

AGROTOURISM-SPECIFIC ELEMENTS AND BENEFITS

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Abstract: Rural areas will have to define new, more ecological and recreational functions, increasingly important, being new developmental alternatives for those from the agricultural field. In this context a major role will be played by the development of a multitude of tourism activities in rural areas. Recently, tourism in an environmentally friendly environment is an alternative to traditional tourism, developed in resorts and tourist centers as well as to the standard industrial-type tourist offer. The new in this field is manifested by the expansion of the tourist phenomenon in the rural area. This expansion is explained, on the one hand, by the revival of the development of rural areas and, on the other hand, by the diversification of forms of mass tourism. Therefore, European Union's countries enroll tourism in local development policies in the future, under the specific name of rural tourism. The present scientific paper aimed to highlight representative aspects of agrotourism, with some emphasis placed on the advantages of agrotourism activity.

Key words: agrotourism, features, benefits

INTRODUCTION

Development of rural areas has always been strongly influenced by non-agricultural activities because these have had a complementary function in the rural economy.[2]

Between other potential capitalizing activities of the village's potential has born the idea of blending the traditional activities with those of hospitality and recreation. As regards *rural tourism*, it is not a new phenomenon, accommodation of the tourists in villages being practiced for decades in countries of European Union (EU). In a general manner, tourism in rural area include: agrotourism, ecotourism, business tourism, tourism for young people, social tourism, sports tourism, health tourism, etc. As more and more tourists have expressed their desire to spend spare time in the middle of the nature, market segment has become sufficiently broad to allow his fragmentation into four distinct niches: - ecotourism; adventure tourism; tourism in the wild areas; camping. Tourist experience has shown, over time, that whatever form of tourism practiced, in general results a series of impacts felt both by the society and at the level of natural environment. [13,14]

Being a relatively recent socio-economic phenomenon, the concerns to define rural tourism are relatively sporadic and heterogeneous, they having their source in the interest accorded to this issue by various categories of specialists. In the whole of local economy, rural tourism is defined as a form of tourist capitalization of rural areas by exploiting natural resources, values and cultural traditions and historical, of agricultural products and through branded products (devoted) illustrative of regional, ethnographic and cultural identity, covering the needs of consumers in respect of accommodation, food, recreation, entertainment and various services.

The rural area is the place where rural tourism manifests himself, but also the "supplier" of resources recoverable through such type of activities. Rural settlements that provide unique products on the market are less numerous. Keeping a brand image for tourism services requires an optimal balance between the nature of the offer, quality of services and price. Rural area offer, a lot of profitable tourist elements: guesthouses, hostels, campsites and farmhouses accommodation can support a wide range of activities such as pedestrian walks, cultural tourism, river tourism, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, winter sports, cycling etc.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors of the paper were used as methods of work: data collection, processing, analysis, observation and their interpretation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In its evolution, agrotourism had periods of growth but also declining. The fact is that it was never endangered. Forms of agrotourism known currently the most powerful soar until now, due to the desire for freedom and the lack of rigid programs. Developed as complementary activities, forms of agrotourism do not break the balance of peasant life, do not cause the disappearance of existing activities until then, but allow the superior capitalization of the obtained products and implicitly their development, together with the appearance of others.

As far as the definition of agrotourism, it is based on the need to find solutions for the rural households, in order to increase the incomes by capitalizing on their economic potential, developing the services of hosting and capitalizing on their own and local products. From this fundamental necessity can be formulated different concepts or derived definitions that characterize agrotourism on specialized segments. Agrotourism has some features: [3,4,5,6,8,10]

