

CONCERNS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ECOTOURISM TO A SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The study presents the ecotourism as a part of the sustainable tourism, setting the strong and the weak points of the romanian ecotourism, off. We carried a SWOT analysis out, resulting the elements which may transform the romanian ecotourism market in a reference market for the tourists.

We also present the first ecotourism associations in Romania, as well as The Ecotourism Association Romania, the one which elaborated the basic principles of the present and future ecotourism.

Key words: ecotourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourist principles

Rural areas are very rich as regards the ecological and cultural diversity. Their dimensions and complexity make difficult a generalization of the problems or values, even if some common characteristics exist.

The sustainable development concept is related to an economic growth, meeting the needs of the society – prosperity, on short, medium and especially on long terms. This concept stands on the following reason: the development must be faced with the present needs without endangering the future needs¹.

The sustainable tourism includes all the types and activities of the hospitality industry, as well as the conventional mass tourism, the ecotourism, the cultural tourism, the business tourism, the rural tourism, the cruise tourism, the religious and sport tourism, the urban tourism. The orientation towards the sustainable development is a process which requires the coordination of

the governmental authorities and needs to be sustained by the local authorities.

The sustainability in tourism as well as other industries, includes three aspects: economic, social-cultural and environmental. The sustainable development concerns permanence, it means that the sustainable tourism must use optimal the resources (including also the biological diversity), has to minimize the negative economic, social, cultural and environmental impact and to maximize the benefits of the local communities, the national economies and of the nature conservation. As a normal result, the sustainability concerns also the managerial structures, necessary to achieve these purposes.

The attainment of the sustainable tourism has to be part of the national and regional development plans. These actions may have economic targets (to increase the incomes, to diversify and integrate activities, to control, drive and distribute the development), social aims (to ameliorate poorness and the unequal distribution of the incomes, to protect the social and cultural indigenous patrimony, the participation and involvement of local communities) or ecological purposes (to protect the functions of ecotourism, to

¹ Nistoreanu P., Bobe Magdalena, Stroia A., Negrea M. – „Contribuția ecoturismului la dezvoltarea durabilă a comunităților locale rurale românești”, *Turismul rural românesc. Actualitate și perspective*, Editura Performantica, Iași, 2008, p 53-61

preserve and use in a sustainable way the biodiversity). Some experts prefer to speak about a sustainable development of the tourism, rather than a sustainable tourism. The first includes all the aspects of the development, the second only some aspects and components of the tourism – like aerial transport at large distance, that can't be sustainable, taking into account the actual technological conditions, even using the best practices².

The implementation of the politics and tourist plans represents a responsibility of the govern but also of the private sector. The private sector is responsible for fixing the strategy, the planning and research, the fulfillment of the basic infrastructure, the development of some tourist attractions, for fixing and administration of rules in offering facilities and services, for introducing measures in order to administrate and capitalize a region and to preserve the environment, for fixing the professional standards in tourism specific vocational training, for maintaining the public health and security.

The private sector is responsible for the development of the accommodation services, the tourist agencies, the activity of the firms specialized in tourism and is based on infrastructure, on the development of tourist attractions and on the way they are promoted within the field of marketing.

The political engagement regarding the development of the sustainable tourism is very important, as well as the implication of different non-governmental organizations, more and more involved in the development of the tourism.

Several methods of implementation are used. The logical mounting and the development projects programming are also very important. Within this domain they must exist efficient organizations in the public sector and in the private one, organizations able to assure the protection of the environment as well as the facilities standards for the tourists.

² Glăvan Vasile – *Turism rural. Agroturism. Turism durabil. Ecoturism, Editura Economică, București, 2003.*

The development of human resources in tourism has to be a priority, these must be able to offer high quality services, expected on the tourism market and needs to be approached in a systematic manner (to lay out the demand on human resources and to fix the modality these persons are going to be trained) in order to provide qualified people in the public and private sectors. If national or regional institutions specialized in these kinds of vocational training are not able to provide the demanded people, then a local institution must be established.

