

STUDIES ON THE PROJECTION OF AN AGRI-TOURISM PENSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF VALIDATING LOCAL RESOURCES IN THE DANUBE GORGE

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Abstract: *This study provides an analysis of the possibility of capitalizing on the resources of the Danube Gorge through the development of an agritourism pension, thus contributing to the growth of sustainable tourism and the economic development of local communities in the area. The Danube Gorge has considerable tourism potential, offering spectacular landscapes at the Danube Boilers, biodiversity in the Iron Gates Natural Park, cultural and historical attractions such as the Trikule Fortress and the Decebal Statue, recreational activities such as Danube cruises and hiking, fresh fish cuisine, local festivals, and a diverse and accessible tourism infrastructure. However, this area faces a significant shortage of accommodation facilities, which limits the region's ability to host a larger number of tourists and fully exploit its tourism potential. Despite the spectacular landscapes, rich biodiversity, and remarkable cultural and historical attractions, the lack of adequate accommodation infrastructure discourages visitors and hinders the sustainable economic development of the area. Investments in guesthouses, hotels, and other forms of accommodation could boost tourism and create new opportunities for local communities. Interest in rural tourism is growing, as more and more tourists seek authentic experiences and direct contact with nature and local culture. This trend offers considerable opportunities for the economic development of rural communities and for promoting the cultural and natural heritage of areas such as the Danube Gorge. The study examines the natural and cultural potential of the region, identifies key resources that can be integrated into the tourism offer, and proposes solutions for their efficient and responsible use, ensuring both environmental conservation and local prosperity.*

Key words: *agritourism, biodiversity, local resources, sustainable tourism*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly urbanized and technologically advanced world, there is a growing interest and desire among people to connect with nature, with the authentic rural environment along with authentic experiences. Rural tourism and agritourism are finding a growth in popularity, offering opportunities for people to retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city and enjoy the peace, the beauty of the rural landscape along with local customs and of course the authentic local products and gastronomy.

Tourism activity can solve some of the economic and labor problems in which the rural population is involved. Agritourism is based on and has as its ultimate goal a certain economic efficiency, but not at the level expected by the over-optimists, who do not take into account the seasonal and complementary nature of this activity for the peasant household [6]. By studying the agritourism product, in concert with the determinants of the purchase decision in the conditions of the tourist market and corroborating with the strengths and weaknesses, we find that - by minimizing the weaknesses and maximizing the strengths - a profitable market niche is created for the agritourism activity. According to specialists in the field, the advantages obtained from practicing agritourism for rural areas can be multiple in natures [10].

Agritourism is the reception and hospitality activity carried out by individual or associated agricultural entrepreneurs as well as their families using their own enterprise (farm, exploitation), or a rented one, so that the activity carried out is in a complementary

relationship with the activities related to land cultivation, forestry and animal husbandry, these having to constitute main activities [7].

Agritourism comes as a complementary activity, which capitalizes on the surplus of accommodation spaces existing in the peasant household, prepared and arranged especially for guests; which consists of a set of goods and services offered by the peasant household for consumption by people [4].

The agritourism activity is based on three interdependent elements:

- The attraction to natural beauties, ethnography, novelty, charm and events specific to life in the countryside;
- Accommodation and meals, which, even if they are not at hotel standards, must be of quality and offered with hospitality;
- Transportation, access routes to the rural environment are vital to ensuring a continuous flow of tourists.

Compared to other forms, agritourism does not require too large investments for infrastructure arrangements or other facilities and does not produce agglomerations that create various problems for urban localities. For reception structures in addition to the households of some villagers, farms and agricultural guesthouses can be used [8].

Agritourism begins to constitute its own market over time, defined by specific manifestation factors and determinants of an economic, social, political, geographical and motivational nature.

Agritourism is currently practiced by people who are forced to travel to the countryside, having houses or properties in these localities and must actively participate in their management, as well as by urbanized people who have been settled in the city for several generations and who feel the need to spend a few hours outdoors on weekends, clean, unpolluted, consuming products from the countryside. This tourism will have a greater spread in the near future, especially in mountainous and pre-mountainous areas, due primarily to the climate and beauty of nature [5].

Agritourism is a result, but also a premise of the development of the rural economy. It can fully contribute to balancing the territorial development of the country. In this regard, we consider the following: the possibility of becoming a support for new businesses and jobs; encouraging traditional local activities, especially handicrafts, but also those that can determine the development of a specific trade and the creation of new jobs; increasing the income of residents of rural settlements resulting from the enhancing of local resources and ecological agri-food products for tourist consumption [1,14].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study aims to identify and sustainably use local resources, including spectacular natural landscapes, cultural traditions, local agri-food products and the tourism potential of the area, in order to stimulate local economic development and to provide an authentic and responsible experience for visitors. The analysis will include aspects such as infrastructure planning, environmental impact management and tourism promotion, in order to contribute to the sustainable growth of the communities in the Danube Gorge.

The secondary aim of the study is to collect and analyse data on the biodiversity, geomorphology, hydrology and cultural heritage of the Danube Gorge.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The proposal to design an agritourism guesthouse as a way to capitalize on the resources in the analyzed commune could be justified by a series of arguments such as: the tourist potential of the area, the deficit of accommodation in the area, the increase in interest in rural tourism, attractions and complementary activities.