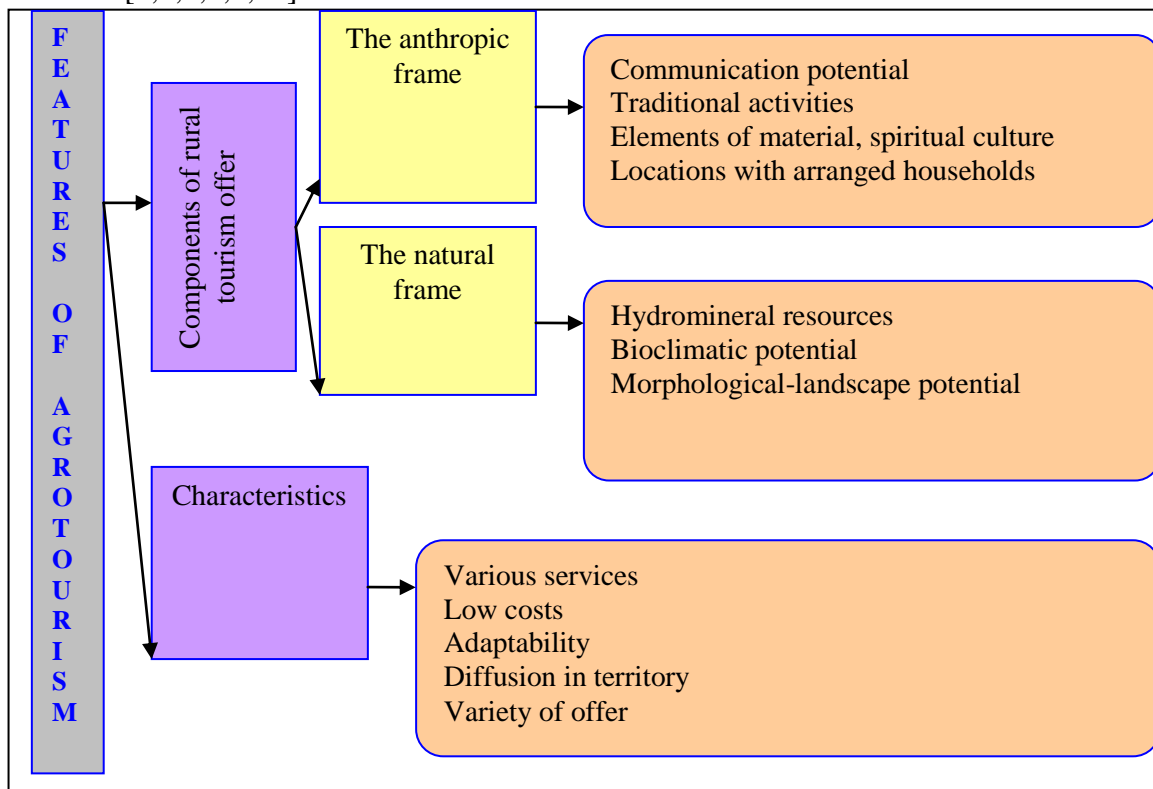


Figure 1. Defining features of agrotourism

- represents an economic activity that capitalizes the excess of existing accommodation space in the peasant household;
- the owner usually performs in parallel also agricultural activities (plant cultivation, animal husbandry, etc.);
- tourists are offered the opportunity to participate in the household activities (haying, harvesting, milking, fishing, processing of agricultural products, preparing food, etc.) for leisure purposes;
- in many situations represents a secondary activity, the agricultural activity, in own household, remaining the main occupation and source of income;

- contributes to the sustainable development of tourism resources, maintaining natural, cultural, ethnographic diversity, etc.;

- is a means of fully capitalization of the rural area, with its natural, agricultural, economic, tourist, socio-human potential.