Also very important is the usage of marketing methods and know-how: to set up the objectives and marketing strategies and to achieve a promotional program.

The deployment of marketing activities has to take place in the governmental tourism offices, at the local tourism office and in the private sector, the development of a positive image of the new tourism sector is very important.

The Law nr.5/2000 regarding the Development Project of the National Territory - section III Preserved Areas – named 17 sites as natural protected areas. These areas of national interest represent “reservations of biosphere, national or natural parks”, with a surface of 1132175 ha, including 134 natural reservations or natural monument, on 129643 ha.

Beginning with 2007, in Romania 17% of the country surface are natural protected areas: the Biosphere Reservation of Danube Delta on 580000 ha, 13 national parks on 315000 ha and 13 natural parks on 756000 ha. The National Forest Administration ROMSILVA manages 12 national parks (307000 ha, 10 natural parks (540000 ha), more than 200 reservations and natural monuments on 33000 ha³.

According to the actual laws and settlements in this field of the protected areas (OUG 236/2000, L 462/2001, HG 230/2003, Ord.850/2003) ROMSILVA applies for the

³ Toader Tudor, Dumitru Ion, *coordonatori – Pădurile României vol. 1, Parcuri Naționale și Parcuri Naturale, Regia Națională a Pădurilor – ROMSILVA, Editura Tipografia Intact București, 2004*

management of the backwoods national and natural parks, ensuring the necessary resources for a sustainable and maintaining management of these areas, according to the management plans approved by the environmental central public authority.

The management of the national parks ensures the maintaining of geographic and natural conditions, the protection of the ecosystems, the conservation of genetic resources and biological diversity under conditions of ecological stability, preventing and excluding every kind of natural resource exploitation and land using, incompatible with the prescribed purpose⁴.

In the last years most of these areas were included in the ecotourist round trips. They exist independent administrations for the Biosphere Reservation of Danube Delta, National Park Piatra Craiului (a protected area since 1938), National Park Cozia, National Park Retezat (the first in Romania, since 1935), National Park Domogled – Valea Cernei, National Park Rodnei Mountains, National Park Calimani, National Park Ceahlau, National Park Bicașului - Hasmas Canyon, National Park Macinului Mountains⁵, National Park Buila – Vanturarița. Most of them dispose of economic capitalization and tourist programs.

Generally they exist three groups of managerial targets in these parks:

Main targets (conservation of biodiversity, maintaining of ecological functions, tourism and leisure)

Secondary targets (wildlife protection, protection of natural and cultural sights, ecological public education and scientific research)

Potential applicable targets (the sustainable usage of natural ecosystems resources in buffer areas without negative effects on biodiversity).

The custodians, administrators and guides have to operate without tracking while visiting cultural, historical and architectural sights or while crossing woods or other natural areas.

ROMANIAN ECOTOURISM

Strong points:

- Diversity of natural tourist resources
- The rich fauna and flora, including unique species
- The presence of wild areas, unharmed by man
- An undeveloped infrastructure for accessing the protected areas
- The existence of a legal frame, which delimits the natural parks and the protected areas and fixes the rules and conditions for the management of these

Weak points:

- The extending of built up areas near or inside the protected area, the aim is in these cases the development of resorts
- The overexploitation of natural resources, the excessive pasture, illegal woodcuttings, wild trespass or uncontrolled tourism
- The deficient administration of the existing tourist facilities, generating big quantities of wastes
- The deficient abundance by protecting rules, because of the absence of land demarcations, in buffer areas to
- The absence, in some protected areas, of administrations able to run an efficient management

One of Romania's competitive advantage to well known tourist destinations is the maintaining and presence of an unharmed environment. Inside natural reservations there exist a lot of species, stated as natural monuments or endemic species. In Romania we can find regions with flora and fauna species, disappeared in other countries or found out in captivity. Because of the weak development of the classic tourism in some regions, good conditions for the development of ecotourism were created. This means that Romania is able to become an important destination for this kind of tourism.

