

THE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCE SUSTAINABLE VALORIZATION BY TOURISM IN THE INTER-ETHNIC RURAL AREA OF SIBIU DEPRESSION

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Abstract

The management of resource sustainable valorization by tourism is always a problem, and this research will try to provide an answer. Our research is based on strategic assessment of rural area for the development of options for sustainable resource valorization by tourism and promoting an evaluation model by involving local communities, enabling selection of the most relevant ones. Thus, it is possible to harmonize the tourism requirements with those of environmental protection and sustainable development, as specified in the Europe 2020 strategy. The complexity of the research methodology, the case study, required the use of numerous methods of qualitative and quantitative research, which made possible to highlight specific elements of the rural area of Sibiu Depression in order to obtain a good orientation of the strategic actions for sustainable development of tourism and agro tourism. The main features are related to the definition of Sibiu Depression as an interethnic area of tourism interest, based on the cultural diversity and on the active involvement of the local community in specific issues. The methodology we have used consisted in bundling the dimensions of life framework in a set of six criteria for analyzing the macro-environment using the PESTEL analysis model. This analysis was complemented by a SWOT one, which has allowed us to combine the endogenous and exogenous conclusions, and enabled us to present the problems and their respective answers. The results contribute to the design of a strategic plan for sustainable resources valorization by the promotion of tourism, backed by the cultural heritage of the Sibiu Depression, an interethnic area, recognized on national and European level.

Key words: management, resources, rural space, sustainable tourism, valorization.

The basic characteristic of the rural economy is well illustrated by the analysis of the land use. In the studied area, two categories are prevalent: farming with a share of 61.2% (2011) which directs rural economy to farming, and 28.5% forests and similar land, that in many areas provide economic diversity by developing rural tourism and agro tourism activities (national strategic framework). Rural tourism and agro tourism activities are growing in Romania's rural economy the past 20 years due to the progressive involvement of specialists, entrepreneurs and local stakeholders. But if comparing this evolution with the tourism potential which characterizes the Romanian rural area, one can see that we are far from its proper valorization (Iagăru R. *et al*, 2014). The issue of sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism is an actual and complex one, occupying a special place in the economic, social or geographic practice. Sustainability of rural tourism and agro-tourism provides in the same time the perpetuation of specific rural values, satisfying both the interests of those providing tourist services, and the requirements of the beneficiaries of tourism services (Mac R. *et al*,

1999). Rural tourism is an effective solution to harmonize tourism requirements with those of environmental protection and sustainable development (Minciu R., 2004). The aim of this paper is to emphasize the orientation towards strategic management as an instrument of development, adoption and implementation of the most relevant policy options for sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism. For this aim, within our research, based also on existing studies and literature in the field of rural tourism and agro tourism, and on the assessment of the state of rural tourism and agro tourism in Sibiu Depression, we have addressed the following research directions: diagnosis of the state of rural tourism and rural tourism; assessing of the potential for sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism; promoting the need for a sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism and for a system of education of entrepreneurs and consumers towards these issues; promoting the importance of development funds and marketing products / services of rural tourism. The major objective of the research is the development and implementation of strategic

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options for sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism in Sibiu Depression. Sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism can be achieved starting from the strategic analysis of the rural area, to determine its specificity in developing and implementing the most adequate strategic options. For this goal, it has been organized a field research whose purpose was to assess the strategic development of rural tourism and agro tourism in the rural areas of Sibiu Depression. Sibiu Depression is situated in central Romania, namely in the south-west of the Transylvanian Plateau and northwards of Southern Carpathians, namely in north of Cindrel Mountains and of Lotrului mountains, having an altitude between 380 and 602 m (Sandu M., 1998).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

To diagnose the condition, and for assessing the potential for sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism, the methodology specialists recommend the parallel and complementary use of quantitative and qualitative methods. These allow "obtaining more knowledge" (Kerekes K. *et al*, 2010), and "forming an overview image and identification of critical factors impacting rural areas" (David F.R., 2009). Specifically, it was chosen the case study as research method, because it has proven its utility and relevance in numerous studies and. The methodology consisted in: secondary analysis of statistical data and of relevant literature (reports, strategies, studies, monographs), PESTEL analysis, respectively SWOT analysis backed by organizing meetings of focus groups that have been attended by local stakeholders and professionals concerned with sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism. We have chosen PESTEL analysis because it is a process for thorough analyzing the components that influence directly or indirectly the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism in the studied rural areas (general external environment) (Garrett B *et al*, 2009). The method comprises analyzing various factors, such as political, economic, social, technological, environmental ones, and allows identifying and understanding legal and macroeconomic forces impacting on the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism. It is an important step in policymaking because it provides the operational and decision-making framework. The argument for SWOT analysis is based on emphasizing the strengths and weaknesses of the researched area, as well as of opportunities and threats respectively, all representing the starting point in preparation of strategies for sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The methods we have used revealed the specificity of the rural area of Sibiu Depression, thus helping to better targeting the strategic options for sustainable development of tourism and agro tourism. The use of PESTEL model highlights some specific aspects of the studied community that allows local actors as forces involved in the development process to better target the development and implementation of strategic options for sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism. The political criterion of macro analysis shows that the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism is driven by the local development strategy, which is politically coordinated through the Common Agricultural Policy.

