greater number of tourists;

Particular emphasis was set on national features, on traditions and customs in the rural areas (Austrian eco-tourism identifies with a quiet country side rich in folklore and ethnography; Germany with its famous beer festivals; France with its specific cuisine or with French can-can and cozy pubs; Portugal with old manor houses etc.);

All member States have paid a great deal of attention to sustainability (they have signed protocols meant to protect the environment, to manage deserted places, to treat boundary areas) owners acknowledge in writing the responsibilities concerning the proper care and conservation of the environment);

Agro-tourism in Romania can develop in all rural areas, with particularly favorable conditions in the mountain area, where it can be a professional and economic dimension of mountain households, capable of ensuring labour occupancy and supplementary incomes.

In the period 1968-1975, they introduced the first forms of agro-tourism (after the French model) and they identified rural localities representative from a touristy point of view, selected also from the point of view of their ethno-folkloric and cultural and natural landscape attractiveness value. Thus, in 1972, following a study initiated by the Ministry for Tourism, they identified 118 rural localities whose touristy potential justified their promotion to national and international tourism.

Practice showed the importance of multi-disciplinary teams in decision making to avoid negative effects. In order to identify problems, resources, trends, and needs, one should analyse sustainable development at every level.

Sustainable economic development should aim at accomplishing profitable actions. For most people in rural areas agriculture is their basic activity focusing all economic

activities.

Sustainable ecological development should parallel economic and social development and avoid environmental degradation, as environmental protection should fit the principles of sustainable agriculture. There should be an optimal proportion between technologies, yields, and ecology.

Sustainable social development should warrant human living conditions for all localities and regions. The more prosperous a region, the less negative effects leading to regress will exist. Due to structural changes and lack of alternatives or of economic and social reconversion, there are regions with a good economic potential that has become socially disadvantaged regions. This is a political measure aiming at creating facilities meant to enhance investors or the development of special programmers.

The concept of sustainable development starts from the idea that nature as the only source of life resources should be protected for both our present and future. Because of industrialization, human civilization destroyed its environment - plant and animal species, ozone layer, etc. Man is the only one to be blamed for his greed and negligence that made him disrespect scientific discoveries and misapply them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The most dangerous form of pollution is that engendered by practicing intensive and industrialized agriculture: pollution in agriculture means soil pollution at a great scale and with vast ramifications, including human food. Economic development and growth cannot be separated from ecological ones. Rural inhabitants, i.e. the suppliers of touristy services, and touristy village and touristy product, i.e. the touristy offer, are key elements in rural development, in rural tourism, and in agro-tourism.

Rural tourism and eco-tourism are sustainable forms of valorizing rural space as:

They exploit natural resources and cultural and historical traditions of agricultural and food produce specific to the area;

They produce items representative for ethnography, folklore, and local identity;

They provide local sustainable development answering the needs for recreation of modern society in a social cohesion of the urban-rural type.

Eco-tourism contributes to sustainable development of the rural space through:

The sustainable use of natural and man-made touristy resources (optimal exploitation, development, protection, and conservation);

The maintenance of natural, cultural, and social diversity of rural space;

The integration of eco-tourism in national development design and strategy;

The support for local economies in socio-economic development of the locality, but also in the protection of nature and of cultural and historical assets;

The involvement of local communities in the touristy sector through the support of initiative groups in eco-tourism development and promotion;

The consultation of specialists, of members of local communities in developing agro-tourism and local economy with abide by the governmental and local politics.

Eco-tourism, as a component of rural tourism, has the greatest impact on valorizing local resources, in increasing standard of living and, last but not least, in protecting and conserving natural and man-made environment, within an economic activity based on ecological principles.

The interest of government and of local community is to develop organizational, developmental, and promotional strategies for agro-tourism on both national and international levels, and to involve all economic agents responsible for the well to do of this business.

CONCLUSIONS

I made a diagnosis analysis of potential (natural, social and geographical, cultural and historical, economic and agro-touristy) and I present the eco-touristy offer and favoring and restrictive elements in the development of agro-tourism.

After diagnosis analysis and SWOT analysis of eco-touristy potential we identified the following strategic objectives for the development of eco-tourism in the Banat area:

- ❖ the development of regional organizational conditions specialized in promoting
- ❖ agro-tourism and alternative tourism;
- ❖ the official acknowledgement of areas with a rich touristy potential and the development of county cooperation with concrete responsibilities;
- ❖ the union of efforts in consolidating forms representing genre offers, in which both owners and local councils play a role;
- ❖ the conservation and protection of environment by taking all the measures concerning meadows, water courses, forest limits, etc.;
- ❖ the mending and modernizing of roads and equipment;
- ❖ the setting of population and the control of youth exodus;
- ❖ the development of information and instruction of rural population;
- ❖ the protection, conservation, and rehabilitation of natural patrimony in areas of scientific interest and of cultural and historical patrimony.

LITERATURE

1. BRAN, F., MARTIN, D., SIMON, T., - *Turism rural, model european* Editura Economică București 1997
2. BUCIUMAN, E., - *Economia turismului rural și agroturismului* Editura Pro Transilvania, Alba Iulia 1999.
3. COSTE, I., BORZA, I., ARSENE G.,G., - *Ecologie generală și agricolă*, Editura Orizonturi Universitare, Timișoara, 2001
4. MATEOC-SARB, N., - *Dezvoltarea rurală și regională în România* Editura Agroprint, Timișoara 2002.
5. OTIMAN P. I., - *Agricultura României la cumpăna dintre secolul XX, un secol al deznădejdii și secolul XXI, un secol al speranței* Editura Agroprint, Timișoara 2002.
6. SAMH, H., - *Environmental Interpretation a practical Guide*, Noorth, American Press, Golden Colorado. 2006
7. xxx., *Agenda XXI privind dezvoltarea durabilă*, Rio de Janeiro 1992.
8. xxx., *Conferința Internațională pentru Agricultură și dezvoltare rurală în zonele de munte* 16 - 20 iunie 2002 Adelboden, Elveția
9. xxx., *Dezvoltarea rurală în România. Charta Verde*, MAA, București 1998.