

IMPLEMENTATION MODES OF TOURISM IN THE ROMANIAN RURAL AREA

1. Tourism – a complex phenomenon

The development of touristic activities in a region including several localities depends on the capacity of the tourism operators to fit out that area so as to meet the motivations and demands of the visitors.

Tourism represents a specific phenomenon of modern civilisation and is related to the life of the human society and hence heavily influenced by it. Appealing to large sections of the society and meeting their needs in different ways, tourism distinguishes itself by its dynamism on both the national and international level. Owing to its complex character, tourism also engages a vast human and material potential, thus having important effects on the evolution of the economy, of the society at large, and also on foreign affairs. The efforts tourism determines and the effects it triggers motivate the interest of the states, governments, and business activities in the phenomenon of the influencing factors, the modes of action, and the peculiarities of the action of economic laws in this domain.

A profitable economic activity, which ought to be encouraged, tourism must be done by professionals. Tourism is not and cannot be neutral from a social and cultural point of view; it involves contacts between different mentalities and societies, yet it may also bring about conflicts; it influences economic practices, work conditions and may have profound effects on the social practices in a particular society. Tourism can also be a source of destruction of culture as it may foster social evils – crime, drugtraffic, alcoholism.

For a long time the trip to the countryside was a joy and a pleasure for those especially attached to that space. Although the motivation is the same, the choice of a holiday in the mountains, at the seaside or in the countryside depends on several options.

The options listed below resulted from the research done by ICT/ The Tourism Research Institute and IMAS/ The Institute for Sociological Research and Marketing:

- rest, recreation, relaxation 62.5%;
- entertainment, fun 28.6%;
- sun, beach, aquatic sports 21.0%;
- winter sports-ski sledging 3.7%;
- excursions, trekking 10.9%;
- the protection and maintenance of good health 16.3%;
- the need for change 4.8%;
- cultural information knowledge 12.3%;
- did not take part in tourism activities (1996) 2.6%.

In our opinion, seeking ways to diversity the demand for rural tourism means to locate the target- groups willing to be involved in such an activity. from this perspective, it seems that the lack of promotion is one of the chief obstacles a potential investor may encounter in the rural area, not to mention the poor state of the infrastrucure, the absence of supportive legislation and funds allocated to diversify the offer.

The problem of accepting tourism as an element of surplus value in the rural areas reflects two situations:

- that of those who wish to be tourists and can achieve this goal;
- that of those who receive the influx of tourists, in this case the village.

2. Social Tourism – a Way of Increasing the Demand for Rural Tourism

Analysing the former situation, we realise that the Romanian rural tourism is mainly one for people with high or very high income. This is the case because prices in this sector are high and undifferentiated. Obviously, rural tourism has several components, some of which require high prices. It is the case especially of holiday residences, luxury houses (huts, chalets, villas) available for rent in the countryside, or of activities that require special, expensive equipment. In our country at least, such elements are present in a too low percentage to actually promote rural tourism.

How could then the implementation of tourism in rural areas be carried on in such conditions?

A possible solution is the social tourism* for those with low and average income.

At the BITS** Congress in Montreal (September 9- 15, 1996) the main topic of the debate was social tourism seen as the most affordable type of tourism for the greatest number of people. This type of tourism is primarily addressed to families with children and low income***, elderly citizens, young people following various forms of education or in their first professional years, as well as to those with disabilities and special needs. It appeals therefore to the middle-classes; this group- tourism (of families, members of associations, or young people) favours social and cultural contacts through non-profit making associations and organisations, and also by promoting life in common (family boarding houses, farm camping, holiday village s).

Social tourism is not mass or elite tourism, it is a universal form**** of tourism, for it appeals to 2/3 of the population, be it tourists and tourism services caterers/ operators. Munkner [1;p.148] recommends another way of carrying out social tourism activities, namely tourism organised on co-operative bases, including services for the old and the disabled.

However European tourism, which in the last decade represented 70% of the world market, has come down by about 18%. This negative trend caused the EU to encourage tourism as a way to make new investments, increase the employment rate and revitalise other sectors of the economy.

As compared with other forms of tourism, social tourism involves a few fundamental prerequisites:

- positive attitudes which should materialise into special hospitality;
- the observance of polite forms of address to children, young people and elderly citizens;
- the development of patience and understanding since these clients may sometimes be rather difficult;
- the encouragement of contacts with the local community; and the interest in the cultural values of the visited places.