Tourism in the Danube Gorge contributes significantly to supporting the local economy by creating jobs and stimulating local businesses, such as guesthouses, restaurants and traditional crafts. Investments in tourism infrastructure and the promotion of ecotourism can generate additional income for local communities, while ensuring the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

Tourism in the Danube Gorge has a significant positive impact on the local community, by generating jobs in the tourism sector and by supporting small and medium-sized businesses. Tourism also contributes to the preservation of local traditions and the promotion of culture, bringing sustainable economic benefits and stimulating regional development.

The promotion and preservation of local traditions and culture in the Danube Gorge are fundamental priorities of tourism initiatives, through the organization of traditional festivals, handicraft exhibitions and cultural events, which encourage community participation and educate visitors about the cultural and historical values of the region. Thus, the respect and transmission of the local cultural heritage is ensured, while contributing to attracting and retaining tourists in the area.

The design of the guesthouse involves certain costs, and in establishing these costs, several categories of expenses were taken into account: construction and layout of the building, interior design and furnishing, infrastructure and utilities, reaching a total cost of 25.660 Euros.

Identifying operating costs in the Danube Gorge involves the detailed evaluation of several aspects. Among these, are administrative and personnel costs, which include employee salaries and administrative taxes. Also included are maintenance and repair costs for tourism infrastructure, such as buildings and public facilities. Utility costs, such as water, electricity and heating, are another important aspect, along with the marketing and promotional costs required to attract and retain tourists [3]. Effective management of these costs is crucial to ensure a sustainable and profitable operation of the tourism infrastructure in the Danube Gorge region.

Revenue estimation can be done by assessing the estimated number of tourists and the average expenditure per visitor for accommodation services, restaurants, recreational activities and other facilities [9,12]. Revenues can vary depending on the season, special events and marketing campaigns, also taking into account the fluctuations of the tourism market. It is important to implement an appropriate pricing strategy and attractive tourism packages to maximize revenues and sustainably grow the local economy in the Danube Gorge.

The calculation of the average cost per room involves dividing the total operating costs of an accommodation unit (such as salaries, maintenance, utilities, marketing, etc.) by the total number of rooms available for sale during a year. This average cost reflects the amount needed to cover expenses and achieve the desired profit based on occupancy and rates charged. Constant adjustment of this calculation may be necessary to optimize profitability and competitiveness in the local tourism market [2,13].

Competitiveness analysis in the Danube Gorge involves evaluating the prices charged by accommodation and restaurants against local and regional competition, also comparing the services and facilities offered. It also includes the analysis of customer reviews and feedback to understand the public's perception of the experience offered by the various tourism businesses in the area. This analysis is crucial to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each accommodation unit and to develop effective marketing and service improvement strategies, so as to ensure a competitive positioning in the tourism market [1].

Using occupancy can be an effective way to justify the projection for the accommodation service offered by the agritourism guesthouse. For a more concrete highlighting of the incomes possible to obtain by occupancy rates, concrete calculations were made, starting from hypothetical occupancy rates.

In order to highlight the advantages of capitalizing on local resources in the analyzed commune through tourist activities, calculations were made to identify the duration of the recovery of the initial investment [11,15].

CONCLUSIONS

The Danube Gorge offers spectacular landscapes, rich biodiversity and a diverse cultural heritage, making it ideal for sustainable tourism and attracting visitors looking for authentic experiences. There is a significant shortage of accommodation units, limiting the region's capacity to host tourists and fully exploit its tourism potential. Investments in accommodation infrastructure are essential for tourism development. The growing interest in rural tourism offers opportunities for the economic development of local communities through traditional experiences, agricultural activities and local products. Offering a variety of recreational activities, such as hiking, cycling and Danube cruises, enriches the tourism offer and attracts tourists with diverse interests.

Tourism contributes to the local economy by generating jobs and supporting small businesses, improving the quality of life for residents. Promoting and preserving local traditions and culture is essential for attracting tourists interested in authentic cultural experiences. The development and maintenance of infrastructure and utilities are crucial for the accessibility and comfort of visitors, thus supporting the growth of sustainable tourism. An agritourism guesthouse that capitalizes on local resources in a responsible way can contribute to the sustainable development of the region, ensuring the long-term prosperity of the communities in the Danube Gorge.

It is recommended:

- Attracting investments for the construction and modernization of accommodation units to meet the growing demand and diversify accommodation options;
- Developing tourism programs and packages that highlight rural life, agricultural activities and local products, attracting tourists looking for authentic experiences;
- Expanding the offer of recreational activities, such as hiking, cycling and Danube cruises, to attract a wide range of tourists and extend their stay.
- Implementing environmental protection measures and promoting sustainable tourism practices to preserve natural landscapes and local traditions;
- Improve transport infrastructure, water and energy supply networks and waste management systems to support tourism growth and improve visitor experience;
- Develop a marketing strategy that uses traditional and digital channels to attract tourists, collaborating with tourism agencies and participating in fairs and exhibitions;
- Provide training programs for locals in tourism, hospitality and natural resource management to ensure a skilled workforce and improve the quality of tourism services;
- Implement a system for continuous monitoring of the impact of tourism on the environment and local communities to adjust development strategies and ensure the balance between tourism development and the conservation of local resources.

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