

RURAL TOURIST NETWORK-A WAY TO ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract: Rural tourism is perceived as an important means of local and regional economic development so rural areas invest in tourism in order to diversify their economy. The target of this scientific paper is to highlight the definition of rural tourism and the necessity and main aspects regarding a rural tourist network for supporting rural area's development through rural tourism.

Key words: rural tourist network, development, rural tourism

INTRODUCTION

In most developed countries, rural tourism is perceived as an important means of local and regional economic development for rural areas, as it creates a favorable framework for both entrepreneurial and administrative initiatives. [2,3,4,15]

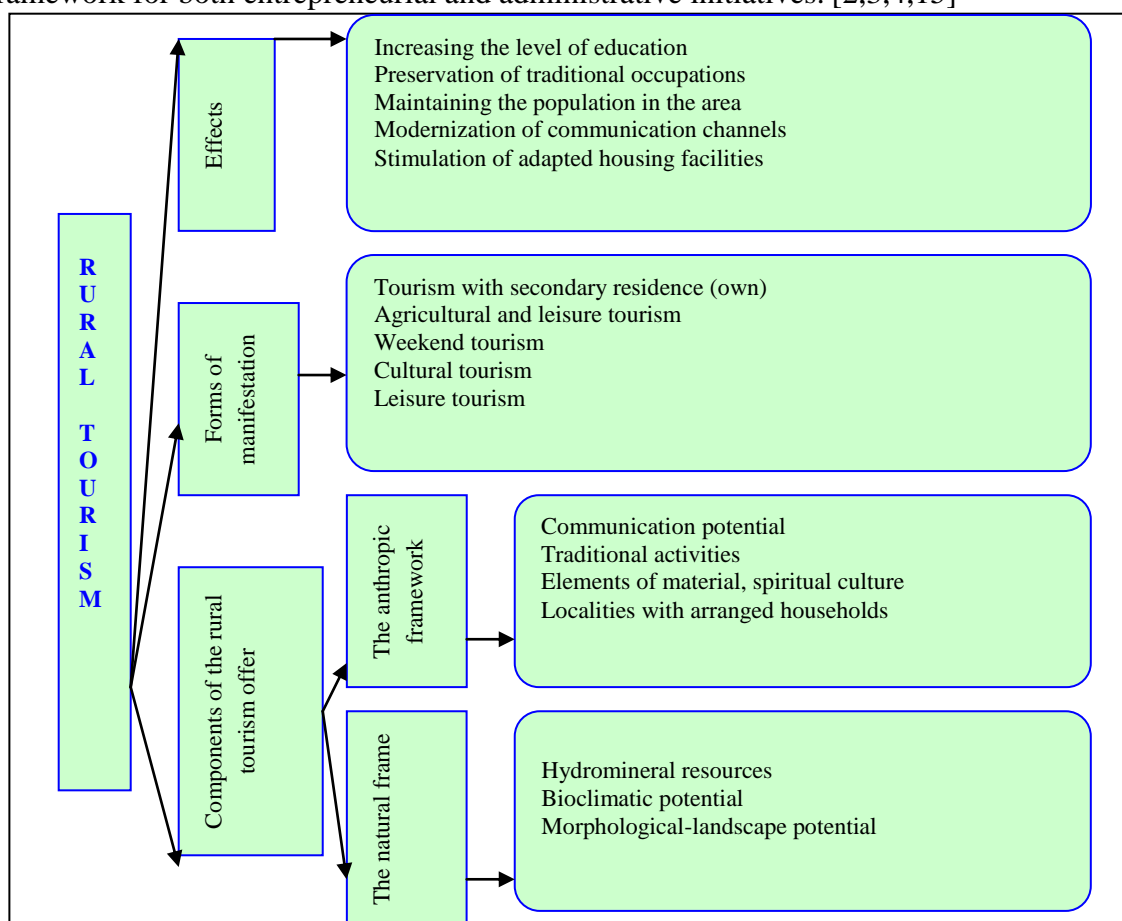


Figure 1. Interconditioning reports in rural tourism

Source: own processing

Rural tourism becomes the factor that ensures the unaltered preservation of the structures and ways of rural life, customs and traditions, in a word of a traditional culture made available to tourists through these things a development of rural areas. This form of tourism is a multifunctional activity, it represents more than a stay spent in the country. The general interest in natural and rational food is a factor of attraction in the international market, and especially in developed countries. Country life ensures an active rest, increasingly rare in urban areas. Due to the relatively small size of the companies involved in this activity (mostly family), rural tourism is able to better meet the demand of tourists for quality, privacy, originality, and the elasticity of purchased services ensures their adaptability to individual needs. [5,9,10,13]

