



Agritourism – Dynamic Factor of the Rural Area Development

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Introduction

The tourism and especially the agritourism are forms of tourism deploying within area, as complementary activities of the agriculture. As an economical activity, it is a source of extra income for the rural population.

The agritourism, on one hand, as an alternative to the classical tourism, with a standard-type offer, turns the agricultural, human and tourist resources within the rural space to optimum account. On the other hand, being a “diffuse” tourism, it does not have any major implications neither in polluting the environment nor in damaging it in any way.

The agritourism, as a form of tourism which uses exclusively the peasant households (agritourism pensions) as accommodation spaces, in its organization and development, involves the village inhabitants and the local authorities as well. For its adequate carrying out, besides of a certain standard of households, it also requires proper technical-civil and infrastructure endowments, commercial equipment entertainment and other further services etc. in this way contributing to the development and evolution of the villages with tourist function.

Generalities

In the local economy as a whole, the rural tourism can be defined as a kind of obtaining benefits by using rural areas by:

- Using natural resources, cultural-historical traditions and values, rural houses, agriculture products etc.;
- Well-known products for regional identity ethnographic, who can cover the consumers needs for accommodation, food, entertainment and various services;
- Lasting local development and as a right answer at entertainment needs in modern society, to a new cohesion town-village.

Although both concepts belong to rural area, the agritourism and rural tourism represent the same thing for some authors and different things for others.

The practice shows that those concepts are similar up to a level, having both similar elements and distinctive levels.

As a whole, rural tourism includes a large variety of activities such as accommodation, events, festivities, sports and entertaining, all in a typical rural environment. But an exact definition of the rural tourism has various specific problems to be used all over Europe.

“The rural tourism is a concept who contains the organized tourism activity and led by local population and who has a close link with natural and human environment at the root”.

This definition – more generous – who can be widely accepted, underlines rural tourism comparing with traditional tourism, in which consistently, the tourists themselves, and their activities have no important links with local population who represents the human environment.

“Agritourism” is a newer concept of European Union, referring to various tourism forms direct linked with agriculture activities and/or buildings who had other initial destinations the for

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agriculture. This specific rural tourism form is sustained by small landlords – usually as second activity – the main activity remaining the agriculture.

So, the rural tourism is a kind of tourism who take places in rural environment, using local tourism resources (natural, economical, cultural and human) and the tourism endowments and equipment, agritourism pensions and farms included. It uses various accommodation forms: rural inns and hotels, shelters, holiday inns, etc. transit, itinerant and other types of tourism.

Rural tourism is an alternative at traditional classic tourism taking place in tourist resorts and centers, and a “standard tourism” offer – industrial type.

Agritourism is a form of rural tourism that uses, for accommodation and feeding, tourism and agritourism pensions only, having an unpolluted and picturesque environment, natural tourism attraction and historical-cultural values, local traditions and habits, farmers hospitality.

The Contribution of the Rural Tourism and Agritourism to Local Rural Economy Development

The rural area, by its components, satisfy a large variety of needs: rest and entertaining, knowledge, culture, sport practicing, air cure or balneary cure, hunting and fishing, giving to the agritourists a large number of possibilities.

The agritourism is a possibility to complete using of natural environment with its agriculture, forest, human and technical and economical potential and it can contribute at rural area development.

Even its elements give this quality:

- tourist consumption takes places in rural environment, where essentials are: pensions and services quality of the farmers, knowing the natural, human, cultural environment, and the originality of tourism product too;
- tourism offer is genuine, different, multiplied in its diversity, organized and led by farmers, who are local people;
- it is a complementary economical activity to agriculture works, not an alternative or a substitute of it;
- it offers to the low budget tourists possibility to rest and entertaining in holidays and weekends in the picturesque rural area, with cultural, educative and specific hospitality;
- it is not necessary to have big investments for infrastructure and superstructure or other endowments;
- it avoids big tourists crowds like at the sea coast and mountain spas/resorts;
- it is a “diffuse” tourism by its specific and divers offer and wide disseminated in spaces: so, apparently, it does not prejudice to much the natural environment and the built one, but...attention – here also have to take care of certain “ecological level” and “psihical level”. This aspect has to fit in the concept of ecotourism, so it has to take into account “the receiving capacity” of the village and surrounding area, specially for longer staying tourists, in summer time (endowments, side services, contacts with local population etc);
- it is not compatible with the mass tourism, who affect the natural environment and cultural and historical heritage by degradation and pollution.

Agritourism can to long time development at local, regional and national level by:

- lasting use of tourism resources (optimum exploitation, preservation, protection);
- maintaining natural, cultural and social diversity of rural area;
- agritourism integration in planning and strategic development at national, regional and, mainly, local level (offer development, promotion and organizing and general and technical infrastructure development as well);
- local economies support the economical and social development of the community and natural and cultural heritage protection (multiplication effect of the agritourism);
- local communities involvement in tourism sector by supporting initiative groups for local tourism offer development and promotion, to protect the environment and cultural

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heritage, and, from here, the role of local organizations of tourism services, in our case Village Rural Tourism Organization;

- consulting the specialists, authorities and local communities members to avoid interest conflicts between governmental and local policies etc.

