

Sustainable development of Mărginimea Sibiului, Romania, through ecotourism and cultural tourism

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Abstract

Mărginimea Sibiului has become during the last years a famous tourist attraction, visited by thousands of foreign and Romanian tourists, an established brand. Most of the villages in the area have retained strong spiritual and folk traditions, giving these communities a special physiognomy. The delightful geographical framework, the purity of nature, the accessibility of places, the richness and diversity of cultural heritage, make Mărginimea Sibiului an area with great tourism potential.

Mărginimea Sibiului area holds more than 30% of the total accommodation capacity available in Sibiu. Although it is a rural area, tourist offer is diverse (active tourism and recreation, traditional cuisine, cultural tourism and business segment coverage through specific facilities, all these in addition to the multitude of leisure), and the degree of comfort is increased.

The development of ecotourism and cultural tourism in the area contributes to: preservation of natural heritage and biodiversity of SCI Frumoasa; respect for socio-cultural authenticity of the local community; preservation of cultural heritage and traditional values of the area, contributing to inter-cultural knowledge; facilitating sustainable long-term economic activities which bring socio-economic benefits equal to all local actors, including stable employment and opportunities to achieve financial incomes and social services for communities, thereby contributing to the prosperity of the area.

Keywords

Ecotourism; rural; cultural tourism; mountain area; sustainable development

1. Introduction

The value gained by the territory in terms of heritage, becomes a strategic factor for its development, and Romania is particularly rich in this respect, whereas there are many areas of Romania, who either have an enormous tourism potential, although they are still in an early stage of their tourism development, or have developed an important tourist activity. The overall aim of coordinating efforts and initiatives in tourism, in order to get a competitive, modern, sustainable and responsible tourism sector is viable if tourism is developed based on competitiveness and sustainability, concept with triple meaning:

- economic sustainability, ensuring fair and efficient economic development, enabling advancement of future generations of Europeans;
- socio-cultural sustainability, consistent with the culture, values and identity of European regions;
- environmental sustainability, ensuring that development is compatible with the preservation of essential processes, biological diversity and biological resources; tourism must be developed on a sustainable basis, in order not to waste natural resources and not cause damage to the environment.

In developing tourism products specific to a region, which may increase the attractiveness of the area, making the tourist' stay more enjoyable; one should also take into account the stimulation of tourism-related activities such as: encourage the pursuit of folk art and craft fairs, traditional folk cultural performances and religious events. Supporting tourism investments that promote traditional cuisine from different regions or tourism maximum use initiatives of local resources can also be topics for future

projects and even the financial support of manufacturing activities of handicrafts and traditional crafts. Initiatives to develop sports tourism activities will be supported as well: mountain bike, descending fast mountain rivers with boats - rafting, paragliding, hang gliding, and so on.

Tourism, more than any other domain, relies on the environment; this represents its "raw material", its object and domain of activity and tourism deployment being its main frame carrying the resources. Tourism is being carried out through the environment and its quality can favor or on contrary, touristic activities. By enforcing such a type of development means more powerful ecologic prices which overlap the global financial-economic crisis. The ecological challenges mostly regarding the principles, the economic system works, shapes the dimension of the efforts which are being asked by this new way.

In a world in which the economy demands are forcing the limits of the natural systems to rely on the distorted signals of the market to guide the decisions on the investments is a certain way to disaster. Converting the economy into an eco-economy is a major challenge. Building an eco-economy will affect "every corner of our life" (Brown L., 2001)

Four general factors determine and influence directly the touristic activity: the quantitative and qualitative value of touristic resources; the general economic growth, which mostly influences jobs and incomes; the exchange rate, which determines the evolution of the purchase power of residents and non-residents; the reparation which determines the purchasing power of clients. All touristic activities determine in time and space potential effects on the environment, health or social system. These influences together are being expressed through the notion of impact (Hornoiu I., 2009).

The tourism-environment relationship has a special meaning, the development and protection of the environment representing a sine qua non condition of tourism, any alteration of it can cause damages also to the touristic potential by diminishing or even canceling its resources. The touristic potential as part of the environment, the existence and development, on its quality, therefore considered a possible quality index for its environment, in other words, a barometer of its quality; it is intensively used in those areas in which the adequate requirements are met and it is diminished and gradually removed in those areas in which, for various reasons, a certain component of the environment, such as the scenery, air, or water is degrading. The economic effects of tourism – estimate income, jobs – are easily emphasized while ecological effects cannot be qualitatively measured rather than quantitatively. Besides the fact that it is a source of income and jobs, tourism is also a source of satisfaction, for people inhabiting touristic areas.

The concept of durable tourism has become increasingly popular at a microeconomic level through the promotion of green tourism. The actors of the industry of hospitality and travel have become increasingly sensitive to environmental issues. Few are those who support the idea the economic activity does not influence the environment. On the other hand, more and more managers and employers in tourism admit that natural resources have a great economic, actual and potential value if they are adequately handled.

The strategy of developing ecotourism in Romania drawn up in 2010 has as finality the creation of some correspondence among the real premises of Romanian tourism within special natural areas, the demands for environment protection and present tendencies of the international touristic market.

To get this desideratum and to direct it towards a sustainable direction funding mechanisms must be developed and preservation programs for biodiversity, revising legislative instruments that are suited with this domain, awareness with the factors involved, education at local level aiming at directing towards the principles of some sustainable thinking, strengthening of institutional ability for the implementation of the environment legislation.

