



DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract *With this article I intend to bring to the attention of the reader the opportunity of rural development in general, and rural tourism and partnerships in particular. This solution responds to the current situation rural tourism it's facing, to be characterized further, as the Cinderella of Romanian tourism. Statistically, this form of tourism attracts more tourists each year, especially foreigners, with a considerable increase compared with other forms of tourism. Rural tourism transforms people, some tourists even abandoning their home countries, buying traditional houses in Romania that become seasonal or even permanent residences. The public-private partnership thus becomes a mission undertaken by several stakeholders, being operationalized through a series of objectives that come to support local communities. As so are build the foundations of sustainable and solid tourism, with real chances of success both nationally and internationally.*

Key words:

Rural tourism, rural environment, public-private partnership, local initiatives

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1. Rural tourism, a form of tourism that integrates the tourist in the authentic rural environment

The rural area still retains unspoiled the traditional and spiritual valences, especially ethnographic ones, socio-economic life and the environment, thus enables the rural tourism development, having a great future ahead (Nistoreanu, Gheres, 2010), it being directly related to the other forms of tourism.

Tourism in rural areas, complementary to other forms of tourism, contributes to its support, giving necessary conditions in order to transform circuit tourism into holiday tourism. Rural responds not only to the cultural tourism motivation and knowledge, but also to other modern requirements: *that of leisure in nature, which otherwise found in other countries.*

Inquiries made among the visitors of historical monuments show that the focus is not only on monuments but also on the environment (Erdelli, Gheorghilaș, 2006). This motivation is expressed as a convincing statement of dr. Andre Lwoff (Nobel Laureate): *"When you're an experienced European living in noisy continental metropolises, you get to realize that there in the Upper Country, as you people in Romania call it, you get to know and live that fulfilling feeling of tranquility ... the beauty of the monasteries visited and the ambiance, the peace climate, this is why I thought of settling there.*

I think this is also the idea that animated Prince Charles of Wales (heir to the throne of the United Kingdom) when he invested a significant amount of money in the purchase of several properties in

Transylvania: *"Transylvania is in my blood ..."*. The option of these world-renowned personalities is entirely justified since Romanias' villages are not a tourism product series, the village bears the imprint of the original, novelty and surprise, is one of the richest sources to satisfy its needs, and so the motivation. The main feature of this tourism product before the consumer is the compensation, physical and spiritual, of the deficiencies the accompany, in most situations, life in urban communities.

A first statement accepted by the vast majority of rural tourism world actors - states that *"rural tourism is a concept that includes all tourist activities taking place in rural areas"* (Nistoreanu, Gheres, 2010).

Based on the reasons expressed above, *rural tourism* includes a wide range of ways of accommodation, activities, events, celebrations, sports and entertainment, all being carried out in a typical rural environment. (Erdelli, Gheorghilaș, 2006).

Rural tourism is a form of tourism that includes any tourist activity organized and led in rural areas by the local population, exploiting local tourism resources (natural, cultural, historical, human) and tourist facilities and structures, including guest houses and agritourism farms. According to this definition rural tourism is determined by the following aspects: the existence of rural areas, preserving rural functionality, the preservation of rural infrastructure, preservation of traditional lifestyle, maintaining the specific cultural identity (Stoian, 2001).

Rural tourism has a broader connotation compared with agrotourism, as it includes all travel offers from rural areas (Stoian, 2001).

Rural tourism is that form of tourism that takes place in rural areas and involves harnessing natural and anthropogenic tourist resources of the rural area and the pursuit of economic and social activities that generate benefits for local communities (Surugiu, 2008).

According to the *European Commission*, *rural tourism* is a tourist activity carried out in rural areas, consisting of an integrated offer of relaxation, facing a demand whose motivation is contact with the local environment and networking with local society (Henche Garcia, 2004).

Thus, as from the above definition, the components of rural tourism are:

- deployment in rural areas, meaning that the environment consists of natural landscapes, with predominant agrarian character;
- a complete touristic product, composed of: accommodation, catering, complementary activities, crafts and local products;
- motivation based on the contact with the environment, where the tourist seeks nature, traditional architecture, gastronomy, traditions, folk customs etc.;
- liaising with the local society, which requires communication and participation of the local community.

