

AGRITOURISM-RELEVANT ASPECTS

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Abstract: In the existing literature, including in the countries of the European Community appear frequently the rural tourism and agritourism terms. Agritourism can play a very important role in rural areas he particularities of agritourism, viewed systemically, viewed in this paper being: relevant aspects from agricultural perspective, relevant aspects from the perspective of rural community's development, specific elements of the agritourism product and its importance, as a "business" for rural areas.

Key words: agritourism, elements of the agritourism product, importance for rural area

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has been neglected by researchers from tourism field, often being confused with recreational activities from rural areas. There are a variety of terms that describe tourism activity from rural areas: agritourism, farm tourism, rural tourism, leisure tourism, alternative tourism and many others, with different meanings from one country to another. Some specialists pointed out that it is difficult to avoid confusion related to these names, as the term "rural tourism" has been adopted by the European Community with reference to all tourism from rural areas. [3,4,15]

In the existing literature, including in the countries of the European Community appear frequently the rural tourism and agritourism terms. Although it operates in rural areas, agritourism and rural tourism are two concepts that represent two different notions. Practice has shown that these categories have the same specific features up to a certain level; they have a common nominator that highlights the elements of identity, inclusion, as well as different elements that lead them to division, to differentiation.

Agritourism can play a very important role in rural areas less known, taking in consideration those peoples who want to spend a few hours or days in a natural setting, away from the crowds of cities, an experience designed to bring this peoples (especially from towns) closer the nature of people, life, habits and the traditions preserved by the inhabitants of rural areas. Through the fact that it capitalize on local resources and products, and combine two activities, the agricultural as a basic activity and the tourist as a complementary activity, the profitability of agritourism is high, being in fact a chance of alternative income for rural areas. [1,2,5,6,9,17]

Given the current conditions of modern society, more and more farmers have started to look beyond the traditional activity of the farm in order to generate profit based on non-agricultural activities. A form of secondary activity in agricultural farms that promises high added value to farm activities is agritourism. Agritourism can be defined as the type of collaboration that combines agricultural and rural settlements with agricultural products and processes, in a tourist experience.

Regarding the sustainability of this activity, the practice of agritourism aims to encourage the practice of traditional activities from rural communities, stop land abandonment and the chaotic development of tourism activities, in deep disagreement with the representative features of the rural environment.

Agritourism promotes the idea of combining economic interests in the development of communities with those concerning nature conservation, so in the figure 1 is illustrated agritourism as it is viewed systemically. [14] Rural entrepreneurs can have a successful model to capitalize on the tourism potential of an area and supplement farm

incomes by being able to add a modest income from tourism activities.

