

STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

The rural tourism registers a growing evolution in the rural economy of Romania in the last 10 years, thanks to the progressive involvement of specialists, of entrepreneurs and also of the factors of local responsibility. However, there are many steps to go before making a superior recovery of the tourism potential which characterizes the Romanian villages. This requires the identification, the development and the implementation of some strategic options based on natural resource, but geared towards the sustainable use of it. Thus, this paper addresses the rural tourism development from the perspective of a strategic management in order to adopt and implement those strategic options aimed at the sustainable development of the rural tourism. Specifically, in the rural area of Sibiu Depression took place a field research study after the case methodology, which has contributed to the demonstration of the requirements for a sustainable development of the rural tourism in the specific examined area. The result consisted of the formulation, elaboration and adoption with a view to the implementation of some relevant strategic options for a sustainable development of the tourism in the rural area of Sibiu Depression.

Key words: analysis, development, option, resources, rural, sustainability, tourism products

INTRODUCTION

The rural tourism development is based on the fact that economy is nowadays illustrated as a destroyer of its support systems, fixed assets of consuming the natural capital [1]. Thus, it is required a new approach that would lead to a change in the economic development based on the integration of environmental requirements in the evaluation of economic activities [1], being known the fact that "any of the trends in the environmental degradation can undermine the civilization as we know it" [13]. The rural tourism is no longer a novelty. The vast majority of the inhabitants of our planet, love country holidays more and more, both by its users (tourists) and as well as through its service providers (amfitrons/owners or their employees). Addressed to the Romanian rural space, this theme is supported by the great weight of approximately 92% of the country area held by it and of the fact that

the Land Fund shows a share of 62% of agricultural land (approx. 14.7 million ha, of which 66.3% arable land, 29.2% natural meadows and 4.5% fruit trees and vines plantations) which shows the suitability of the development of agricultural and handcraft activities (Strategic Framework). Important is also the fact that the approximately 29% of forests and other lands covered with forest vegetation in use, all these provide a potential which generates the development of rural tourism activities. The current theme is about the sustainable development of rural tourism and it holds an important place in the rural economy by providing the perpetuation of rural specific values and the satisfaction of some interests of those who provide travel services, namely of the requirements of those who are beneficiaries of the tourist services [9]. The rural tourism is an effective solution for harmonizing the requirements of the tourism with the requirements of the

environmental protection and of a sustainable development [10].

During the sustainable development of the rural tourism, an important role is held by the strategic evaluation of the rural space in order to surprise its specificity and the elaboration of the strategic options appropriate for a sustainable development of the rural tourism. It was organized a field research, concerning the strategic assessment of the development of rural tourism in Sibiu Depression. Sibiu Depression is situated in the centre of Romania, more precisely in the south-western part of Transylvanian Foothills Depression, and in the northern part of Carpathians, respectively in the north part of Cindrel Mountains and of Lotru Mountains whose altitude is between 380-602 m [14].

In order to achieve a sustainable development of the rural tourism, through this paperwork, we recommend the use of a strategic management by the responsible officials of our modern society in order to answer some "strategic" questions, such as: Where are we now?, Where are we heading to?, What are the changes and rhythms in the environment?, What course of action is contributing in order to attain the established goals and objectives? This is due to the fact that strategic management contributes to the diagnosis of the external environment and also to the knowledge of the influence factors on the activities carried out in the studied area. At the same time, the strategic management sets a number of decisions and actions necessary to implement the plans and programs [11] designed in order to achieve a sustainable development of the rural tourism in the researched area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method of research concerning the sustainable development of the rural tourism in Sibiu Depression must be consistent with the objectives and the purpose of research. The major goal of the research is to develop some strategic options for developing a sustainable rural tourism in relation to the reality of the researched rural space. The purpose of research is to increase the

diversification of the rural economy in Sibiu Depression and also to improve the quality of life for all members of the rural communities, under the conditions of using in the endurance limits, the natural resources of the Earth.

The sustainable development of the rural tourism, starts from the study of the socio-economic reality of researched rural space, for which, most of the methodology schools recommends its using "in a parallel way and also in a complementar way of quantitative and qualitative methods for getting a plus of knowledge" [8]. They contribute to the formation of an overview and to identify the critical factors with impact on the rural area [2]. In this present work, in order to solve the multitude of problems, it is necessary to deal with the research methodology able to surprise the territorial specificities. The case study methodology [3], [5] [16], is recommended by the results obtained in many studies and research projects to a national and international level-Ruraljobs, Ruremplo, Top, Himilce Mard [7].

The socio-economic reality is highlighted by the use of several methods, both qualitative and quantitative, such as: the study of statistical data and the relevant literature (reports, studies, strategies, monograph), semistructural interviews with key local factors and of course PESTEL analysis, SWOT analysis, completed by focus group meetings. PESTEL analysis represent a process of a closer analysis of the components that influence directly or indirectly the researched rural development (the general external environment) and it acts through the analysis of the following factors: political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legislative [4]. The method allows the identification and the understanding of the macroeconomic forces with impact on the development and it represents an important step in creating a new strategy, because it secures the framework within which it operates and where will be made decisions. S.W.O.T. analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) represent the analysis of diagnosis which highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment, the opportunities and threats in

the external environment [6]. The purpose of the strategic alternatives generated by SWOT analysis is to enhance the strengths, in order to be able to exploit the opportunities, to counter threats and also to improve the weaknesses [12].