Rural tourism is a form of tourism that allows the recovery and recreation of the human in his spare time by spending two or more days away from home, on the basis of the economical and cultural context, in villages and rural landscape (Matthew, 2003).

Specific motivations of rural tourism are (Erdelli, Gheorghilăș, 2006):

- return to unchanged nature, motivation applying to all categories of age, sex, socio-professional status, need for conservation, health, physical and spiritual comfort demonstrating that modern man can not break apart of the native way of life and his contact with the tourism environment has echoes in the functional balance mechanism;
- knowledge and temporary adhesion to specific groups belonging to rural areas, of which fall between the patriarchal family, the community housing, the work group, the folklore group. In this framework, the tourist recovers its condition as a member of the community, reputation, prestige, consideration of others and the opportunity to participate in joint creative actions;

- knowledge, understanding, inventing and developing direct contact with pieces of national history treasure, folklore, traditional occupations and folk customs, transform rustic holidays into a genuine process of assimilation of new knowledge and acquire many habits that give tourists personal satisfaction and a sense of usefulness. At the same time, by initiating the tourist in local crafts and traditional trades, he can fully express personal creative skills, getting out of the monotony and routine of daily activities;
- esthetic reasons arising from the need for beautiful, order, purity, harmony, naturalness, which urges tourists to consider themselves privileged for the opportunity to visit the picturesque and charming places;
- curiosity, satisfied by information on traditional hospitality, culinary habits, rituals and crafts of the village;
- rest, air and fruit diet, eating fresh food and occupational therapy;
- sports, hunting, angling, climbing and hiking, which get a genuine note, leaving enough space to initiative, imagination and individual inclinations.

According to consultants in the field of tourism & leisure, rural tourism experiences include: physical experiences and emotional experiences.

Physical experiences/"hardware" - It is the contact with nature and culture combined with personal contact with the locals which makes rural tourism so unique

- See, touch, hear, smell
- Farms and villages
- Unspoiled nature
- Culture: history, heritage, traditional gastronomy
- Local events, festivals, folklore

Emotional experiences/"software"- is based on the principle of sustainability and offers elements of country environment, nature, as well as presenting traditional hospitality and the values of life of the local population

- Feel, sense
- Personal experience of rural lifestyle
- Build memories
- Authenticity

Rural tourism experiences is a mix of physical and emotional experiences. Rural tourism is based on principles of sustainability and offers elements of country environment, nature, as well as presenting traditional hospitality and the values of life of the local population. International trends show that the expectations of authentic experiences is becoming more sophisticated at a domestic and international level.

Impact of tourism on rural areas stems from the fact that:

- tourism activities are carried out in rural authentic areas;
- it benefits of specific spatial and constructive elements, such as workshops, businesses, service areas, direct contact with nature, original cultural heritage, traditional societies and attitudes;
- socio-economic activities take place at a smaller scale;
- being in contact with traditions and customs;
- there is scope for development and careful management, long-term controlled;
- enjoy a wide variety of tourist activities consistent with the complexity of the countryside;
- lead to sustained economic growth by capitalizing on top of existing resources in the territory, improvement of social structures with reducing the level of poverty in rural households, stimulating economic development through enhancement of agricultural raw materials for the benefit of tourists, the revival of old crafts, customs and folklore events.

Rural tourism has a functional structure of heterogeneous services and accommodation, which are offered by specialized staff; requires the deployment of *services with touristic content (accommodation/housing, food, recreation) in rural areas*, other than the usual environment of the visitors, for a period shorter than a year.