Rural areas invest in tourism in order to diversify their economy, essential for development, jobs and sustainable development. [12] They offer interesting possibilities, because it is about the very attractive living and working environment or the very appreciated natural resources and landscapes. In this context, it is very important to monitor the coherence of Community policies and create synergies between them, trying to preserve the environment and protect rural areas.

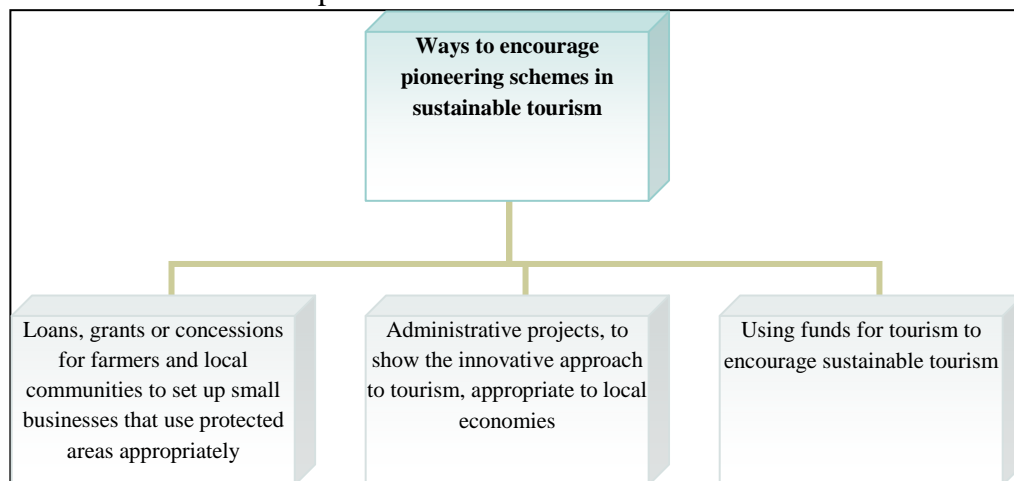


Figure 2. Ways to encourage pioneering schemes in sustainable tourism

Source: own processing

The components that favor the development of sustainable rural tourism refer to:

- the market segment formed by the elderly population, which expresses its demand for rural tourism in order to restore health, entering in a relaxing picturesque natural environment, that can offer even unique experiences, given that they have a small budget;
- as a main starting point, the technical-informational progress, determines on the one hand the improvement of the equipment specific to rural tourism that gives the tourist an extra comfort and safety, and on the other hand, allows a development and modernization of transport and telecommunications, improving the situation of the general infrastructure;
- creating the conditions for improving agricultural activities;
- the capitalization process of the tourist resources, especially of those that constitute unique and can be amplified by carrying out the promotion process, which in turn must be subjected to improvement.

Sustainable destination management is important for tourism development, in particular it requires effective control of space and land use development and planning, as well as investment decisions in infrastructure and services. By ensuring that the new development of tourism is by its magnitude and nature in line with the needs of the local community and the environment, sustainable management can strengthen the economic

performance and competitive position of a long-term destination. To do this, there must be a support framework with the participation of all stakeholders at regional and local level, as well as a rational structure that fosters partnerships and effective management.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The target of this scientific paper is to highlight the definition of rural tourism and the necessity and main aspects regarding a rural tourist network for supporting rural area's development through rural tourism. So the main steps are finding other studies in field as references, draw the main conclusions and achieving the main proposals.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Since, for some time, rural tourism has started to develop and a series of rural tourist structures have appeared, there is a need for a rural tourist network that extends its area of action to the neighboring communes, a center that coordinates and promotes the tourist activity of the households from rural area. The aim is to create the rural tourism product and support those who contribute to the enhancement of the rural tourism offer of the area by creating this network.

