

THE ROLE OF RURAL TOURISM CONCERNING THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT – CASE STUDY: ARIEȘENI

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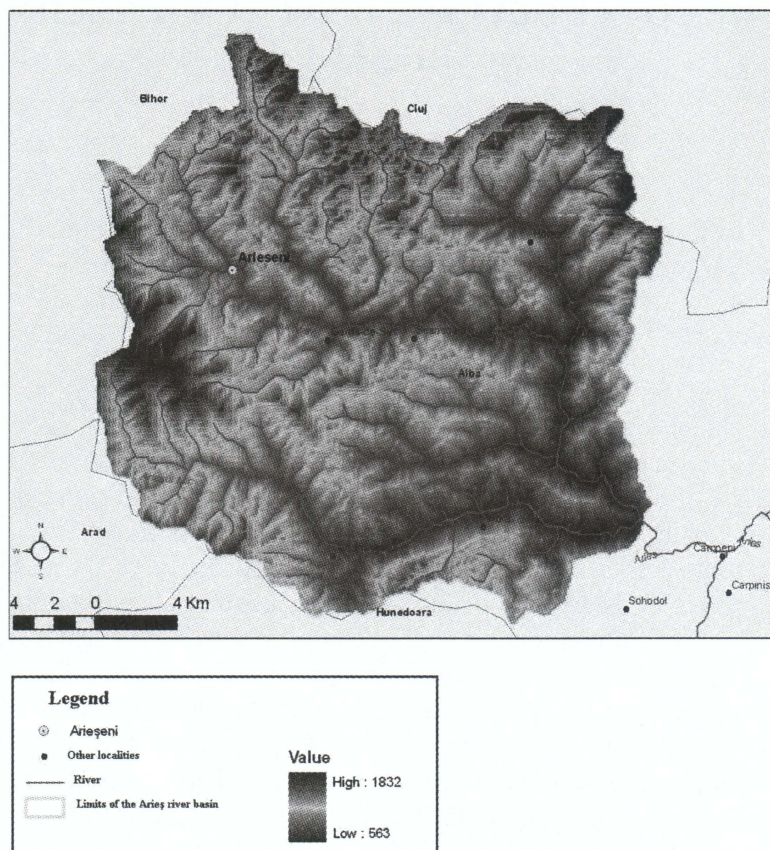
Abstract: The role of rural tourism in local development is increasing due to external factors which influence people's life. In the last century, there can be observed a need of people to relax, to connect with nature, to discover their roots and get away from the daily stress. The answer to all this is rural tourism. Arieseni is a local resort situated in the center of Apuseni Mountains, known as a rural area but also as a ski resort. For many people who live here, tourism is an essential activity besides agriculture. And because the natural and anthropic potential is very high in this area, there are many activities that tourists can do. We can talk about cultural tourism, sightseeing, spending time in nature, visits to the major tourist attractions from the area (caves, waterfalls, and mountains) but also spending time to discover the rural life. Two associations contributed to the development of the rural tourism in the area: OVR (Operation Village Romaine) and ANTREC (Association Nationale de Tourisme Rurale, Ecologique et Culturel) and their actions can still be noticed in the present. The advantages and disadvantages of the rural tourism are also mentioned in this paper. It is known that the tourist activity has its positive and negative aspects regarding the social life of the residents, the environment, and the impact on tourist attractions. Rural tourism can assure a supplementary income for the persons involved in this activity or in some cases it can be the only source of income. It is also a way of preserving the cultural traditions, customs, and beliefs. An analysis (by means of questionnaires) shows the importance that rural tourism has in the development of the area but also how it influences the economic and social activities. The persons with a high education (college) such as doctors, teachers, and engineers were the first who noticed that this form of tourism can help to the development of their village. The local development is possible only if the local people get involved and participate in the development along with local authorities, so the both parts contribute to the community welfare.