The organizational structures of rural tourism, as guest houses, motels, campgrounds, school camps, creative arts camps, holiday villages, camps for environmental activities, etc. are specifically designed in order to achieve these functions, both in terms of using the built and in terms of service. Specialized literature shows the *main structures* of specific rural tourism (Nistoreanu, 2006):

- *holiday Village* - tourist center, consisting of villas or bungalows, for family or individual choice and grouped around common spaces for catering, entertainment and sport. Prices include both accommodation and amusements. The first holiday villages were created in 1947 by the "*Touring Club de France*" and entered the tourist circuit since 1965;
- *tourist stop* - hotel designed primarily for tourists passing through and arranged along a major tourist route or near it; has more than 10

rooms and a regional gourmet restaurant (is very common in France);

- *motel* – originally, the term designating a set of apartments grouped in bungalows, isolated from each other or in the same body of the building, composed of a room with bathroom and a flat car. Located along the road, motels allow motorists to have the car permanently available. Motels differs from hotels in that they do not have staff to the tourist/ customer disposition (self catering), the tourist renting the apartment (room) whose key is given as soon as he arrives and pays the amount requested. Motels conception has evolved rapidly (now the meaning of the word is building with hotel function - accommodation, food - small or medium capacity, usually located outside the settlements and in the vicinity of the road network and the facilities - gas stations, service stations etc. - and designed to provide the necessary services at different levels of comfort, especially for motorist tourists);
- *hotel rustic pavilion* - type of tourist hotel, located in the countryside, bringing together a number of rustic pavilion. Sometimes erroneously is called "*Camp Hotel*";
- *camping* – form of tourism that involves accommodation in tents or caravans, using appropriate equipment, for a more or less prolonged stay. The development of this form of tourism has imposed the introduction of regulations on spatial behavior of tourists land;
- *guesthouses* - reception structures for housing and meals, with capacity between 3 and 20 rooms, operating in independent citizens' homes or buildings, which provide dedicated facilities, tourist accommodation and catering services.

Type and distribution of rural guesthouses in Romania:

Types of guesthouses: 80% - homes of the locals; 20% - are houses built especially for rural tourism.

Owners: 85% are locals; 15% are residents of cities.

Analysis of rural guesthouses in Romania:

Capacity:

- Small (1-3 rooms) - 25%;
- Medium (4-6 rooms) - 40%;
- Large (7-10 rooms) - 23%;
- For groups (11-15 rooms) - 12%.

Guesthouses location:

- 80% of guesthouses are located in mountainous regions and sub-mountainous;
- 85% of communes, villages;

- 10% in small towns (former communes) as: Horezu, Râşnov, Novaci;
- 5% in villages located in the suburbs of cities: Gura Humorului-Voroneţ.

Rural tourism businesses are managed in a family system and include all tourist services in rural areas, which are not related to production activities in the homestead, namely: holidays in households that have lost their main function of domestic homes, stays in holiday homes, private homes (buildings usually have low capacity and a high architectural interest - traditional or artistic - decorated in a reminiscent style of traditional dwellings). Tourists that come to these places want to know the rural traditions, culture and nature, they want to spend their holiday in an intact rural environment, to be offered products and traditional specialities (Surugiu, 2006) (in such business a special attention is paid to food services).

2. Partnership, a source of obtaining competitive advantage for rural areas

In Europe, concerns about this new vision emerged since the 80s, when the external environment actors (local authorities, private companies and foundations, the business community), began to seek new means to promote economic and social development of the regions, especially rural communities. They quickly understood that for a maximum mobilization of resources and achieving substantial results is essential to work in partnership. *(In our country, the partnership contract type is young, in Romania is regulated by Law No. 178 public-private partnership/2010. According to specialized literature, this type of contract should be understood not only, or mainly, as a financing instrument, but as a form of political decision to introduce innovative concepts in the field of administration and open new opportunities for local communities to better meet the needs of administrators).*

As such, was developed and founded the "Local Employment Initiatives" (local initiatives for employment) - ILE designating efforts of the authorities, institutions and local agencies to counter growing unemployment and revitalize local economies. Most initiatives of ILE were conducted in generating jobs.

Common features of successful local initiatives:

- actors do a careful assessment of the local advantages and disadvantages so they could make clear and realistic objectives and strategies;
- key players have entrepreneurship, are visionaries and have resources;
- although tend to be independent, projects that take part in initiatives are grounded in law or shape partnerships,

- no partnerships are identical, they may identify certain common objectives and partners.