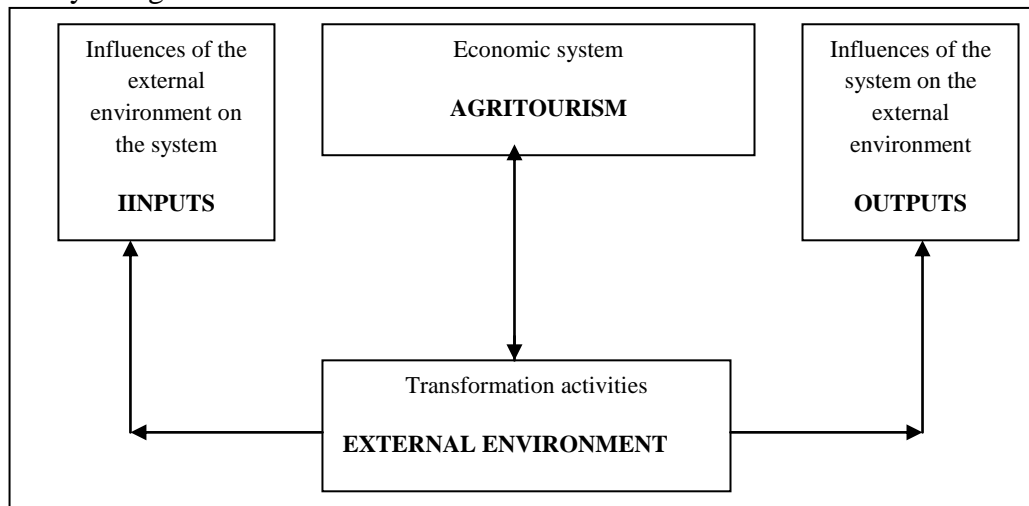


Figure 1. Agritourism - viewed systemically

The effects of practicing rural tourism should have been graded according to the level of development to which rural tourism, as a "business", has reached. [11,13,16] In this regard, it should be possible to talk about economic effects in the start-up phase in the provision of such services, if it is intended to be a success-obtaining additional income, employment, some infrastructure investments, possible changes in the lifestyle of the locals by the possibility of abandoning the traditional agricultural occupations in favor of the tourist ones-and less of the social ones, on the environment, legal. Only after the agritourism business starts to develop, to train a larger part of the community, to generate related services can the other effects appear. [10,12]

The aim of this paper is to identify the particularities of agritourism, viewed systemically, pursued through a series of objectives:

- Agritourism-relevant aspects from agricultural perspective
- Agritourism-relevant aspects from the perspective of rural community's development
- Agritourism-relevant aspects from the perspective of tourism activity
- The specific elements of the agritourism product
- The importance of agritourism development for the rural area

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The reason for choosing the theme of this scientific paper starts from the tendency of modern times to escape in rural areas, to look for authentic products, agritourism as a form of tourism can satisfy these trends.

In order to implement the proposed goal, was used as a research method the multi-criteria analysis of the different existing information in the specialized literature. Thus in order to perform the study we have used several data from references from the field, from other studies. In order to achieve the proposed desideratum, we started from what the notion of agritourism means, taking into account the agricultural aspects, those specific to community development, tourism aspects, but also the particularities of the agritourism product and the importance of this form of tourism for the rural environment. Although there are some disparities at the rural level, the particularities and aspects revealed specifically to this form of tourism are similar in general, therefore the aspects proposed and discussed in the paper can be considered as relevant to agritourism throughout Europe.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Preserving a rural world, with everything that it has significant, in economic, social, cultural terms, involves the initiation and development of this form of tourism. Also, tourism can participate in maintaining the viability and stability of rural localities.

- Agritourism-relevant aspects from agricultural perspective

Agritourism is a hybrid concept that combines elements of two complex sectors - agriculture and tourism - and designed to open new and profitable market niches for farm products and services and at the same time to provide tourism experiences to a specific segment of demand. Although a single definition of agrotourism does not seem to be recognized, it is at the intersection of a number of important economic and marketing concepts (see figure 2).

Agritourism, without becoming a dominant part of the agricultural sector, can play a significant role in supporting many agricultural enterprises. Figure 2 shows the relationships that agritourism has with alternative agriculture, the added value of production, direct sales on the farm and ultimately with the development of the rural community.