Key words: rural tourism, local development, rural area, tourist potential, impact

INTRODUCTION

Arieșeni is situated at the north side of Arieșul Mare hydrographic basin, almost in the center of Apuseni Mountains.

Figure 1. Position of Arieșeni in the Arieș hydrographic basin



The area that includes Arieșeni represents the center of a circle that has on its ray cities such as Cluj, which is located 157 km far from Arieșeni, Oradea, at a 124 km distance, Arad, 233 km far, Deva, 142 km far and Alba, located 119 km from Arieșeni. This fact leads to the transformation of the village of Arieșeni into a tourist attraction, which is located approximately at the same distance from the cities mentioned above.

Arieșeni has a total of 3322 acres, which represents 0.53% of the surface of Alba county, with a population of 1909 residents and a density of 467,6 residents/km². The population is distributed in 18 villages located around Arieșeni: Arieșeni (the central village), Avrămești, Bubești, Casa de Piatră, Cobleș, DealuBajului, FațaCristesei, FațaLăpușului, Galbena, Hodobâna, Islaz, Pantești, Patrahaitești, Poenița, Ravicești, Sturu, ȘteiArieșeni, Vânvucești.

THE BEGINNING OF RURAL TOURISM IN ARIEȘENI ARIEȘENI

The premise of the emergence of rural tourism in this area first occurred during the communist period, when the development of tourism was strongly controlled and seen as a negative aspect by the restrictive political leaders. Yet, there were households that hosted tourists overnight without being registered. Thus, even though rural tourism did not exist legally and officially, it did exist unofficially, a fact that supports the idea that rural tourism in the superior basin of the river Arieș, especially in Arieșeni, has developed continuously starting from the period of the communist period, with its associated restrictions.

The first buildings used as secondary residencies were built towards the end of the communist regime (1988–1989) and were owned by the residents from the area, mostly from the cities surrounding the area: Ștei, Arad, Oradea, Timișoara, Cluj. Once the constructions were finished, the owners came to Arieșeni during their winter and summer holidays. During these holidays they saw the possibility of tourism and the benefits it would bring, which first of all regarded the financial aspect.

The first who succeeded in making profit from their activity in tourism were people with high levels of education, people with university degrees. This fact shows the importance of cultural knowledge when it comes to managing and being well-organized in tourist activities, and the importance of an effective communication with tourists and knowledge of a foreign language. All these aspects contribute to quality of the tourists' holidays.

The local population realized the important role that tourism could play in the development of the village, so they decided to give up their cautious attitude and to concentrate on practicing rural tourism, starting with transforming their own homes into traditional welcoming units, their work being coordinated by the national networks ANTREC and OVR.

Therefore, the advantages of practicing rural tourism manifest, first of all, as a financial aspect, this aspect being one of the most important when it comes to tourism in this area. The fact that by practicing rural tourism, households can improve their income, but, more importantly, that in some situations practicing tourism represents the only source of income in this area lead to the desire to continue the tourist activity and exploit the resources that tourism has to offer. Residents started to realize that practicing rural tourism is an opportunity that deserves to be exploited, because it ensures the income that they need to be able to live a decent life, but they also realized how important tourism is for this area, especially for their residents, since it represents, in most cases, a supplementary income to the family's budget.

The multiplying effect of tourism

The multiplying effect of tourism consists of creating new workplaces, public alimentation units, new types of jobs, which are beneficial mainly to the local community, more activities being emphasized by the fact that a person who is active in forestry can also work as a tour guide or ski instructor, which leads to a diversity of skills that the person must have, but also to additional income from the field of tourism and, implicitly, to a change in lifestyle. Also thanks to the multiplying effect of tourism in conjunction with other factors of financial, social and cultural nature, youth emigration is somewhat halted, especially of those with higher education, to industrial and commercial centers from the area, represented by Cluj, Arad, Oradea and Timișoara, who choose to get involved in the development of the area and in the improvement of the tourist offer.

