

ASPECTS OF THE TOURISM MARKET DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE EUROPEAN RURAL SPACE

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Abstract:

The paper makes an analysis of rural tourism market development with the presentation of the main players in the European rural tourism. The methodology used is based on the synthesis of information from articles and studies published in specialty journals, in Government documents as well as in other development strategies on tourism and rural space. The results of this scientific research study reconfirm that rural tourism promotion and development are based on the existing tourism potential and also on the involvement of governmental and non governmental institutions.

Keywords: tourism market, rural space, development strategy, European Union.

JEL Classification: L83, Q01, R10.

1. Introduction

Rural tourism, agro-tourism and ecotourism are economic activities that significantly developed in the last years, which denotes that they have not been affected by the economic crisis to the same extent as other sectors, like the production sector. Ecotourism development supplies the necessary incomes for the protection of natural areas, which cannot be obtained from other sources.

This ascending trend is due to the growing awareness of the tourism potential generated by a diverse natural and cultural potential, as well as to the utilization of the opportunities provided by the European Funds for investing in tourism infrastructure with accommodation facilities, foodservice, leisure, information and promotion. On the other side, the rural population's migration to towns, the agricultural sector modernization, the changes brought about by competition increase in the rural world through the Community free market enlargement have determined the development of the rural tourism activities, which could relaunch, economically, the villages, could contribute to the infrastructure modernization and could attract different investors, if the inhabitants of the rural areas are adopting a favourable attitude. (Lane and all., 2013)

In the context in which the European states have shown an increasing interest in the positive role that rural tourism could play in their economies through the diversification of the economic activities, job creation, improvement of infrastructure and services for a better life quality in the rural areas, the paper attempts to make an analysis concerning entrepreneurship promotion and development in the European rural tourism.

The methodology used is based on the synthesis of information on the economic and social coordinates of rural tourism in Europe, presenting some of the main players who carry out their activity on this market. For this purpose, articles and studies published in books and specialty journal, in governmental documents have been used, as well as other strategies for entrepreneurship, rural tourism and rural area development. This information is presented under synthetic form.

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2. Common European Programs - support for the rural tourism development

In Europe, *tourism* plays an important role due to its economic and labour employment potential, as well as to its social and environmental implications. The tourism statistics is used in order to monitor not only the tourism policies in the European States, but also in the regional and sustainable development policy. According to a publication of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) entitled “Tourism highlights”, 2014, Europe is a main tourism destination, and five EU Member States (France, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Spain) were among the top ten holiday destinations in the world in 2013. (UNWTO, 2014)

The European tourism has the potential to contribute to labour employment and to economic growth, as well as to the development of peripheral or less developed rural areas. The sustainable tourism presupposes the protection and development of the cultural and natural heritage, from art to local gastronomy and biodiversity conservation, playing a significant role in the development of the European regions. The infrastructure created for tourism purposes contributes to local development, and the created or maintained jobs can contribute to the compensation of the rural or industrial decline.

The *rural tourism* grew in Europe, mainly in the second half of the 20th century. Throughout Europe, week-end getaways or holidays spent in the countryside became a common practice for the lovers of fresh air, nature or green areas.

At European Union level, an important role in the rural tourism development was played by the Common European Programs in support of this field. (Nitescu, 2015)

The program “European Rural Tourism Network”, initiated by EuroGites and Euroter, in association with about 12 rural tourism organizers in 9 European countries, has raised the rural tourism to higher quality standards; this program included three components:

- Providing technical assistance for the design of tourist dwellings networks in the rural areas in Germany, Spain, Hungary, Portugal, Czech Republic and Romania;
- Knowledge of the European market in this field;
- Development of certain information and promotion actions concerning the rural dwellings in each country.

The Program “The Village I love”, organized by Euroter (Tourisme en Europe rurale), which included 51 specific actions from 14 European countries, produced a report in the year 1990, declared “The European Year of Tourism”; the report was published in 2000 copies and was distributed to the administrations and public services, to some European and international institutions, to some tourist organizations and associations and in mass-media; the program elaborated a trilingual publication (English, French, German) presenting the tourism activities that can be developed in the rural areas.

The Program “Rural Lodging” was initiated by “Federation de Eurogites de Wallonic” and had as a scope to persuade the rural owners to renovate and modernize their dwellings and to put them into the service of rural tourism. For this purpose, they created a 9-minute video-clip (“Genese d'un gite”), presenting the positive evolution of a family in the Ardenne area, who, from a modest start, by transforming their old house and practicing tourism activities, evolved into a very modern rural household, providing quality services.