Rural areas offer great opportunities for agrotourism development, and its practice being even needed in the current period. Most studies have shown that tourism combined with rural resources and traditional products would be an important "tool" for revitalizing the rural economy, and that these should be key components of the development strategy. There are many examples that many areas have succeeded in capitalizing on the niche nature of some specific forms of tourism for the rural area through appropriate and efficient strategies for capitalizing traditional resources and products, to move from the pioneering stage to a valuable alternative from cost-effective point of view for rural areas. The development of rural tourism is imposed in rural areas, both economically and socially. Thus, it contributes to the village's economic life through the following: [1,7,9,11,12,15]

- the possibility of developing a long-term development policy in close connection with other sectorial policies, agriculture, infrastructure, environmental protection;

- the possibility of becoming a support for new businesses and jobs and leading to new local and regional development;

- encouraging traditional local activities, especially crafts, but also those that can lead to the development of specific trade and the creation of new jobs;

- increasing the incomes of the inhabitants of the rural settlements, generated by the use of local resources, ecologically friendly food products for the consumption of the tourists or the sale to them and the existing tourism potential (for recreation, excursions, etc.);

- a dynamic factor of the process of increasing the quality of life in rural areas.

The forms of rural tourism possible to be deployed in rural areas can be numerous, but in our opinion the approach to sustainability is the three most numerous, ecotourism, rural tourism and agrotourism. There are various communitary documents that try to capitalize the activities that can be realized in rural area. In the `90 communitary courts applies to rural tourism a strong treatment on long term, applied by a dual optics:

- Agrarian, as activity that can contribute to improve farmers' incomes and living conditions and production in farms;

- Tourist, as an expression of new forms of tourism. At first agrarian perspective it had a higher share than the tourist one, due to the fact that there was produced faster the development of agrarian communitary policy.

Development of rural area is an activity of vital importance, both in terms of expressing dimension of rural area, expressed through the owned area and also through the population share occupied in various activities. Much part from rural settlements are very good keeper of traditions. If to the customs and traditions we add natural resources and traditional products results a specific valuable tourist product which would contribute of many of the problems from these areas. Many of the current problems of rural areas are related to the general lack of a coordinated development. Cert is the fact that through rural tourism forms could be capitalized a set of specific elements of rural areas, in the rural tourism product may be included:

- Existing natural resources;

- Farms themselves;

- Various tourist sights defined as "curiosities";

- Rural way of life:

- traditions and customs;

- traditional crafts;
- rural architecture;
- local gastronomy.