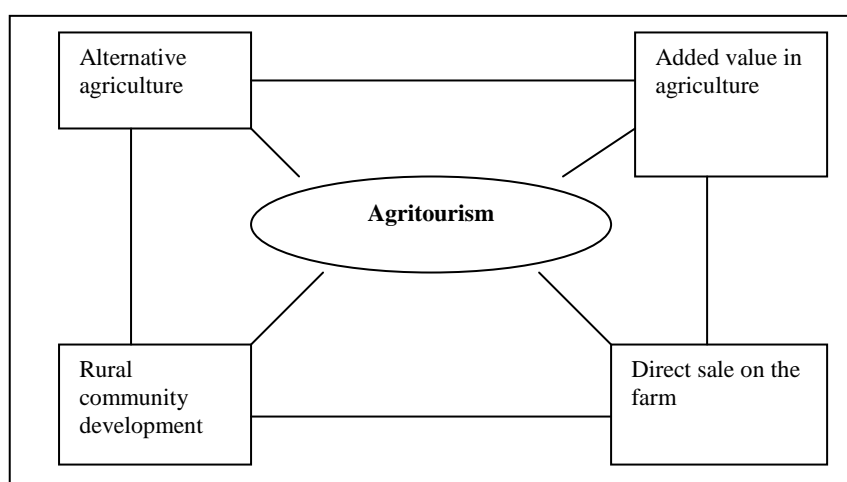


Figure 2. Relations between tourism and agriculture

Alternative agriculture is defined as that vegetable or animal production or land use that is not a typical feature of the local or regional production or distribution system. The strengths of an alternative agriculture can derive from:

1. A better adaptation to soil characteristics (for example: marginal use of maize and soybeans to the detriment of other less input-intensive crops, with similar productivity and a higher rate of return);
2. Establishment in market niches;
3. The use of a large amount of labor and therefore income for the community in terms of number of employees;
4. Less polluted environment.

No matter how positive is the reallocation of certain resources to alternative products, they must ultimately be sold with a net profit that ensures the operation of the system. Agritourism can provide support to this market segment.

Added value represents the core of modern agricultural business models. There are significant differences between the farm price of agricultural products and the price of the final processed product at the point of consumption. It is in the interest of farmers to capture as much as possible of this added value. There is of course a need for funding, markets, a processing and distribution mechanism, but the price of not doing so is so high

that action is needed. Agritourism is an effective tool in increasing the added value of agricultural products in many rural areas.

Direct selling has advantages recognized both by farmers and consumers. Whether the farmer comes to the consumer (producers' markets) or it is the case of the consumer coming to the farmer (direct sales on the farm) the effect is the same: the producer delivers his product to the final consumer at the retail price, without going through the links of the traditional sales chain and wholesale markets.

- Agritourism-relevant aspects from the perspective of rural community's development

Due to its strong local identity, agritourism becomes a real possibility to consolidate the local economy given the recognized positive effects on income and employment generation, as well as its ability to create a certain dynamism in the upstream and downstream sectors and activities.

Agritourism is promoted as a source of growth and diversification of the rural economy and job creation in most developed countries. With the decline registered in many traditional industrial sectors in rural areas, agritourism is perceived by both the agricultural community and decision-makers as an option for diversification in order to maintain the viability of businesses in the agricultural sector. However, the benefits are much greater. Agritourism has advantages for the agricultural sector, for rural communities and for the tourism industry in general.

The advantages of agritourism from the point of view of farmers include:

- development of new market niches;
- increasing interest for local agricultural products;
- creating a greater recognition of the opportunity to maintain/use agricultural land;
- creating jobs right at the family level (on-site employment);
- increasing the long-term sustainability of agricultural businesses.

For rural and regional communities, agritourism can be a factor in diversifying and stabilizing rural economies, by:

- job creation and increasing community income;
- expanding the market for local businesses;
- attracting other businesses and small industries.

From the point of view of the tourism industry in general, agritourism means the diversification of the mix of tourist products and services available to visitors and the unique positioning, as a rarity, of the agritourism communities.

- Agritourism-relevant aspects from the perspective of tourism activity

A peculiarity that allows to distinguish agritourism from other forms of tourism in rural areas is that agritourism is an economic activity in a farm/agricultural holding or food industry, an activity carried out in order to produce benefits and satisfaction to visitors and generating additional income for the agricultural producer.

According to this definition, agritourism is a subcategory of rural tourism in two ways:

- rural tourism does not necessarily take place within agricultural holdings/farms
- rural tourism activities do not directly generate additional income for agricultural enterprises.