With the start of rural tourism, a modernization regarding technical aspects and utilities of the village was necessary as well the modernization of the households that practiced rural tourism, a modernization that would respect the conditions imposed by the legislation of tourism and that would respect traditional architecture. The ranger roads that grant access to different natural or anthropic sights were marked and transformed into tourist networks with the attractions that are in areas that are tourist appealing to tourists. The attractions were marked by billboards which indicate that there is a natural or anthropic attraction nearby. The D.N. 75 national road, which is the main road to access Arieșeni through, is maintained during summer, but even more during winter when because of the solid, sometimes even abundant precipitation road traffic can get dangerous.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PRACTICING RURAL TOURISM

The fact that women are more and more present in the management of tourist activities led to the improvement of the unfair situation that women find themselves in the rural area, where their role in the local community is relatively limited, while men have the main role, but as tourism started developing, women have the opportunity to show off their skills, since their coordinating skills of tourist activities is effective.

Increasing the financial income is also an advantage, along with local development, new work places, getting in contact with new people from different cultures and also improving their cultural knowledge.

Obviously, practicing rural tourism in this area does not present only advantages, but a series of disadvantages that deserve to be mentioned and analyzed in order to create an overall image of the benefits and risks that the phenomenon that is tourism, a very ample and complex phenomenon, represents. The existence of

these disadvantages does not have to be taken as a good-enough argument to stop the touristic phenomenon in this area, but rather as a sign that needs to be taken into consideration when tourism strategies are created and that needs to be kept in mind as the negative aspect of tourism in the hope that it can be reduced as much as possible.

One of the main disadvantages of tourism is the impact it has on the environment, which does not manifest itself only by water or soil pollution, which is a big issue in this area, but by changes in the landscape, through the changes in landscape in order to diversify the tourist offer, such as artificial ski slopes for the possibility to practice winter sports, and numerous new buildings that do not respect the traditional architecture of the area, buildings that through their massiveness and color only "pollute" the landscape from an aesthetic point of view and the rustic character of the area.

This is caused by the fact that the initial goal of tourism got out of sight, which was to provide a rural tourist offer and that has turned into being adjusted to the tourists' needs so much that it almost cannot be called a rural tourist offer anymore. This statement must not be taken the wrong way though, because it is very good and even recommended to take the desires and needs of the tourists into consideration, but one must not forget that before the tourists' need comes the fact that this should be a rural tourist offer and should be conceived and handled as one.

Tourism carries with itself an amount of stress on the natural environment, which is caused by the growing number of tourists and leads to the deterioration of sights, especially in the case of caves, the flora and fauna in the area. The local community and authorities must try to diminish this stress on the natural environment through protective measures, such as arranging a pathway for outdoor walks and, when necessary, even implementing a fining system for tourists who break the rules of environment protection. It is important to remember that the natural environment represents the support, the basis for the tourist activity, and its deterioration implicitly leads to the decrease in quality of the tourist activities. For the locals the natural environment represents more than just the support for the tourist activities, it being the support for the whole activity of the entire community. Thus, it is an essential part of tourism, as well as the quality of life. The quality of life depends on the balance between nature and the anthropic environment, a balance that can easily be ruined if its importance is not properly emphasized. The destruction of an ecosystem can have consequences that might not be perceived immediately, but, over time these will become more and more obvious and permanent. So, it is very important to foresee these consequences and to control them as much as possible, in order to prevent an imbalance as a result of the stress caused by the touristic phenomenon.