Objectives of local initiatives:

- *creation of new businesses* - small businesses are a very important component of the market economy. Many local initiatives try consistently to encourage the creation of small businesses through a variety of methods: advising, training, areas with low rents, financial assistance, tax exemptions etc. Efforts are being made to strengthen entrepreneurship among groups with weak tradition in the development of their business (unemployed, women, youth). Many of these companies will remain small, providing perhaps the job of one person, or limited cooperation, but others will grow and eventually along with new small business can have a significant impact on local occupancy. Assistance and incentives are offered also to existing businesses in order to encourage them to expand and diversify;
- *improving access to finance* - local authorities have created complex networks through which to draw funds from multiple sources: grants for special programs of the government, public agencies, banks and private financial institutions, international funds. They can play a valuable role as simply by updating the information on variable rate grants, loans and subsidies, their conditions and eligibility criteria. One of the fundamental objectives of local initiatives is to encourage new models of private investment - and not replacing public with private investment. Local authorities can intervene on private investment by offering stimulating tax forms, coordinating and providing guarantees or supplementing investment. They can create public/private partnerships to develop credit instruments that provide local businesses with capital relatively low interest rates. Local and regional investment funds can be used to create new companies to help local firms to become competitive (that is an advantage of partnerships – they represent are ways of achieving competitive advantage) and to convince large companies to open local offices. The availability of capital allows old companies to upgrade their production technologies and to adapt production methods to the markets that are rapidly changing;
- *training and retraining* - rapid technical change is now commonplace in almost every sphere of activity, so that training and retraining are a

mainstay practical component of any initiative. The target groups considered will depend on local circumstances, involving the efforts to teach those who left school jobs which are expected to be searched into the future, to retrain redundant workers long ago, in radical crafts different from those needed before and training or relatively inexperienced or new entrepreneurs in business. As with financing, training and retraining programs can benefit enormously from working in partnership. If local initiatives invite members of the local business community and local businesses to participate actively, is less likely to fall into the trap of creating a skilled trades program obsolete or not corresponding to the real needs of the local economy. This is particularly important where redundant workers should be retrained. Not only does it reduce the risk of training with great expense of time and money, a job for which there is no market demand, but at the same time helps companies to look for skilled workers and thus do not need to spend few resources for recruitment and training. The way partnerships are done also contributes to the way instruction is made: through local educational institutions and their staff, through specially designed courses and kept within the firm or agency development etc.;

Local initiatives partners: local authorities; central authority; local development agencies; educational and research institutions; Chamber of Commerce and Industry; others: *trade unions, voluntary organizations, local companies.*

The collaboration and organization of different stakeholders is critical for the Successful Development of Rural Tourism:

- partnerships Between the private and public sector and civil society;
- engage private sector particularly in the development of facilities (man-made facilities, accommodation);
- local Stakeholder Participation is critical;
- regional collaboration is critical as it allows for the development while at the same time diversity leverages Similarities Between different Municipalities;
- support and leadership at the national level;
- include agricultural sector as the main stakeholder

3. Opportunities for rural tourism

Growth Opportunities:

- international trends of Shorter and more frequent breaks
- increased demand for domestic trips "staycation" and "daycation"
- more sophisticated demand: Need for authentic experiences, Need to escape and recharge (active or passive)
- growth of eco-tourism and agro-tourism, Synergies with Rural Tourism

Rural Tourism is the Opportunity:

- diversify of rural economy
- differential: tangibles and intangible
- leverage the natural and cultural resources
- preserve and protect environment (natural and cultural)
- job creation and human resources development
- involve and empower local stakeholders
- collaborate, organize and manage national, regional and local stakeholders
- quality Guarantees (accommodation and leisure facilities)

Partnerships (public-private), attract private investors and international funding

Rural Tourism is a real opportunity to create sustainable economical, social and environmental value

4. Conclusions

Rural tourism is an experience that can not be compared with any other feeling left by practicing other forms of tourism. This represents a sum of physical and mental experiences. For the tourist to enjoy this form of tourism at its true worth and ability, I believe that public-private partnership is the optimal solution for the current rural areas, where a legacy so important but fragile, is transformed by such local initiatives in an opportunity for Romanian tourism. These partnerships can turn into recipes for various local communities and facilitates mainly: new business creation, improving access to finance, training and retraining, which are considered key issues for rural areas today.

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