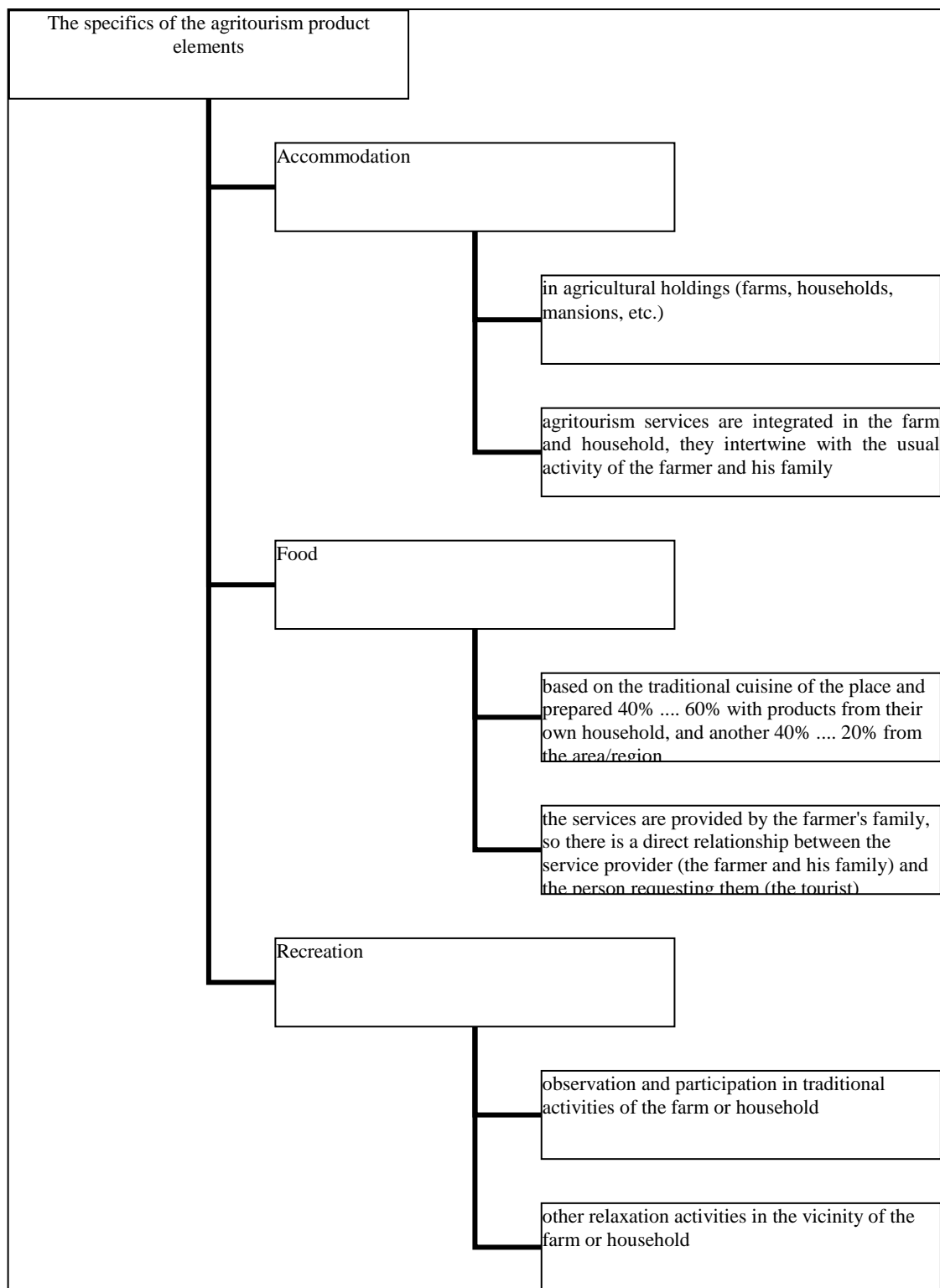


Figure 3. Specificity of the elements of the agritourism product

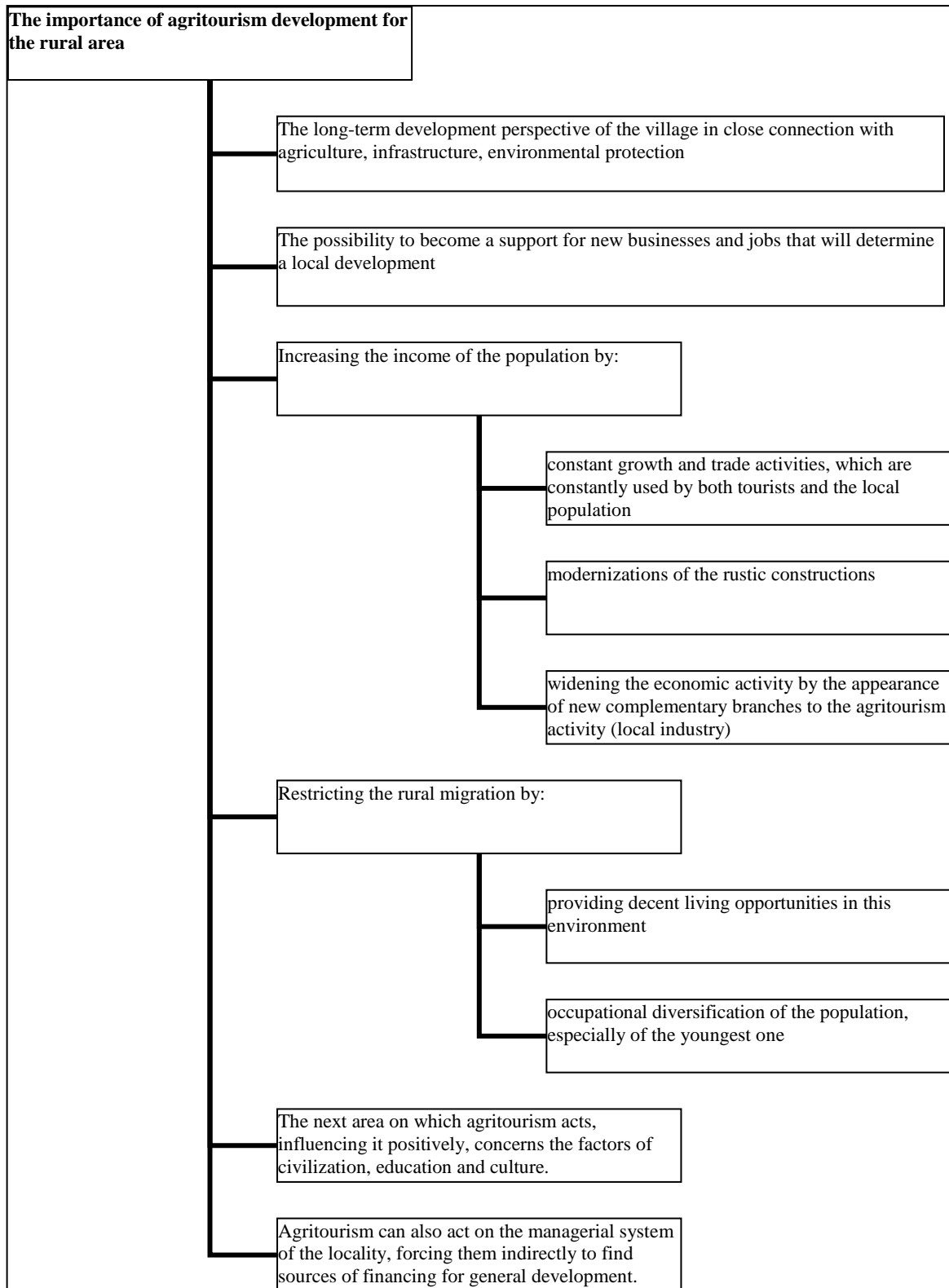


Figura 4. The importance of agritourism development for the rural area

According to specialists, prosperity is not only on the part of the farmer, but also on the part of the tourist. The benefits of the entrepreneur/farmer who also practices agritourism activities can be seen from the point of view: (see figure 3).