Approaching the future of some rural localities from a tourist perspective and adapting them to this purpose, we consider that their ethnographic specificity can and must be preserved and perpetuated (in appropriate forms), otherwise, the current interest of tourists for the Romanian village, for the rural environment, generally will gradually decrease. With more receptivity and little interest from administrative and specialized bodies, one can perpetuate, even in the conditions of contemporary civilization, the ethnographic and spiritual specificity of some Romanian villages. This desideratum must be pursued all the more, as many villagers from some localities show obvious interest in maintaining their traditional lifestyle, these localities having chances to become permanent tourist bases, of international popularity, particularly profitable. [1,6,14]

A direction of tourism, rural development, must be characterized by at least two aspects:

- First of all, it must have continuity, because in general, it aims at a long time horizon, for its realization it is necessary the continuity of the efforts. The effort of the Romanian governments in transition was oriented towards highlighting the errors of the previous governments, giving up in many cases the investments already made and redirecting the sources of financing. Good initiatives must be taken and continued, regardless of the political color of the governing parties.

- Secondly, a unitary direction of tourism development must be closely correlated with the directions of development in the other branches of industry, which provide the infrastructure for tourist services.

The long-term goals of the network are:

- Deepening the specialization and increasing the quality of the established offer and promoting new offers according to market trends.

- Increasing the coordination and collaboration at the level of public services in order to correlate the strategies, programs and actions that contribute to the development of the tourism sector, to the increase of the quality of services.

- Encouraging investments in the realization of modern tourist capacities, through fiscal methods that will interest both investors and local councils.

The short-term objectives focus on:

- Continuing education in the field of all those interested.

- Developing the partnership and increasing the cooperation between the commercial and public sectors for the realization of initiatives for the benefit of rural tourism.
- Creating a positive, complete and correct tourist image about rural area and its surroundings.
- Efficient marketing of tourist and rural tourism programs.