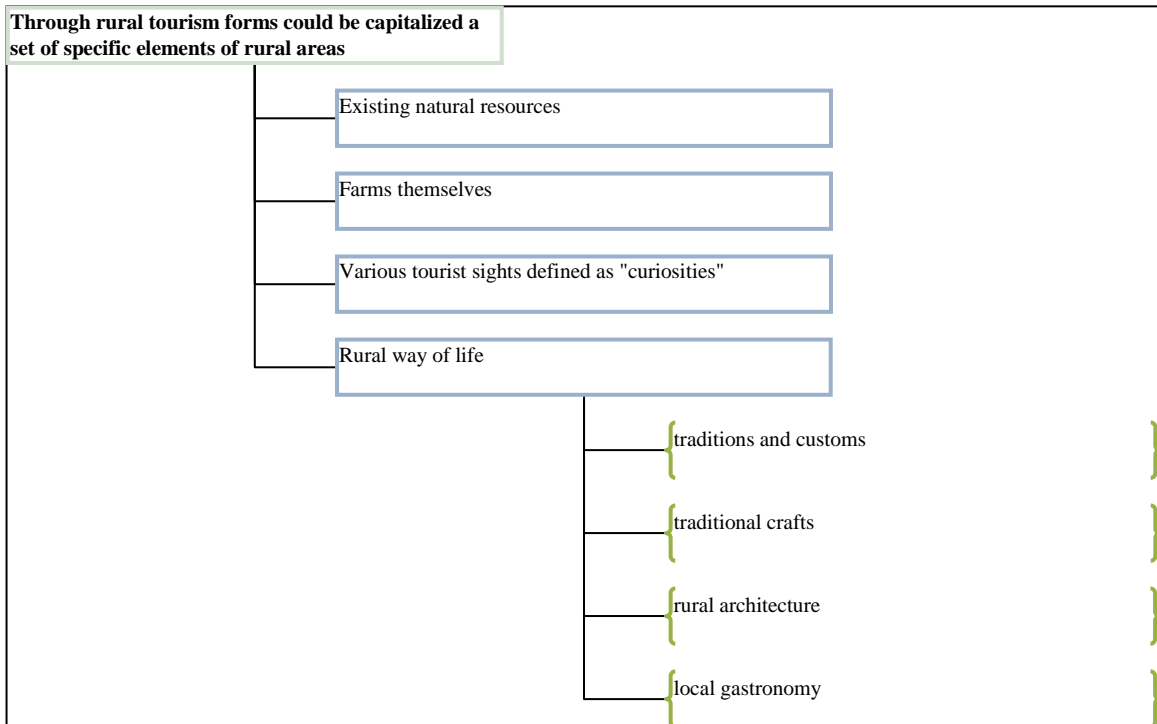


Figure 2. Specific elements capitalized through rural tourism

Rural tourism has in Romania an excellent development environment, due to a banal reason: about half of the population lives in villages. Analyzing foreign tourist market of rural tourism and comparing, the strengths of Romanian offer in the field is customized through:

- The high percentage of natural virgin mountain area, in the natural component, unmodified;
- Conservation of elements of old rural civilization and their application in everyday life;
- The presence of some representative ethno-folk traditions and values (folk architecture, crafts, folklore and folk, folk festivals and folk customs, etc.);
- Romanian hospitality with influences of Latin type, gastronomic habits from the Orthodox Christian religious holidays;
- Cure of fruits and other forest products, the consume of fresh bio foods eating at very low prices, practicing occupational therapy and initiation into the mysteries of folk Romanian natural medicine.
- Integration in the life of rural very old communities and living their specific atmosphere;
- A large number of speakers of foreign from languages internationally used; facility in understanding and speaking foreign languages.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism integrated in rural areas and localities is an alternative to solving at the same time problems affecting both the village and the city. Rural tourism will be able to solve problems of spatial planning policy, city-village balance, thus creating a social change that gives the city's population the opportunity to regain their roots, cultural values, physical relaxation, peace and quiet, lost or forgotten.

Starting programs for social tourism can contribute to promoting tourism in rural areas. The sustainability of rural tourism is primarily dependent on the attractive potential, the comfort conditions of the accommodation units according to their originality and typological diversity, without the urbanization of the rural environment (including the households as they also receive tourists), the change of staff mentality active in tourism by approaching and delivering tourist services with professionalism. A good development of tourism in rural areas can contribute to the development of entrepreneurial initiatives among local people, with great chances of success, given the value of the attractiveness elements in rural areas.

Tourism and rural services can solve some of the economic and labor problems that the rural population is involved with. The advantages of agrotourism for rural areas can be of an economic nature. Among these we can mention:

- *Stabilizing the population by setting up the labor force.* This is an extremely important consequence for most rural areas, generally confronted with the phenomenon of depopulation, especially due to the lack of a certain material perspective of the inhabitants.
- *Creating new jobs.* Creating new jobs is possible given that the local implementation of agrotourism is realized with success.
- *Diversifying the way of use the workforce.* The vast majority of their rural areas have a poor diversity in the use of labor, almost entirely occupied in the agricultural sector.
- *Pluriactivity.* Pluriactivity is another beneficial consequence of agrotourism. It designates the situation where, at the individual or family level, the assurance of existence is accomplished by carrying out additional activities (at least one) in addition to the basic activity.
- *Promoting and developing services.* Promoting and developing services is an essential aspect, as more as since many rural communities are still increasingly struggling with the lack of appropriate service facilities.

In addition to the economic benefits that can encourage farmers to engage in tourism activities, social benefits cannot be ignored.

- *Promoting and supporting the folk art, the local handicraft industry.* Art and rural crafts occupy an important place in the cultural heritage of each country.
- *Rehabilitation of the urban heritage.* The rehabilitation of the urban heritage is achieved under the conditions of a tourist flow, mainly in two ways.
- *Attracting new investments.* Rural tourism has the advantage of acting in the direction of opening new investment perspectives

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