The economic criterion reveals that rural tourism and agro tourism in rural areas of Sibiu Depression has recorded a continuous increase since 2007, in both the number of units specializing in such activities, (from 64 in 2007, to 77 in 2010, Iagăru R., 2012), and in turnover. The local distribution of the number of enterprises in the studied rural areas shows that most developed communes in this respect are: Șelimbăr, Rășinari, Cristian and Sadu. The social criteria highlights that the inhabitants' role in the development of rural tourism and agro tourism in the studied area is manifested differently, in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Evolution of the population number and economic structure, of education and training has a decisive influence on sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism. In the rural area of Sibiu Depression there is a decrease in the number of inhabitants, excepting Șelimbăr, with an increase of 1300 inhabitants, generally due to the migration of residents from the urban area. The technological criterion underlines the existence in the rural area of Sibiu Depression, of a relatively high level of spending on innovation and of the number of agro tourism and tourism companies, which means a good receptivity to innovation. From these companies, about one third have innovated products, processes, marketing or management methods. With regard to product innovation, this was focused primarily to the company and then for the targeted market. The diagnosis of the environment emphasizes the need to provide a sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism by targeting activities that are consistent with the principles of environmental protection, pollution control and waste management. Considering the overall features of the rural areas of Sibiu Depression, certain relevant aspects for this study are

highlighted:

- The existence of a large number of historical monuments, some of which are affected by pollution.
- The growth of economic activity in all areas.
- The need to promote eco-tourism, because of the scale this economic activity presents in the studied area.
- Concerns on the production of green energy.
- The existence of adequate green areas, both in size, and in arrangement.
- The existence of a relatively high percentage of coverage with sanitation services, but whose practice of collecting household waste collection remains in mixed way.
- The existence in the area of an eco-friendly landfill, located on the territory of the commune Cristian.
- The existence in Cîsnădie of household

waste sorting station serving also the communes Cîsnădioara and Sadu.

The legal criterion highlights the support of the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism by regulating, using a variety of environmental protection, human health and life quality norms.

The obtained information proved to be relevant, but to complete the socio-economic characteristics of rural area of Sibiu Depression we have performed a SWOT analysis. This allows the identification of strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats faced by an organization or territorial unit (Vincze M *et al*, 2009). The obtained information have led to the following display in the SWOT matrix of the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism (Table 1).

Table 1

SWOT analysis

Strong points		Weaknesses	
1	Exceptional tourism potential due to exceptional natural resources (soil, water, forests)	1	Poor knowledge on attracting EU funds
2	Relevant media coverage because local famous personalities (Emil Cioran, Octavian Goga ...)	2	Inefficient public administration
3	Traditional lifestyle and recognized brands	3	Lack of motivation for young people with higher education
4	Advantageous geographical position in the vicinity of Sibiu	4	Irrelevant strategies for developing rural tourism and agro tourism
5	Renown interethnic cultural zone, well-preserved local traditions	5	Irrational exploitation of natural resources that are favorable rural tourism and agro tourism
Opportunities		Threats	
1	Sources of funding for agro tourism and rural tourism	1	Damage tourism heritage through degradation or uninspired management.
2	Sources of funding for non-agricultural activities	2	Low capacity of the stakeholders in attracting development funds
3	Sources of funding for road infrastructure and ITC	3	Poor development of recreational areas and activities outside tourism companies.
4	Close cooperation between the remaining population and emigrants.	4	Lack of action to support entrepreneurship in rural tourism and agro tourism
5	Introduction of certain localities in the network "European Destinations of Excellence in Tourism"	5	Shyness of support and promotion actions for tourism and agro tourism products / services

From the information presented briefly in the SWOT matrix, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- the advantages of sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism are considered the exquisite natural resources (soil, forests, water); geographic position; media coverage; traditional lifestyle; the existence of brands; recognition as interethnic cultural area and the affiliation to relevant touristic networks, respectively;
- the weaknesses of the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro

tourism are the poor skills on attracting development funds; The inefficiency of public administration; lack of attraction of young people with higher education; adoption of irrelevant strategies or inappropriate exploitation of favorable natural resources, favorable (soil, water, forests).

The external environment fully participates in the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism and the SWOT matrix briefly presents its both sides: opportunities and threats.

- The opportunities of sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism are considered the sources of funding for rural

tourism and agro tourism, for non-agricultural activities, and for road infrastructure and ITC. This is supplemented by the possibility of collaboration with immigrants or cooptation of certain communes in successful tourism networks.

- The threats on sustainable development of rural and agro tourism envisage the damage of tourism heritage, the poor development of areas and recreational activities, lack of actions to support entrepreneurship in tourism, shyness in support and promotion actions for tourism on the markets.

The sum of the information provided by the methodology recommends a number of policy options for the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism in the Sibiu Depression, the most relevant being considered as:

- Attracting investment for the development of road infrastructure and information and communication technology;
- Actions to support entrepreneurship in tourism and agro tourism;
- Superior valorization of the favorable natural resources in rural tourism and agro tourism;
- Superior valorization of human potential involved in specific activities of rural tourism and agro tourism;
- Increasing the capacity to integrate specific activities of agro tourism and rural tourism;
- Increasing the involvement of local actors in promoting products / services of rural tourism;
- Development of consulting services on financing entrepreneurship in tourism and agro tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

The socio-economic analysis of rural Sibiu Depression leads to the identification of success factors and shortcomings in the management of tourism and agro tourism activities, namely in their sustainable development. There have also been identified the external factors that favor the development of these activities and those hampering them.

The superior valorization of the favorable natural resources of rural tourism and agro tourism in rural areas of Sibiu Depression is based on a diagnosis of its components.

Attracting investments for the development of road infrastructure and information and

communication technology contributes to increase the interest in consumption of tourism and agro tourism services.

Developing consultancy services on financing entrepreneurship in tourism and agro tourism initiative encourages the sustainable development of rural and agro tourism.

Involving local actors in marketing of products / services of rural tourism has a positive impact on the sustainable development of rural tourism and agro tourism.

Increasing the capacity to integrate specific activities of rural tourism and agro tourism into the rural economy contributes to their sustainable development.

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