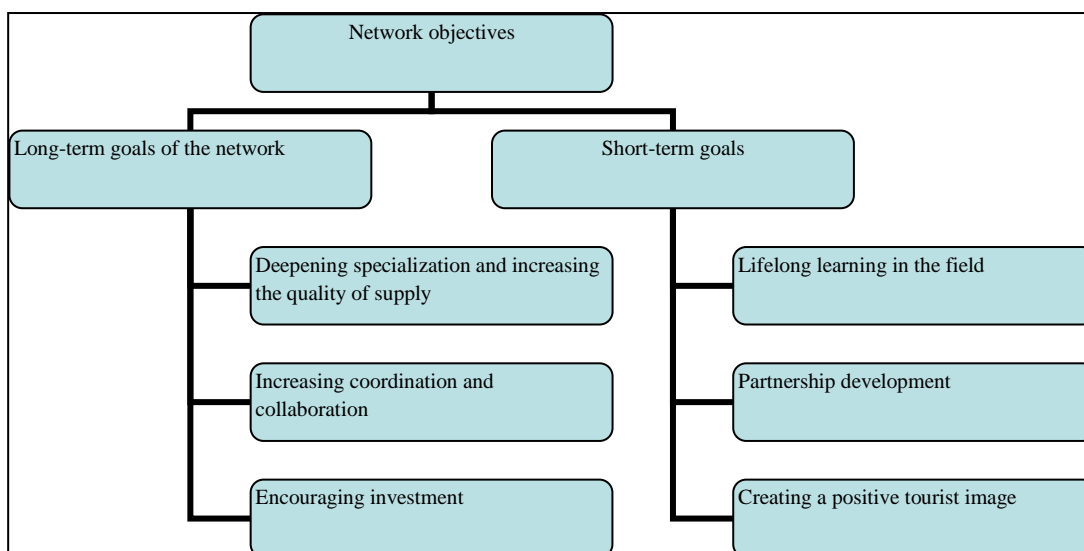


Figure 3. Network objectives

Source: own processing

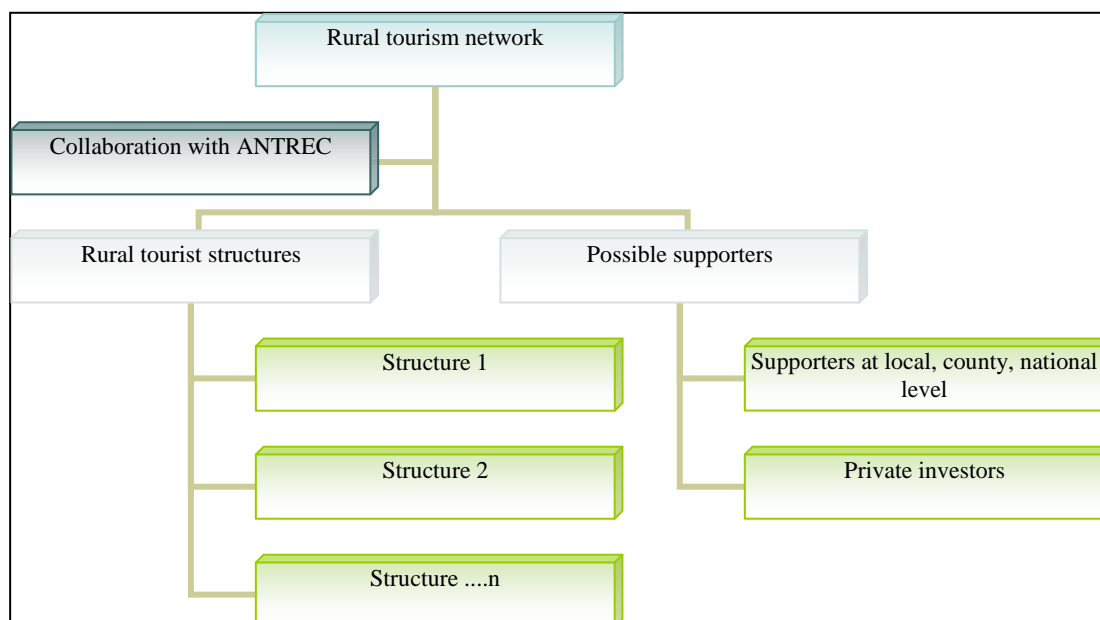


Figura 4. Proposed model for organizing the rural tourist network

Source: own processing

Although there are already rural tourism structures, the vast majority of owners do not have the necessary knowledge for the development and effective promotion of rural tourism. We consider that the realization of this rural tourist network will ensure this guidance, the necessary support as well as the promotion of the rural area.

It should be mentioned that the possibility of implementing this project is relatively small, at least in the initiation phase. The main reason would be the distrust of the

households regarding the notion of association. Another major impediment would derive from the way of composing the organizational structure of this center: the question arises who will coordinate the managerial activity and to what extent the households involved will be subordinated to the imposed strategies. The viability of this model comes after households have gained some experience in organizing rural tourism, so that they are able to determine exactly what would be the responsibilities of this network and become aware that certain problems can be solved at Community level more effectively.

An important first step in setting up the network is the awareness of local actors, especially the owners of boarding houses from rural area, of the need to set up the network. If this has been achieved, the authorities who must take the necessary steps for the legal establishment of the network intervene. Owners of local boarding houses need to understand that working together can bring greater benefits and bring this area to light by creating tourism programs that capitalize on local resources.

After the establishment of the network, the attestation or certification of the households/pensions according to the criteria established by the legislation in force is pursued. For the owners of local boarding houses, the obligation to obtain patents and tourism licenses, attesting both the existence of specialists in coordinating and providing services, and the minimum conditions to be provided by economic agents that make up the rural tourism network is a necessity.