From the above the result is that the agritourism, as a rural tourism component, has the greatest implication in utilization of local tourism resources and to rise the life standard of the community, in social-economical development of the village and the community in general terms, in an economy based on ecological terms.

That is why, the local community interest is to elaborate an organizing strategy, to develop and promote the rural tourism, agritourism especially, at local level, involving all economical factors who can benefit of it.

Rural Tourism and Agritourism Organizing

The issue of “tourism villages” as base factor in organizing and promoting the rural tourism is approached by Romanian Village Organization (OVR) under PHARE patronage, who elaborated in 1997 an “Agritourism villages development program”, and the main core of it is “Local association for tourism development”. This one should develop a tourism with “support and under local population control”.

The necessity that, in agritourism development strategy, the most important thing should be the tourism local association with the village authority involvement, is because:

- agritourism is a kind of tourism where the human is the essential and central element; human, territory – the village the “tourism product” represent the core elements of the agritourism;
- the local association and the farmers can ensure the attractiveness of this kind of tourism by quality of receiving, natural local environment knowledge, cultural and historical knowledge and product authenticity;
- the participation of local community is strictly necessary join with local tourism association to ensure rural development, in general, and tourism especially;
- the farmers joint helps the offer designing, marketing, promoting and selling them, that could not be possible for one person only;
- the possibility to develop in common more expensive offers like ski tracks, swimming pools, cycling tracks, horse riding alleys, sport grounds etc.
- making resources inventory studies and creating of some special offer, market research studies about agritourism environment impact etc.;
- making programs for forming and improvement of the association members;
- community identity stimulation, responsibility assuming and creativity encouragement and cooperation to assure the agritourism development with local specific;
- preserving and promoting the cultural and historical traditions, ethnic and folklore heritage;
- preserving and protecting the environment, the natural monuments, the artistic and historical monuments;

Taking in account that The National Association of the Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism for the head office and local branches have mainly task to promote the rural tourism, we consider that to right dealing of the issues who implied tourism activity in rural area is necessary to build a 3 level organization (local, county and national). This organization has to include both rural tourism and the agritourism, both to be developed in “tourism villages” and surroundings.

At “Tourism Village” Level

To support the local population in rural tourism development and in “tourism villages”

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organizing and running it can be organized Village Association for Rural Tourism – ASTR, based on free choice, by the farmers who offer agritourism service, but also other persons or companies who offer side services.

The association is non-governmental, non-political and non-profit. This association has the main role to coordinate the economical activities in tourism: reservation, information, promotion, advertising and other services, development etc.

The executive committees are elected by and from the associate members, have an activity plan part of the association general plan.

The president is recommended to be a known person as specialist or a delegate from local authority.

The association, together with local community and/or other associations, foundations, companies can invest in infrastructure, equipment and other objectives to support the tourism and the “tourism village”.

The tourism development plan is included in the general plan of the social – economic development of the village.

The association has its own budget made by tax paid by tourists, fees paid by members, sponsorships, advertising etc.

At County Level

The local associations – ASTR – can join themselves at county level in County Association of Rural Tourism – AJTR, who can have a guiding role in few areas, like:

- guiding in promoting and advertising at county level;
- guiding in accounting, financing, economic and legal areas;
- facilitating experience exchange at county or/and inter-regions level;
- informing about exhibits and fairs in tourism;
- informing about new laws and regulations, other associations offers, news in rural tourism at national and European level;
- representing the local organizations in contact with other similar bodies.

Those AJTR can include, by option, local ASTR and other institutions and associations.

ASTRs can group themselves regionally too, for advertising matters, to inform and/or for investment matters.

At National Level

It may create a National Federation of Rural Tourism Associations – FNATR – with the main purpose to coordinate and guide the whole activity of rural tourism and agritourism in Romania.

Its components can be represented by ASTR, AJTR, ministries, associations, foundations and other national bodies and can be led by a Consultative Committee and a president elected by the general assembly.

The Authorities and Local Communities Involving in the Rural Tourism and Agritourism

The rural tourism and agritourism are making up, as a social-economic activity, who turns to account the material, spiritual and human resources of a rural community and benefits by the services and equipment of it. It appears the necessity that the authorities to be involved directly in organizing, developing and promoting such kind of tourism as a component general activity.

This participation of the communities and the local communities can be dealt by:

- making a joint between authorities and local tourism association, tourism companies and other side services providers who can lead to a more efficient organizing, developing

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and promoting rural tourism/agritourism. In this joint the rural associations and tourism companies have to contribute financially to the realization of the general development of the village (access routes, water supply, hitting, telecommunications and alike). That can be done by using a part of their profit, so a bigger contribution of the tourism to general development of the village with indirect benefic effects;

- developing of a commercial network for supplying and services;
- developing and diversifying the entertaining equipment to fit the local specific;
- developing the infrastructure;
- diversifying the cultural activities, fairs and traditional exhibits;
- supporting the local initiative in handicraft and local traditional art developing;
- creating facilities and supporting pensions agritourism household network;
- building small farms for food producing to supply local market with local products;
- supporting the tourism association to promote and lasting development of rural tourism/agritourism;
- leading the tourism activity and the activities to protect and preserve the environment, natural tourism resources cultural and historical heritage.

The viability of these partnerships proposal is confirmed by the good results in some areas in our country and by the experience in some countries with tradition in the area like Germany, Austria and Switzerland.