* Eversince its foundation in 1963, the International Social Tourism Bureau has defined social tourism as being the whole of the relationships and phenomena resulting from the participation in tourism activities of the low-income strata of society, a participation that is made possible or facilitated by well- defined social measures.

** International Social Tourism Bureau

*** I. Desplanques, Turismul – fenomen complex, în Comerțul modern, nr.6/1988, p.52.

**** Turismul social cu valoare universală, în Tribuna economică, nr.33, 1998.

Some less positive aspects will have to be tackled so that social tourism should spread throughout Europe:

- the bringing together of the various points of view on ways to diversity services for this form of tourism, including the social categories and age groups in focus;
- the expansion of international co-operation (insufficient at present) on both the level of national responsables and international ones;
- the reduction of the fragmentary structural and organisational character of this sector;
- the increase in the competitiveness of this field on the community level, and the poor capitalisation of the touristic potential;
- the incomplete cultural and scientific knowledge and promotion of the touristic phenomenon in its social, economic, and cultural dimension.

Agrotourism may relate social and rural tourism. Economically speaking, it balances the capacity of the village households, thanks to the use of food produced on the farm. When it comes to foreign tourists, this represents a form of "internal" export of agricultural products. The profitability of agrotourism is below that of organised tourism because most of the food comes from the household. Calculations made by some specialists reveal that the prices of meals in agrotourism are 40-50% lower than those in hotel networks. The explanation for this lies in the fact that the price of the food eaten in the agrotourist household includes no commercial tax, VAT, exise, transportation expenses, storage, etc. the eggs, the cheese, the milk, the butter are locally obtained. Unlike touristic services (accommodation) additional, indirect expenses, commissions, overheads, the agrotouristic product is incomparably cheaper.

That is why agrotouristic policies must protect the advantages of the rural tourism by means of tax exemption, the reduction of the general fiscal pressure which leads to the levelling off of prices and the loss of traditional clients (low-income townpeople, foreigners who wish to know the traditions of a particular area, young people in urban areas).

The European Organisation for Economic Co-operation, too, regards as essential the creation of conditions that should make tourism affordable to all those people who were not involved in any touristic activity either because of insufficient money or because of the lack of information or habit.

France has the best social tourism system. The first trade unions appeared in 1880, and the national Tourism Office was founded in 1910. After the adoption of the law on paid vacations, in 1936 there appeared the

first association for popular tourism, and in 1969 the VTT association following the merger of several federations of family boarding houses and popular vacations. All these social tourism organisations propose several types of vacation, with costs depending on family income and the period of the season.

In Germany [2, p.184] for instance every three years each citizen is entitled to a fully-subsidised watering treatment under certain conditions and depending on professional status. It is true that the German union system is highly developed on professional bases and is independent of any political influence. There are many examples of European states running social tourism systems combined with rural or other forms of tourism. For these opportunities to become a reality in our country as well, proper information, adaptation and the creation of conditions are very important.

The promotion of rural tourism can also be achieved by exploiting those artistic and cultural elements that make it attractive.

All over the world tourism is closely related to advertising and the budget allotted for this can be enormous.

In other words, from this perspective, tourism is directly related to national and local decision. The policy of promoting traditional national values without exaggerations may play an important part in the global strategy of including the Romanian touristic offer in the catalogues of big tourism-operators.

Romania's strong points for foreign tourism are the World Heritage Sites of UNESCO (the painted monasteries of Bucovina, and the Danube Delta), the Roman vestiges (Adamclisi, Sarmisegetusa still little known due to the lack of promotion), and the Romanian traditional settlements (visited mainly during the winter holidays).

3. The Village – Receiver of the Tourist Influx

The latter situation we have mentioned is that of those who receive the tourist influxes. This alternative is represented by the complex exchanges between the tourists and the community acting as a host.

In the rural world traditions are better preserved, influencing the social and cultural personality of the inhabitants. It is the case of distinguishing elements, the set of moral, spiritual, and even economic values passed on from one generation to the other. Fortunately, one can still find such values in:

- the respect for the environment and its protection;
- the love for the earth as a source and developing ground for life;
- the preservation of certain moral values;
- the creative spirit manifest in art, economy, etc.

