

## THE IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM ON LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT OF THE BULZ AREA – APUSENI MOUNTAINS

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In the concept of tourist products, the most important component is the human element – the one that organizes and executes turistic programs. Experience has shown that given the increasing competition in tourism linked to almost identical characteristics of some turistic destinations, the commercial success can be assured only through attractiveness of components. This success is increasingly influenced by professional training by the personnel employed in the turistic activity and by the promptitude regarding the tourists' exigency.

The global restructuring process forces national economies to adapt to current conditions in order to maintain their social and economical competitiveness. They adapt by making changes in the rural area but also by changing the methods of utilizing and capitalizing this area.

These changes together with the new ways of spending free time lead to the rapid development of tourism in rural areas. We must take into account another important factor – the technical progress in the field of tourist equipment. These equipments enhanced the tourists' mobility and independence vis-à-vis urban centers.

The transformation of rural areas in tourist centers is realized gradually, either through the initiative of entrepreneurial groups that develop small tourist businesses in order to attract tourists, or by the discovery of the area by visitors which generate demand for tourist activities, demand to which the local community reacts.

The success of tourism depends greatly on the capacity of the region to be a proper host for the rural tourism, on the capacity of planning and implementing development projects, taking into account all the changes that this type of tourism brings for the region, in general, and for the rural households, in particular.

When the economical implications of agro tourism are discussed in the technical literature, authors recur to a simple enumeration of economical effects (many of them being the general consequences of any tourism phenomenon), without trying to appreciate these effects as defining elements of the rural area development policy from the point of view of tourism.

We will name some of these effects: the stabilization of population through the anchorage of the labor force, the creation of new employment opportunities, the diversification of the methods for utilizing the labor force, the multitasking, the promotion and the use of services, the economical support of agriculturists, and the rehabilitation of municipal patrimony, the improvement of the degree of utilizing female labor force, the allurements of new investments.

In the field of rural tourism, the human activity will be more and more dependent on competence, increased individual responsibilities and high efficiency. The tourist system implies decision making the undertaking of responsibilities as close as possible to the location of productive activity (the rural household) – this means the delegation of increased authority to the rural family that supplies tourist services. The conception according to which, in the field of rural tourism, human resources management must be

based on consultancy was overcome because the “players” in this area of activity started developing responsibilities linked to local community and to the environment of the firm, to tourist demands, etc. The variety of problems and activities with which the people working in agro tourism are confronted, are determinant for their competences in a large interdisciplinary area. Together with the increase of rural tourism complexity, of the bigger and bigger issues that this activity generates, the stringent need for human resources to be awarded the proper significance appears.

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Considering that every rural establishment constitutes an entity, with its particularities and specific activities that must only be identified and capitalized, we can state that the appliance of the specialization principle in what concerns the organization and operation of the agro turistic village. This type of area is considered to be adequate for activities as: practicing different sports, horse back-riding, strolling, ridding the bicycle, mountaineering, speleological tourism, sky, fishing, hunting, artistic creation, handicraft, etc.

Beyond the analysis of these economical, social and cultural factors is the availability of the local population to practice agro-tourism. The method of determining of the potential agro-turistic offer of the region was applying questioners; one of ten households was investigated and 95 households were investigated in total (appreciatively 950 households were taken into consideration).

For the year 2000 the situation was as follows:

The results applying these questioners were:

1. Number of rooms in the household?
2. No of free rooms in the households
3. Access to drinking water and sewer system of the households.
4. Willingness to rent rooms to tourists.
5. Willingness to cook for tourists.
6. What percent of products offered to the tourists are manufactured in the household?
7. Are you willing to practice agro-tourism (as a service)?
8. What are your reasons for not practicing agro-tourism?
9. Would you be willing to develop your agro-turistic capacity in the future?
10. What type of organization do you prefer for practicing agro-tourism?
11. What would be the percent of income from agro-tourism in the household income?
12. Do you think agro-tourism can help with the development of the Romanian rural environment?

Apart from these elements it is especially important to analyze the correlations that this questionnaire implies. The fact that from the total households investigated 72.6% households have over 3 rooms and that 88.5% of the households have at least 1 room free demonstrates that a potential for development of agro-tourism exists, potential development based on the abundant accommodation conditions. The majority of households have access to drinking water; the households showing a deficit in what

concerns sewage system and bathrooms inside the house (only 48.4% have a bathroom in the house).