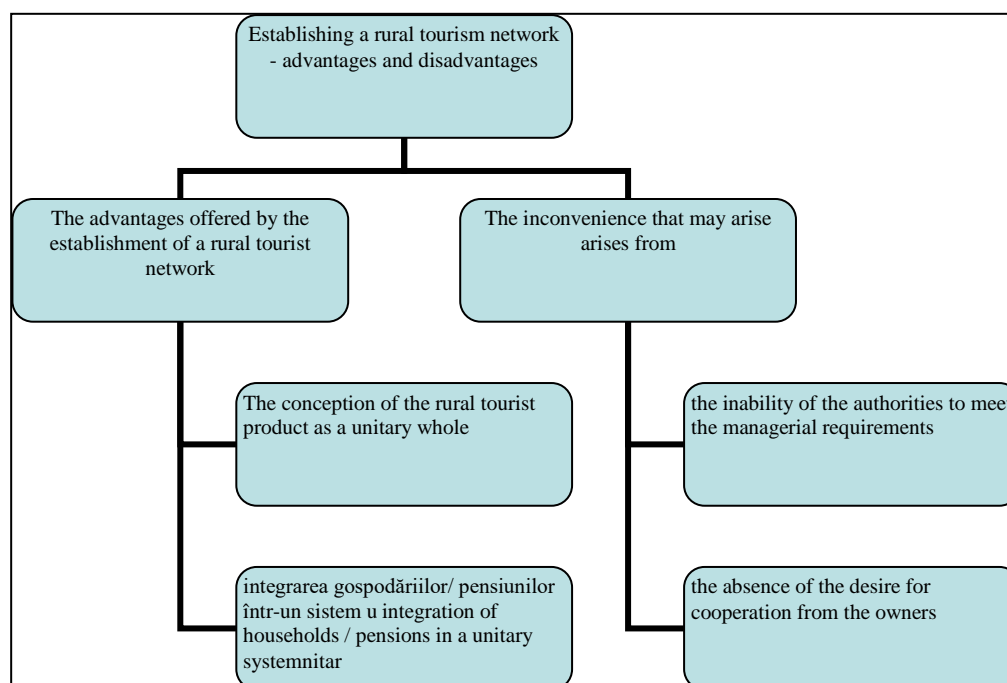


Figure 5. Establishment of a rural tourism network-advantages and disadvantages

Source: own processing

The advantages offered by the establishment of a rural tourist network start from the possibility of conceiving the rural tourist product as a unitary whole, by integrating the households/pensions that practice rural tourism in a unitary system of organization.

The inconvenience that may arise stems from the inability of local authorities/ mayor's office to meet the managerial requirements imposed by the creation of such a project and the lack of desire for cooperation from the owners of tourist structures. The main reason would be the distrust that comes from the households regarding the notion of association. Another major impediment would derive from the way of composing the

organizational structure of the network: who will coordinate the managerial activity and to what extent the households involved will be subordinated to the imposed strategies.

The shaping of a rural tourist network can contribute to the development of the rural environment, to the creation of a brand image, attractive and hospitable. In some articles, analyzing the tourist potential, it was emphasized that the Romanian rural tourist offer offers country holidays, home, and meals for tourists who do not want the stress of big cities but a quiet holiday in a natural setting. For them, the Romanian village offers a return in time, a tourist attraction that Western countries can no longer offer. This proves that we can turn the lack of infrastructure and modernization into an advantage over European countries. The novelty of the Romanian rural tourism product, the existing conditions, and the technical-material base, the popular culture doubled by hospitality, interest and motivation can impose the rural village on the tourist market and can consecrate it.