The approach concerning the data collection used during the field research is complex and it includes a variety of tools. It began with the application of a questionnaire-a quantitative research instrument, whose completion is based on quantitative data existing to a LAU2 level (municipality). This information was supplemented with raw data as a result of carrying out a process of collecting them for uncovered items with information in the official documents. The obtained information lead to a realistic picture, but not to all of the problems and opportunities for a sustainable development and for a diversification of the economic activities in the researched rural space. Thus, it was organized a structured interview with key local factors. The interview points out that through the formulation of some open questions, the local factors can identify opportunities and constraints concerning a sustainable development and diversification of the rural economy. The interview was organized in the form of focus group meetings for the purpose of highlighting some new issues from a limited number of subjects [8].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The development of the rural tourism registers a continue increase in Romania of the past decade, but without a full recovery of the tourist potential, the specific characteristics of each zone, folklore, ethnographical regions and agricultural products which is dependent on.

The future, namely the market represents the rural tourism part because "through its environment/space where it unfolds and also through its personnel structure it provides a relaxing atmosphere, serenity, novelty, lack of templates and the human warmth of the hosts".

The approach of the research methodology to the case study, in this present study has

allowed getting some relevant information, in accordance with the objectives of the research and they led to the identification of the specific characteristics of the investigated area, as it is evidenced from the obtained results with the help of the PESTEL and SWOT methods, supplemented by focus-group meetings.

With the help of the results of the six major criteria's analysis, it was built the SWOT analysis leading to the identification of strengths and weaknesses, thus the external opportunities and threats of the analyzed territorial unit [15].

It has originally encompassed a number of strengths and weaknesses, respectively the opportunities and threats, but in some focus group meetings of local responsibility and other involved actors it was discussed the relevance of the opportunities and threats for each of their strengths and weaknesses in terms of a sustainable development of the rural tourism.

This shows that improving the physical infrastructure in order to exploit the appropriate hydrotechnical potential, of forest and of tourism created by the natural setting, it is considered an important factor of sustainable development of the rural tourism to which one may add the improvement of the tourist activities, the medical-social infrastructure improvements, namely improving the perpetuation of the traditions and customs. Sustainable development problems of the rural tourism are generated by the existence of the microregion Sibiu Depression of some weaknesses, such as: the lack of the necessary knowledge concerning the attraction of European funds, for the majority of the entrepreneurs, the lack of experience in using the modern marketing principles area; the lack of knowledge of the possibilities for leisure in the rural microregion; the lack of a clear direction in the rural and urban planning; the educational infrastructure of transport and poor communications; the lack of interbonding initiatives with other neighbouring regions; the lack of jobs for young people with higher education.

The sustainable development of the rural

tourism is influenced by threats, such as: the impairment of the tourism heritage through degradation or through inspired arrangement; the inability of local factors to create partnerships in order to attract funds, the poor development of the zones and of the recreational activities outside the guesthouses, namely the absence of some promoting policies and strategies of the obtained products in rural areas.

What could bring a plus to the sustainable development to the rural tourism may be a good valorisation of the opportunities manifested in the microregion: the advantageous geographical position of the area, the possibility to access national and European funds; the closed connection between "destinations of excellence in tourism"; close collaboration between the population of the area with industrial metal band; the existence of some elements of material and cultural heritage well preserved which is still waiting to be capitalized.

The results are relevant for the development with a view to the implementation of strategic options leading to a sustainable development and to a diversification of the rural economy. These are grouped as follows:

A. Strategic options which create favourable framework for a sustainable development of the rural and agrocultural tourism

SO 1. Promoting the development of the rural tourism and of the agrocultural tourism by attracting investment in the physical infrastructure and of communications in order to expand the use of the existing resources and also attracting additional resources.

SO. 2. Improving the educational infrastructure for a good knowledge, and for a good development of entrepreneurial skills .

B. Strategic options specific to the rural tourism development:

SO 3. Supporting the implementation and development of the sustainable rural tourism through the creation of a network in order to promote a sustainable tourism in general and also to support partnerships designed to lead to the vertical integration of the rural tourism, namely the emergence of some related activities.

SO 4. Promoting the recovery and

development of the traditions, the traditional agricultural activities and also the marketing of some area's specific products in accordance with the specificity of the rural localities and their tradition in folk art, folklore, plant breeding, gastronomy, hospitality etc.

SO 5. Supporting the development of information and consultancy services of the inhabitants of rural areas and of the local public administration's staff for the purpose of accessing funds for the development of the rural tourism of marketing tourist's products, of preservation and of promotion of the cultural heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

The case study of this paperwork addresses to the socio-economic reality of the rural space from Sibiu Depression from the point of view of a sustainable development of the rural tourism.

The natural and cultural heritage, mostly in a good condition of conservation in Sibiu Depression is determinant in the development of a sustainable of the rural tourism.

The rural tourism offers the chance of obtaining some additional revenue, of recovering the products from the private household, of the area resource, using the surplus of the space, products and labor, out of the monotony and boredom which leads to refreshment of economic activities in rural areas of Sibiu Depression.

The research of existing social and economic reality in Sibiu Depression leads to the identification of the factors of success and to the shortcomings expressed in organizing some tourist activities, thus in the effective promotion of the tourism potential and of the traditions.

There are also external factors that contribute to the development of these activities as well as those that hinder their development.

Sibiu depression is an area with a vocation for tourism that offers quality holidays and business opportunities and it may contribute to the increased interest of consumers of travel services so that it becomes a tourist destination for higher ranking.

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