The Program “Interregional Celtic Cooperation” was based on an analysis made in 8 agricultural regions from Spain, France, Iceland and Great Britain, focusing on common history and culture elements; developed in the period 1990-1991, the group who realized this program put into action 49 activities (projects), targeting the promotion of rural and cultural tourism; it had an important role in the initiation of tourism activities in these regions in the period of “dead season” for agriculture and in supporting environment protection.

The program “Data Base on Rural Tourism Services” had as purpose the creation of a computer data bank (Macintosh) to collect data on the quantitative aspects of the tourism services in the rural area, whose organizer was the German Company “Publotechnica SA”; this program included several actions that targeted the harmonization of the available information with the necessary services for the rural tourism, in order to facilitate the relationship between the agricultural land owners and farmers and the tourism agencies (the first pilot region was in Italy, Friuli-Venezia Giulia).

The program “Training Seminar for Rural Tourism Operator” was developed from the initiative of the EU Commission for Agriculture and Rural Tourism, which organized 5 training seminars for the rural operators in the period 1992-1994, where a special focus was laid on women; the seminars presented specific management, marketing, investment planning techniques, for farm equipment and modernization, cost calculation; representatives from Denmark, Ireland, Great Britain, Portugal, Hungary participated in these activities with theoretical and practical role, each developing its own project.

3. The present rural tourism network

All these programs represented a transition from the design phase to practical implementation of many private initiatives. Under these programs, the designed tourism products were correlated to the expectations of potential customers in concordance with the supplier’s economic power. As resultat, *the present rural tourism network has the best organization in France, Austria, Germany and Italy.* (Lane and all., 2013)

France ranks 1st in the EU by the number of farm owners with tourism function due to maximum diversification, organization and promotion of this activity. Since 1970, following the concerns to provide tourism services in the rural area, “Tourisme en espace rural” (TER) emerged, which comprised 4000 tourism villages. The largest part of the French units can be called *country-houses* and are controlled, certified and reserved through the National Federation “Gîtes de France”, as well as other association forms such as: “Logis et Auberges de France”, “Stations Vertes de vacances”, “Relais et Chateau”, “Relais de Silence” etc.

Among the areas where the French rural tourism holds an important position, the following stand out: Haute-Savoie, Herault, Saone, Loire, Cotes d’Armor, Bas-Rhin, Bourgogne, Bretagne, Alsace, etc., where tourists are attracted by the French cuisine (with the butter tartines dipped in the cup of coffee with milk at breakfast, original snail or cheese-based food), by the French wines (white, red, rose or champagne) and mainly by the careful hosts’ hospitality, always ready to do everything to satisfy their visitors. (<http://www.eurogites.org/>)

Furthermore, one should not overlook the price-quality ratio, which is a main concern for each French rural tourism developer. To this, we must also add a “strong attachment to the native region and a certain reluctance to change one region for another”, as well as the authorities’ care to support all these enterprises through loans (agricultural, hotels, village planning) on long term (up to 15years) and small interest (3.5%). All these and some other things (which you can discover only at the respective place) have contributed to the new look of the French tourism in the rural area and to ranking first in tourists’ preferences.

In **Austria**, rural tourism has a long history and it represents an occupation which became profession afterwards, leading to the economic growth of villages.

Growth realised in tourism led to: economic growth of all region, population growth, increased leisure transport and infrastructure development, development of new communication systems, winter sports and not least of urbanization. For practicing rural tourism in Austria there are “resorts” (Erholungsdorfer) for the family holidays. These

types of tourism are attractive also by prices, which are generally small, with differences from one household to another, but observed throughout the year, being reported and entered into “annual supply indicator”. (Ciolac, 2011)

Nowadays, the statistical data place Austria on the second place, after France, by the number of farm owners with tourism function, being supported by the following organizations: the Village Tourism Organizations (VTO) and the Administration Centers of Village Tourism Organizations (ACVTO). (Antonescu and all., 2013)

The Austrian rural tourism units are *the peasant boarding house and the tourism inns*.

The most important position in the rural Austrian tourism is held by the Tyrol Region. The results obtained by the rural tourism in Tyrol area are due to its geographic position, being situated at the crossroad of the North-South and East-West routes, where the traffic is intense, as well as to the Program initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade, suggestively named “The Green Plan”, by which the Tyrol households were granted loans with a long repayment period (15years) and low interest (3-5%).

In **Germany**, the holidays on the peasant farms are very popular; as a result, in 1980, the project “*From the North Sea to the Alps*” was launched, which had in view building up and equipment of 2000 holiday homes with about 10000 rooms. The most developed regions in the rural tourism activity are Schwartzwald and Messen.