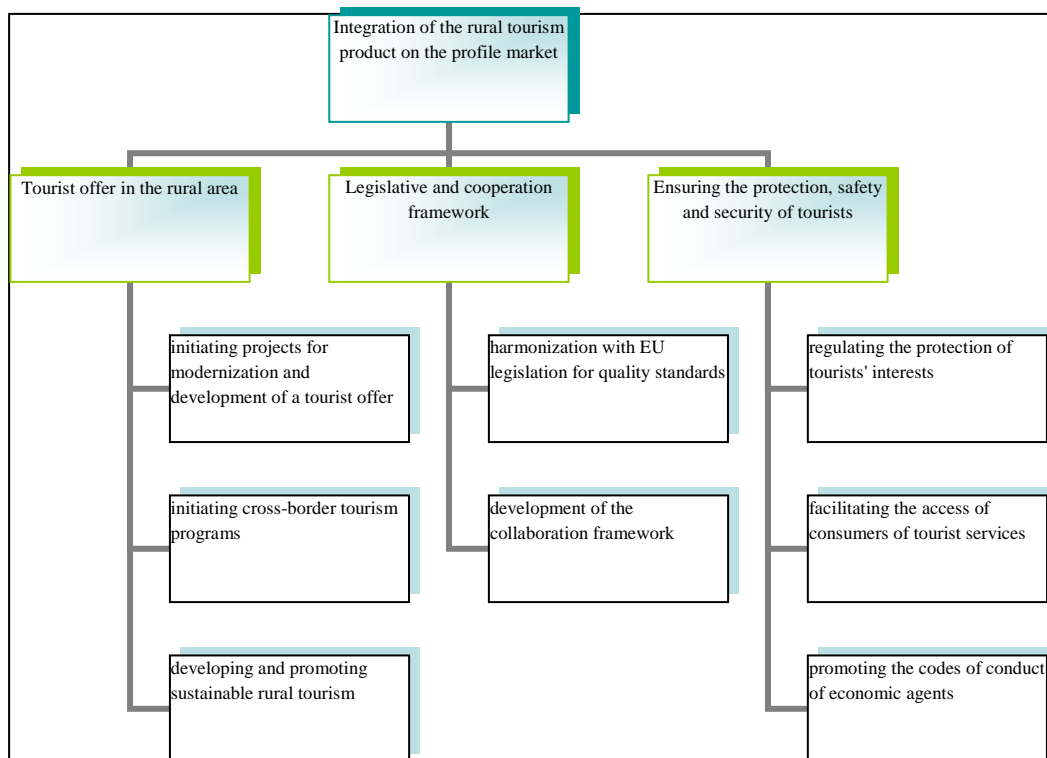


Figure 6. Integration of the rural tourism product on the profile market

Source: own processing

Due to its special specificity, the quality of the tourist product must be analyzed in particular, starting from the fact that rural tourism is based on three coordinates (rural area, locals and specific products offered) and farm accommodation is equivalent to vacation in the village and spending free time in rural areas. For this reason, the analysis of the quality characteristics of this product is carried out starting from the specific elements that determine its substance and make up its content:

- quality characteristics of the natural resources, namely the beauty of the landscapes, the uniqueness or diversity of the elements that make up the fauna and flora specific to the places, the degree of environmental pollution, the climatic conditions, etc.;
- quality characteristics of the technical-material base specific to this type of product, namely the quality of the social structure of reception, proper to both the peasant farm and the village in general, the quintessence of the spirit and popular traditions.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism contributes to the dynamization of the local socio-economic life and the spiritual life of the village by:

- Retention/conservation of jobs: although not as ambitious, from a political point of view, as the object of "creating new jobs", this indicator has a special role 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. [11]

- Creating new jobs is the next step if tourism proves to be a successful option.

- Supporting the agricultural farm - this is an idea loved by all policy makers and, indeed, agricultural activity can be supported by the development of farm accommodation services, by the development of "Open Day" activities, by increasing direct sales of products, by increasing the activity rate 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 the streets, traffic regulation schemes, sewerage, sanitation can be stimulated by tourism and by political pressures exerted by tourism organizations. These determine after a certain "pride", increase in identity and accountability with a role in maintaining the population, business and stimulating the implementation of new enterprises.

- The development of the spirit of initiative is the key to success, the guarantee of individualization in an increasingly competitive market. If the rural population has acquired a mentality "to be assisted" due to efforts to support agriculture by providing services and a subsidy, 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 inhabitants from rural environment 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.

The Romanian rural tourism product is a "young" product and made, for the most part, by miming or more correctly following the example of other providers. Given the need to achieve quality, repeatable and perfectible services, it is necessary to organize and lead this activity, in the spirit of achieving a professionalization of providers, as well as the products themselves. [7,8,16]

- The essential condition for the development of the rural tourism product refers to the improvement of the general infrastructure of the rural locality, with influence on the entire local economy. In the current conditions, when "mass tourism" becomes almost impractical, due to the high prices, a chance for practicing tourism is rural tourism. The current trend of integrating agrotourism in the international tourist circuit, presupposes the existence, within this form of tourism, of an infrastructure and a degree of comfort at western standards, the infrastructure being a motivating factor in choosing an agrotourism farm as a destination in holidays and holidays.

- In the last 20 years there has been a continuous decrease in the external tourist demand for Romania. In order to get out of the international tourist competition, it is necessary to modernize, relaunch and develop the Romanian tourism and to create modern

and competitive tourist products on the tourist market. Trying to carry out a comparative analysis in the light of the European tourism experience, we consider that the scope of tourist activities provided in the Romanian rural environment must be expanded from the simple accommodation offer to:

- display of popular gastronomic products;
- leisure and animation specific to village areas;
- transport by traditional means;

Through rural tourism, it will be possible to solve problems of land use planning policy, of the city-village balance, thus outlining a social change that offers the possibility to the city population to find their roots, cultural values, physical relaxation, peace and calm lost or forgotten.

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