Hence, tourist activity implies advantages, as well as a series of risks that are sometimes taken without enough knowledge to give a prognosis regarding the

future effects on the area. The local community and the authority must take into consideration both the positive and negative aspects that rural tourism in the area and they must try to diminish parts of the negative aspect, especially those related to the environment, landscape and the esthetics of the area, which are more and more threatened by the tendency of modernization and the people whose only goal is to make profit, not caring about the future of this area. The touristic phenomenon is to be perceived as an opportunity and a threat, the separating line between opportunities from threats being a very thin one, but an essential one for the sake of the balance and the possibility of tourism in the area. Thus, a balance between the advantages and disadvantages is essential, and diminishing the disadvantages is very much welcomed in the context of the expansion and development of tourism in this area, since this has not yet reached its exploitation and development threshold, the disadvantages and advantages becoming more and more obvious. Though, a good management of the tourist activities and the constant concern towards keeping traditions alive, the architecture traditional and caring for the environment will lead to a balance between tourism, traditions and environment, without affecting the landscape or the rural tourist offer of the area.

ACCOMMODATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN ARIEȘENI

Arieșeni has a diverse infrastructure of accommodation which provides a series of complementary services for the tourists, so that they can benefit from the best holiday possible and not be disappointed by their choice, thus the hospitality of the hosts is noticeable from the moment the tourist arrives. The infrastructure of accommodation plays an important role in the tourist offer of the area, since it is a necessity and without it the development of the area would not be possible. The accommodation and communication infrastructure represent basic elements of the tourist exploitation of an area.

The infrastructure of accommodation in Arieșeni, consists of 20 unclassified welcoming units, 17 welcoming units that serve the ski slopes and are intended for winter sports, 10 secondary residencies and 30 welcoming units related to rural tourism – adding up to a total of 77 welcoming units on the surface of Arieșeni.

The 30 rural tourist receptions in Arieșeni can be classified according to comfort categories as following: six 4-daisy pensions, eight three-daisy pensions, fifteen 2-daisy pensions and one 1 daisy pension. Therefore it can be noticed an overweight of 2-daisy pensions, these representing half of the rural tourist pensions in Arieșeni, on the strength of the lack of investments, dissatisfaction, and large scale investment failures.

The services available for the tourists include a wide range of activities auxiliary facilities and other complementary services, all these completing the tourist offer, and offering the tourists an experience-based stay. These services

differ according to the number of daisies, so, as expected, there are differences between the pensions regarding the complementary services, auxiliary facilities and service quality in general.

Rural 4-daisy pensions offer complex facilities, from which the following are mentioned: air conditioning in every room, TV and Internet, refrigerator, room service, fireplace, sports grounds, indoor and outdoor playgrounds, platforms, barbeque, fitness rooms, pool, Jacuzzi, massage, guarded parking, restaurants, and horse caravan or sleigh ride possibilities. All these characterise the 4-daisy rural pensions' offers, which try to diversify their offers according to the own rural trends, but according to the demand as well.

While analysing the 2- and 3-daisy pensions one can notice firstly the lack of sports grounds, fitness rooms, room service and guarded parking but they are still equipped with TV, refrigerator, internet, platforms, restaurants, outdoor barbeques, playgrounds and central heating.

TOURISM TYPES AND FORMS THAT CAN BE PRACTICED IN ARIEȘENI

In Arieșeni, there can be distinguished a wide range of tourism types and forms, whose popularity is in continuous growth among tourists who choose the Arieșeni resort. The efficient exploit and practice of these tourism forms leads to the increase of the popularity of the place and the area, which brings a lot of advantages for the local community with itself. The identification of the tourism types is important as well, regarding the facilities and arrangements which lead to product and offer diversification.