The anti-trust laws, the permanent encouragement of small and medium-sized businesses with family capital and supporting the concept “*kinder, kuche und kirche*” (child, kitchen, church) led to special results and increasing promotion of rural tourism.

At present, the rurall tourism is practiced on more than two-thirds of the German rural area, and the tourism endowments are found from North Rhenania, Westfalia, Hessen, Bavaria, Baden, etc. The tourist stays offered in the German rural area bear the smell of beer fests and the colour of the Danube and Grimm Brothers’ stories. These add to cycling, swimming, riding, creative courses, concerts, museums, open air events. (<http://www.eurogites.org/>)

In **Italy**, rural tourism has been developed under association forms. The local, regional tourism associations are strong and operate on the basis of task books that all the members are respecting. In these books one can find the minimal and maximal rates established with the purpose of no price difference for the same service type. Thus, tourists are no longer obsessed with prices, and they are concerned only with what the region is offering to them, for their physical and spiritual satisfaction, discovering:

- the diversity of the cultural traditions and landscapes,
- the food traditions of the Italian cuisine;
- the famous Italian wines;
- the folk dances and songs or the cultivated music;
- the architecture of the different historical monuments;
- the poetry and legends of each place. (<http://wikitravel.org/en/Italy>)

The following Italian regions are famous for rural tourism activities: Piemonte, Lombardia, Trentino, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Liguria, Toscana, Lazio, Ambruzzo, Umbria, Campania, Puglia, Calabria, Sicilia and last but not least Alto Adige. It is worth mentioning that Italy is a great receiver of tourist inflows, and at the same time great tourist outflows leave Italy for the rural tourism destinations in Europe.

In the recent years, *through the opportunities provided by the European Funds for investments in tourism infrastructure with accommodation, leisure, information and promotion facilities, the rural tourism has developed on the whole territory of the European Union*, in areas such as:

- Spain (Granada, Almeria, Malaga, Cadiz, Huelva, Sevilla, Cordoba);

- Portugal (Costa de Lisboa, Costa Verde, Costa de Prata, Montanhas, Planicies, Algarve, Azorele and Madeira);
- Great Britain (Kent, Norfolk, Suffolk, Warwickshire, Wales);
- Ireland (Ballyhourra Country near Shannon, Joyce Country, Irishawen, Unabhan and Carlow Country);
- Luxembourg (Porte des Ardennes, Mullerthal, Moselle).

Merry people and always ready for a party, pragmatic and efficient in showing their good host reputation, well-known for their hospitality can be also found in the rural localities from Greece, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland.

Rural tourism also started to grow in the countries from Eastern Europe, in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, ex-Yugoslavia. The experience of Western Europe has been used in promoting non-agricultural activities in the rural area and the diversification of activities through the assimilation of new entrepreneurial skills, in acquiring new skills and in the delivery of new services for the rural population, which proved to be the main factors contributing to the economic growth and implicitly to the change of mentality and increase of the living standard in the rural areas, as well as to the stability of the territorial, social and economic equilibrium. (<http://www.agritourism.eu>)

4. Conclusions

The present research identified some of the European Programs that provided support to the promotion of the entrepreneurial initiatives in the rural tourism of the European Union Member States, as well as the modality in which the present natural and anthropic potential was put into value by the Member States with the highest number of farms with tourism function – France, Austria, Germany and Italy.

The European rural tourism has reached its present standard through the involvement of the following entities:

- governmental and non-governmental institutions,
- cultural institutions,
- airlines offices,
- official offices in the countries with tourist outflows,
- newspapers, journals, radio shows, television programs,
- posters in public places, prospects and fliers,
- firms participating in fairs and exhibitions.

The rural tourism development was based on:

- economic growth of regions,
- spare time increase,
- development of transports and infrastructure necessary for tourism activities,
- development of communication systems,
- development of winter sports and last but not least – increase of living standard in the rural zones.

The support for the entrepreneurial initiatives in the European rural tourism means:

- investments for a continuous improvement of the quality of accommodation and leisure equipment,
- prevalence of association forms, in which the small-sized family units get economic power,
- tourism packages, which should respect the natural, economic and social integrity of the rural space and ensure the rational exploitation of the natural and cultural resources necessary for the next generations.

Rural tourism has the potential to contribute to labour employment and to rural development, to the development of the less-favoured and remote rural areas; at the same time, it plays an important role in the rural economy, where it represents a significant source of additional incomes through the promotion of entrepreneurial and innovation skills.

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