- of the structure of tourist reception: as an element of capitalization of the surplus of accommodation space existing in the rural households;

- of the activities: capitalization of the traditional products and services from the own farm;
- of income: as a source of their increase.

The development of agritourism will lead to a sustainable economic development of rural areas, due to the multiplier effect of this activity, feeling the positive influences on the environment, agriculture, transport, construction, processing and food industries, services in various fields. (see figure 4).

The rural localities where the rural tourism, the agritourism, the ecological tourism will be practiced, will become spaces where all the elements of local sustainable development will be assembled. There will be an interest in improving the infrastructure, in establishing a spiritual life of the rural localities. This will create support for improving public services. It will be noticed that the rural tourism exerts a complex influence on the external environment (economic, social, cultural, environmental), putting its imprint on the general level of economic development of the respective localities. The development of agritourism is necessary in the rural area, both economically and socially.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the development of agritourism, several aspects are taken into account, with a direct impact on the villages:

- Jobs conservation: although not as ambitious, politically, as the "job creation" goal, this indicator has a special role to play in maintaining the viability of small communities and is even critical in certain marginal areas. The incomes obtained from tourism allow the support of jobs in retail trade, transport, medical services.

- Creating new jobs is the next step if tourism proves to be a successful option. Studies from the UK show that the number of new jobs varies from company to company: for example, farm accommodation with breakfast included can create up to 23 new jobs for £ 100,000 in income. The emergence of new jobs takes place in areas such as transport, trade, information, guidance, catering, etc.

- Many of the small rural communities have a monotonous structure, with jobs focused on agriculture. The appearance of new jobs in tourism leads to the increase of the complexity of the rural life, to the capitalization and the increase of the interest for adjacent fields.

- Supporting the agricultural farm - this is an idea loved by all policy makers and, indeed, agricultural activity can be supported by developing farm accommodation services, by developing Open Day activities, by increasing direct sales of products, by increasing the rate of activity of farmers outside the farm, by organizing other types of attractions. However, farmers' participation in rural tourism actions differs from one region to another, depending on the size of the farm, the age of the farmer and many other factors. In all cases, however, the contact with tourists brings a certain variety, it stimulates this lifestyle that may seem monotonous.

- Infrastructure development/Environmental improvements such as paving streets, traffic regulation schemes, sewerage, sanitation can be stimulated by tourism and by political pressures exerted by tourism organizations. [7,8] These then lead to a certain "pride", increasing identity and accountability with a role in maintaining the population, business and stimulating the implementation of new enterprises.

- Developing the spirit of initiative is the key to success, the guarantee of individualization in an increasingly competitive market. If the rural population has acquired an "assisted" mentality due to efforts to support agriculture by providing services and subsidies, tourism is a chance, a challenge to unleash energy, to encourage new

businesses and new methods. We can say that from this point of view, tourism acts as a catalyst.

- Increasing the quality of life of the rural inhabitants by: obtaining complementary incomes, raising the general degree of civilization, improving the hygienic-sanitary conditions and the social behavior, cultivating the aesthetic taste; increasing the possibilities for information and communication through the effects of an improved infrastructure.

- Increasing the added value of the products: And we understand by this both the obtaining of agri-food products, of culinary art within the pensions, as well as the artisan products, the diversified range of services or of folkloric and cultural benefits;

- Achieving the cheapest form of export with high quality products. Export on the spot, in the producer's yard, of natural, fresh, varied products, of culinary or artisanal art. This avoids costly prices for sophisticated packaging and long shipments, for various forms of preservation that require additives, etc.

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