In what concerns the willingness of the population to practice agro-tourism this is rather high – 76.8% were willing to rent rooms and 61% are willing to practice agro-tourism. We must also notice the great percent of people that are willing to cook for tourists; an explanation for this is that most of the population dispose of agricultural products made by themselves which they can put to better use – 71.2% of the questioned households the majority of products from their own production.

Out of a total of 95 households analyzed, just 37 do not want to practice this form of tourism. It is important to underline the reasons for this fact: 61.5% out of the questioned ones point out the lack of knowledge in this field. Even though the lack of knowledge in the field is a reality, 49% of the people questioned want to practice turistic services individually and 33% want the collaboration with a person/ firm that would supply them with tourists. Despite this situation, 91.5% of the people are aware of the fact that agro-tourism generates more positive effects than negative effects for those involved.

The same questionnaire applied in 2005 had the following results: by comparing the analysis of the questionnaires applied in 2000 and 2005 the following can be concluded:

- The percent of households that have over 3 rooms has increased from 72.6% to 74.7%
- The access to drinking water (80%), sewage system (55.7%) and the existence of bathrooms in the house (75.7%) have increased
- The interest and willingness of the local population in the activity of agro-turistic has increased

As to what concerns the availability of the population to practice agro-tourism, it is important to underline the fact that the percentage of the people who claim they do not have enough knowledge in the field has increased (61.5% to 67%); this being an obstacle in practicing this type of tourism. This demonstrates that the local community has become aware of the fact that agro-tourism can not be practiced by amateurs. This can be considered a major problem that the ones involved in the development of agro-tourism must solve (from the national authorities to the local authorities and the firms associated to this field).

Another problem arises because, even though people are aware that agro-tourism must be practiced in an organized form, the percentage of people that want to integrate their activity into the activity of an external agro-turistic company is still low (10%)/ or into the activity of a firm lead by the local community (8%). This contradiction – the lack of knowledge on the one hand and the restraint as to what concerns the involvement of specialized personnel in the field – can lead to un-professional services in agro-tourism and to a failure in the field. An explanation for the increased percent of people that do not desire the association practicing agro-tourism is the lack of trust of rural people into the association process.

Despite this fact, the percent of people that believe more positive than negative effects are generated by agro-tourism – from 91.5% to 94.7%. All these facts lead to the conclusion that the Bulz area is appropriate for the initiation and developing of agro-tourism activity.

The way in which society intervenes in supporting the mountain households is vital; no matter how great the effort the society must intervene to stop the depopulation of these areas. Financial support is the main way in which society can sustain the efforts of the rural population to capitalize in its favor the marginal resources.

The Ministry of Tourism considers conferring consultancy and technical assistance through the help of national and international organizations and associations that are active in this field and through the organization of local, regional and national or international demonstrations (practical activities, seminars) for the suppliers of agro-turistic services.

Those who are responsible for the organizing of rural tourism in a certain area must establish the objectives and the guiding lines of the activities in such a way that the interests of the two parties, the local population and the project managers, should not find themselves in opposing positions. Thus, any development project must be conceived and sustained in three directions: economically – the obtaining of economic results which are positive for the local population and project managers by identifying, developing and increasing the degree of resource exploitation; socially – by settling the population within the villages, increasing the employment rate and returning to several old traditional crafts; ecologically – by avoiding the degradation of the environment, the ensuring of a balanced long term exploitation of resources.

The many-sided character of tourism, in general, and of agro-tourism, in particular, does not allow us to describe it as an industry in the technical sense because this sector does not imply a single specific production or very well defined operational parameters. Its economic dimension cannot be estimated without the intervention of external and internal factors of economic, social, cultural and environmental nature.

Thus, we are dealing with a wide, varied and complex character of the touristic phenomenon which requires a careful analysis. Among the problems concerning rural tourism, which are well known for their negative impact are: the threat to the surrounding environment, the socio-cultural threat, the disturbance of the natural world affecting the balance of the small socio-cultural universe of the rural community; problems related to the planning, local control, public environment and possible partnerships.

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