Tourism types in Arieșeni

a) The rest and recreational tourism – is well represented in the Arieșeni resort thanks to various elements, which together lead to this type of tourism. The landscape surrounding the area is one that delights through the diversity of the landforms, the colours and especially the “purity”, being a pristine landscape, without industrial and commercial centres, large cities, or noise, followed of course by the soil, water and air. Arieșeni presents a wild landscape conducive to rest and relaxation, and does not allow you to get bored. It gives the impression that you're back in time, a time long past, but in fact you are in the XXI century, in a corner of the Apuseni Mountains heart. Beside landscape, climatic factors highlights too as in summer the average temperatures are of around 14 ° C in Arieșeni and slightly lower, around 3–4° C on the higher peaks. This provides a particularly pleasant summer when the sun is scorching in the cities, where the air is almost unbreathable, while here the coolness and freshness of the air contributes

to tranquillity, relaxation and recreation. Walking outdoors, wildlife watching and / or bird watching, admiring the landscape are just some of the activities that can be carried out under the rest and recreational and tourism fosterage, whose importance is undeniable in terms of shaping the tourism offer. Among other tourism types and forms that emerge in this area, this type of tourism – rest and recreational has its place well defined and is an advantage to increase popularity in the area, mostly for offer diversification and tourism products.

b) Cultural tourism – although it fills in a secondary position, its capability is characterized by cultural buildings, especially wooden churches dating back to 1791, whose contribution to shaping the cultural heritage attraction is important, these are representing durable evidence of construction over time, the “AvramIancu” memorial house as well, which presents a rich spirituality for the locals. Water mills are cultural heritage, they are to be found in the Cobles village and they also contribute, beside the wooden churches, to creating cultural tourism offer in Arieșeni. But these constructions are not the only representatives of the cultural tourism; one of its components is the folklore of the area and the events that annually attract curious tourists who want to discover traditions and songs. The Folk Festival entitled “Up, up, up in the mountains above” takes place every year in Cimpeni, the cultural capital city of the so called Motilor Land, in July, and each year it attracts tourists from all over the country and abroad being one of the most prominent folk events in the area. A few days after this folk event takes place an even greater festival, on the so called Hen Mountain, bearing the name of “Girl Mart”. This event has its roots back in the past when young men could choose a wife from the girls in the mart, together with their heritage. The name of this event was preserved in time, but its meaning is different, now there are 2–3 days of folk songs and dance shows, gathering people from nearby towns, and from considerable distances or even outside the country as well. But unfortunately, with time, these events tend to be more kitschy, and most people have forgotten the basic meaning of these events, and do not see anything else than a good market opportunity.

Tourism forms in Arieșeni

Practiced and practicable tourism forms in this area are: rural tourism, mountaineering, speleotourism and transit tourism, they all contribute to shaping and diversifying the tourism offer and the importance of these tourism forms refer to the dynamic flows and tourist traffic. Each of this form of tourism has peculiarities and characteristics, advantages and disadvantages, but they all are important to some extent to the development of the tourism phenomenon in the upper basin of Aries, especially for the Arieșeni tourist resort which is the case study of this research.

Analysing each form individually, we try to present their importance for tourism development in the area, especially in the Arieșeni tourist resort.

1. Rural tourism – this form of tourism is mostly represented in this area, particularly in the Arieșeni area. Traditional architecture, crafts, cuisine, traditions and lifestyle of the inhabitants of this land build the rural tourism offer, an offer that has been and continues to be a springboard from which the village has gained a great reputation. Rural households offer the comfort that every tourist needs; especially the hosts want them to be involved in the local community, to participate in the daily activities that take place in a rural household.

Because Arieșeni resort is surrounded by a number of industrial and commercial centres as Arad, Oradea, Timisoara and Cluj, there is an increasing demand for rural tourism in the area as daily stress, pollutants, agitation and congestion in these cities lead to negative energy “overload” in the life of the residents and urge them, when they have a little free time, to “escape” in a natural and rustic world, to forget for a few moments about the big city life and therefore they get to choose from offers in Arieșeni village. But there is another category of tourists who choose the rural tourism offers of these areas, people who have decided to leave the area many years ago and settle in other parts of the country, and now, after a long period of time, choose to return to these places and present these lands to their children and / or grandchildren in which they have lived and what the real rural life looks like. This form of tourism makes the tourist flow to be dynamic in the the upper basin of Aries; the focus falling on the Arieșeni town.