A renowned French ethnographer, Jean Cuisenier, a researcher of South East Europe, expressed his surprise at: "the diversity of the social organisation in Romanian villages and his fascination with the vigour and beauty of a traditional culture that is still alive."

The elements mentioned above influence the social and economic activities in the countryside including the rural tourism.

We must specify that when evoking the touristic strong points of the rural areas we have in view especially the mountainous regions. Without actually intending to exclude the villages in the plains, we must admit that they do not represent a proper alternative to the mountain village, but rather a secondary variable or a test for those who want to experiment temporary integration in varied environments. The only exception is represented by those areas in the plains that are naturally fitted for watering treatment.

We remark that the villages in the plains cannot compete with those in the mountains because of the natural attributes related to air, water, sun, forests, etc. Also, at least in Romania, there is a marked economic difference between households in the mountains and those in the plains. Besides, the ethnographical values, the rustic note are better preserved in the mountainous regions, perhaps because of the isolation of the villages and the more conservative spirit of the inhabitants.

In our view, following the stabilization of the touristic phenomenon, profound changes are taking place in the rural areas, affecting both the social and economic profile of the village and the individuals lives. They have a conspicuous effect in the rural inhabitant both as tourism services offered and especially as receiver of the tourist influxes, as seen in Fig. 1.

Thus the diversification of the scope of business in the rural area together with the transformation of the occupational structure lead to significant mutations in the village milieu, enhancing the necessities and demands for the operational equipment every locality must possess.

As a matter of fact, specialists consider that under the influence of progress and the increasing level of civilisation, one should always take into account the internal organisational transformations in the village life as reflected in:

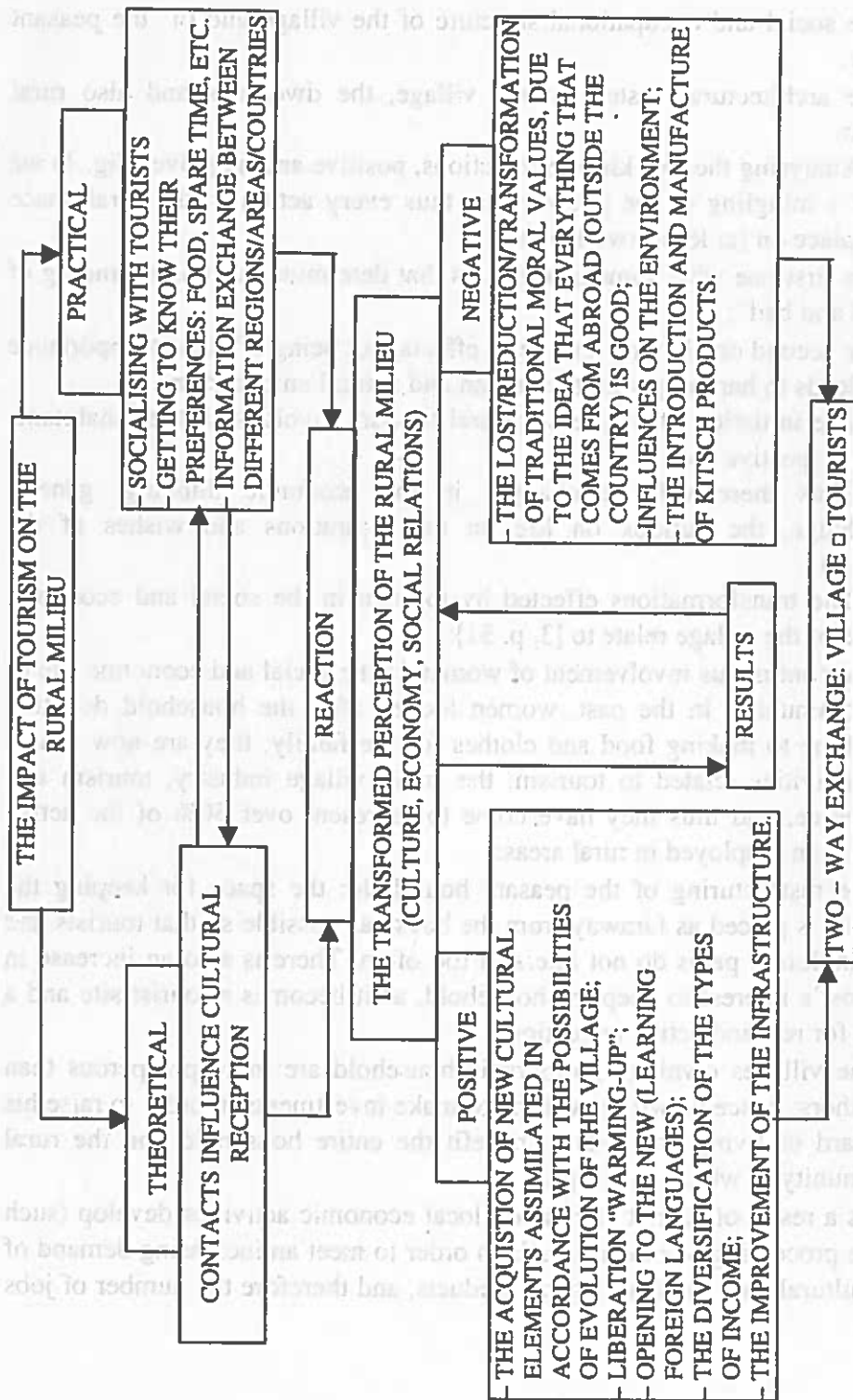


Fig. 1 - The impact of tourism on the rural milieu

- the social and occupational structure of the village and of the peasant family;
- the architectural system of the village, the dwellings and also rural confort.

Analysing the two kinds of reactions, positive and negative (Fig. 1) we notice a mingling of the phenomena; thus every action in the rural space takes place on (at least) two levels:

- the first one with immediate effects that determine our understanding of "good and bad";
- the second one having long-term effects, but being of utmost importance for it leads to harmony with the human and natural environment.

The initiation of business in rural tourism involves all the inhabitants of the respective area.

Thus there will be changes in the economic thinking, general knowledge, the outlook on life, in the aspirations and wishes of the villagers.

The transformations effected by tourism in the social and economic profile of the village relate to [3, p. 31]:

- the continuous involvement of women in the social and economic life of the community. In the past, women looked after the household devoting their time to making food and clothes for the family; they are now drawn into activities related to tourism, the small village industry, tourism and commerce, and thus they have come to represent over 50% of the active population employed in rural areas;
- the restructuring of the peasant household: the space for keeping the animals is placed as faraway from the house as possible so that tourists and the landlord's paths do not intersect too often. There is also an increase in the host's interest to keep the household, as it becomes a tourist site and a place for rest and active recreation.
- the villages owning agrotouristic household are more prosperous than the others; hence he will be willing to make investments in order to raise his standard of living and thus to benefit the entire household and the rural community of which he is a part;
- as a result of tourist circulation local economic activities develop (such as the processing of raw materials in order to meet an increasing demand of agricultural and non-agricultural products, and therefore the number of jobs rises;

- all kinds of services develop which leads to the increase in the level of prosperity of the area;
- the growing touristic circulation will eventually make possible and necessary the modernisation of the local infrastructure.

4. Conclusions and Proposals

We consider it natural to add a few general remarks to these pages devoted to the phenomenon of rural tourism:

- rural tourism represents a dynamic element favouring the long-lasting development of the Romanian contemporary village;
- one can envision a growth in the interest in social tourism, if one takes into account the level of the demographic growth and especially the number of elderly citizens;
- unlike the other types of tourism, social tourism has the advantage of exploiting the whole of the tourism infrastructure and of ensuring a continuous professional formation; it also supports the programmes of recycling, and improving human capacities and resources contributing to maintaining superior competitiveness [4, p. 19];
- long-term assistance and welfare programmes are needed to support social tourism;
- the relationship between social tourism and rural tourism is conspicuous if one correlates the elements presented above; social tourism revives and preserves the traditionalism dominated by communities and collectivities, in opposition to the present development of stark blatant individualism.

We consider that the following proposals with regard to the promotion of rural tourism may sometime become operational:

- the organisation of a series of conferences in the areas having touristic potential;
- the promotion of information through education with the help of the local/regional administration;
- the participation in local traditional events in order to take advantage/profit by new ideas which subsequently by means of promotion, may become attractive elements;
- the creation of a touristic potential by revitalising already existing traditions;
- pinpointing target – groups that wish to take part in rural tourism.

References

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