⁴ Blaj Robert, coordonator – *Arile naturale protejate din Județul Sibiu, Editura Constant, Sibiu, 2005.*

⁵ Toader Tudor, Dumitru Ion, coordonatori. *Pădurile României. Parcuri naționale și parcuri naturale, Regia Națională a Pădurilor Romsilva, Editura Tipografia Intact, București, 2004.*

SWOFT Analysis

Strong points:

- The rich natural patrimony inside national and natural parks
- The rich number of sights included on the UNESCO patrimony list, which are located in parks
- The permanent development of the protected area system
- The existence of the necessary legal frame which allows this development

Weak points:

- The marketing of national/natural parks is reduced especially on regional/local field, that means the ignorance of these sights
- Insufficient market studies
- The low vocational training level (for guides, people who manages these activities)
- The low accommodation capacity inside the protected areas
- Reduced services and leisure offer
- The incapacity of the managers and local communities to understand that this kind of tourism may bring incomes
- The absence of ecological education
- The big wood cuttings and the waste disposal in the areas
- A chaotic buildings layout
- The absence of other types of fuel so that the wood is cut uncontrolled
- The pollution of creeks in regions where there is no drainage

Opportunities

- the increasing number of tourists and demand
- the diversification of the offer by including representative natural sights - Danube Delta, Rodnei Mountains or Retezat Mountains
- to promote natural events from the “Calendar of the Nature” (the call of the stag, the blossom of the snow rose)
- to offer facilities to investors interested in this kind of tourism

Threats

- the international competition

- the superior waste management in other countries
- the urbanization of the country people and the wastage of the cultural patrimony
- the income decrease in this regions as a result of the restraint system of different economic activities
- the development of other tourism types near these protected areas

The first ecotourism associations⁶ were set up in Romania in the XIX – th century: The Transylvanian Carpathians Tourism Society (SKV), The Tripper Circle, The Tripper Guesthouse, The Touring Club Romania, The Academic Tourism Society Romania, The National Tourism Office.

In the presence in Romania exists the Ecotourism Association Romania(AER), based on two international models:

- The Trusted Program on Nature and Ecotourism developed in Australia
- Nature’s Best, the certification system of the Ecotourism Association in Sweden

AER elaborated the following principles to be applied by those who offer ecotourist products and who plans the development of an area based on ecotourism⁷:

1. The ecotourism occurs in the nature and is based on the direct and personal experience of the tourists in the nature.
2. The ecotourism has a large contribution for a better understanding and assessment of traditional nature for the tourists but also for the local communities.
3. The ecotourism offers the best practices for a sustainable development and for the nature conservation.
4. The ecotourism concurs in a positive manner with the natural areas protection. The ecotourism offers practical methods for an efficient management and for the natural area protection (may offer financial support for rehabilitation

⁶ Trască Doru, *Primele Asociații Ecoturistice din România*, 2007

⁷ Matei Elena – *Ecotourism, Editura Top Form, București*, 2006.

actions or contributions for the conservation organizations).

5. The ecotourism offers sustainable contributions in order to develop the local communities. The local benefits derive by using the local guides, consumer purchase or usage of local facilities.
6. The ecotourism needs to reduce the negative impact on the local visited community but also to conserve local culture and traditions. Ecotourist activities offer also contributions on long terms for the local community.
7. The ecotourism must be able to face with all the tourist expectations. The potential tourist is usually high-bred, that's why the satisfying level of his demands is high.
8. The ecotourism marketing has to offer complete and responsible information, able to concern the tourist about preserving the culture and environment.

Our country disposes of the legal frame necessary for the development of ecotourism. This means to capitalize the protected area but also to practice a type of tourism based on ecological principles, adapted to a sustainable development.

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