2. Mountaineering – is very well represented in Arieșeni, there exist two ski slopes, located in Vârtop, one of them is called Vârtop slope 1, it has a length of 1,000 m, of medium difficulty and with a height difference of about 240-250 m, and Vârtop 2, which has a length of 450 m, the difficulty level is easy and the height difference is of 101 m, both slopes are fitted with day and night lifts and elevators. Mountain tourism makes summertime tourist flows to meet a very important dynamism, because this form of tourism is one of the most important advantages of the Arieșeni tourist resort. Although rural tourism prevails, mountaineering has an essential contribution to the tourism development in this area.

3. Speleotourism – is strongly represented by caves that are to be found in a great number in the Western area, their number is higher than anywhere in the country. Those which are mostly representing the speleological interest in the area are: Vârtop Glacier, HoancaUrzicarului Pothole, The Two Entrance Pothole, Borțig pothole, Small Coiba Cave, Coiba Mare Cave, GuraApei Cave, Huda Orbului, Hodobana Cave, HoancaApei Cave, PojarulPolitei Cave, PoartaluiIonele Cave, Sub Zgurasti Cave, Altarului Cave, FoculViu Glacier, Scărișoara Glacier. These can be included in a thematic circuit addressing to the speleotourism lovers, who can face challenges in the discovery and exploration of these caves, so the range of activities widens for the tourists who choose this area.

4. Transit tourism – it is represented by the fact that the 75 national road passes Arieșeni, which connects the west side of the country and part from Câmpeni to Turda. The existence of this road has made possible the emergence of this form of tourism, namely tourism transit, which exactly like mountaineering gives some extra credit to Arieșeni regarding the dynamic flow of tourists and tourist traffic compared to other resorts of local interest.

Therefore, all types and forms of tourism presented and discussed above contribute to shaping the touristic dynamism and traffic in the area, and some of them have contributed more or less significant, when referring to the intensity of tourist flows, one thing is certain: all types and forms of tourism for the area which are outlined in the upper basin of Aries, especially in the Arieșeni area contribute to the image of this area, the development of a tourist offer that shows all the strengths of the area, but what is more important, it gives the village a number of advantages in terms of dynamism and tourist traffic and in terms of activity diversity, this is thanks to the forms and types of tourism that can be practiced in the area.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions about the phenomenon of rural tourism are the following:

- Highlights blending of forms of rural tourism, mountain and transit, as a result of advantages that this resort holds, unlike other resorts in the area of local interest;
- Income from the practice of rural tourism in the area Arieșeni are relatively low, their low contribution to the budget of households indicates that rural tourism is a secondary activity, it has only a complementary role, although sometimes it is the only source of income;
- The education level and the cultural capital of the activities in the tourism domain are particularly important, in terms of attracting a high number of tourists, know-how in the domain represents a real advantage, and people who have experience in the tourism management, with higher education, manage to break away from the competition;
- Tourism Associations (ANTREC and OVR) have lost their significance in terms of how to attract tourists, due to the prominence of the growing independence of households tutelage tourist networks, due to the membership fee that had to be paid, but also due to the fact that they received their money late pertain to the tourism services that customers received through these networks;
- The intensity of tourist flows still show low values, over 50% of the households recorded a number between 1-3 nights per day in season, while more than a quarter of the households recorded more than 4 nights per day, which is still a favourable recorded income for the practice of rural

tourism in the near future, if we take into account a number of strategies for its development;

- An overwhelming share (91%) of the households which practice rural tourism want to continue this activity, not necessarily motivated by the income, modest in most cases, realised by the practice of rural tourism, but because this income supplement the family budget, in some cases this tourist activity is the only source of income.

As we figured out, rural tourism has a major role concerning the local development both as economic and social, with positive and negative aspects. It is important for local authorities and population to take care of the welfare of their resort and in this way to develop it together.

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