Ecotourism represents a consequence of the putting into force of the present principles for developing sustainable tourism that aims at respecting the integrity of natural landscapes, ecologic biodiversity, cultural identity in accordance with the demands of amatory tourists for nature and authentic culture.

In Romania, the activity regarding tourism on ecological principles must apply the romanian legislation and normative documents or directives in this respect of the countries within the EU or other world organisations that back such measures and that is to be taken for granted as tuning with in future. In 2007 the global initiative to establish a minimum set of standards for sustainable tourism was launched proposed by the Program for Environment for UN (UNEP) and WTO and implemented by the Partnership for Global Criteria regarding Sustainable Tourism.

The Local Document Agenda 21 and the European Initiative backed by WTO and World Business Council for Sustainable Development proves the contribution for eco-classification to directing the tourist market towards sustainability. This represents an important step within a larger context where in 2003 the WOT recommended to governments in order to back the initiatives that promote the certifying of sustainable tourism (Honey M., 2002). Taking into consideration the policy of the EU regarding the products with small impact on environment one should give more attention in the new legislation to

backing products and services that have implemented a pattern of good practices in ecotourism (ecologic label, ecotouristic certifying officially admitted) and free promotion for villages "touristic green" within a general program „Green Touristic Romania". Over 40 touristic operators are being registered in AER and they promote ecologic tourism in Romania and they managed to initiate the development of a chain for touristic destinations at a micro regional level under the brand Discover Eco Romania.

The Association for Ecotourism in Romania certified starting with 2006 a series of touristic pensions with a totality of more than 300 places for accommodation, mostly situated inside or in the immediate approach of some protected areas situated in Hunedoara county, Râu de Mori village. Recent studies have enlarged the possibility of eco-certifying in Mărginimea Sibiului, an area with agritouristic ground and ecotouristic potential (Nicula V., Spânu Simona, Ciorte G., 2012). Other areas with ecotouristic certifying capacities are Viscri - Braşov, Zălanului Valley and Micloşoara - Covasna County which with the help of the British Crown will make a chain of pensions that will cover the Saxon and Sekler areas.

Concept admitted internationally and backed by UNESCO for the preservation of the local patrimony, natural and cultural, material and immaterial, the Geopark is an instrument that can entail an identity on the market in the international exchanges and in global communication (Andrăşanu A., 2014). That means the existence of an adequate management form the sustainable means of transport; complete exposure of promotional strategy and communication to promote the idea of protected natural area within the accomplishment of new touristic products and the putting into practice of a technical management; establishing monitoring programs of information about the natural protected areas regarding the touristic circulation, consequences and revising periodically the touristic plans for development in order to respect the quality standards for the environment ; analysing the degree of exploiting resources by taking into consideration protection demands; accomplishing conditions to put into practice plans for complex economic turning into account.

2. Material & Methods

Statistical data on the evolution of tourism indicators in Mărginimea Sibiului, in 2018-2020, shows increasing interest manifested both among tourists from Romania and abroad, even in pandemic situation.

Using the experience with Sibiu - European Capital of Culture and Mărginimea Sibiului - the most romantic ecotouristic destination, the main objective of the paper is to unfold a pattern for promoting cultural ecotourism for local communities regarding Sibiu area. The motivation for the choice comes out of the wish to render profitable in a superior manner the huge cultural and ecotouristic potential of this region. With an original offer, a unique one Sibiu county can be successful in tourism and mostly in cultural ecotourism. By using the experience gained in the project "Sibiu Cultural European Capital" we consider that cultural ecotourism is an opportunity for Mărginimea Sibiului to become ecotouristic and cultural destinations on the European touristic map, not only for foreign visitors, but for Romanians too.

Table 1. Establishments of tourists' facilities in functions of tourist accommodation, such as guesthouses and agro type in Mărginimea Sibiului (no. days/tourist)

Units with functions of tourists' accommodation	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2018												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	38488	33001	37533	35810	40613	40190	41015	40541	38920	39723	38480	38874
2019												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	34522	28831	34838	31594	33795	33436	36025	36415	33410	33541	31767	33870
2020												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	33659	31752	17425	-	612	20660	36930	38513	36280	37965	34700	32847

Source: processed data insse.ro, base Tempo online

The touristic circulation as well as the capacity of accommodation in pensions within the rural environment have higher values but cannot be quantified in absence of some statistic obvious and genuine data.

Table 2. Tourist arrivals in units with functions of tourists' accommodation guesthouses and agro type in Mărginimea Sibiului

Units with functions of tourists' accommodation	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2018												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	1906	1465	1243	2302	2655	3169	4325	5043	3196	2287	2081	2983
2019												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	1883	1043	1295	2107	2513	3556	4606	6172	2956	2491	1959	2409
2020												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	2301	1402	319	0	17	938	3253	5038	2409	1275	660	970

Source: processed data insse.ro, base Tempo online

From the analysis of this data, it is obvious that tourists are increasing demands for tourism products in the Mărginimea Sibiului.

Table 3. Tourist overnight in units with functions of tourists' accommodation guesthouses and agro type in Mărginimea Sibiului

Units with functions of tourists' accommodation	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2018												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	3447	2606	2119	4729	4214	6043	8520	10026	5723	4492	4532	5969
2019												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	3973	2416	2550	3974	5655	7751	10261	11856	5603	5684	3423	5121
2020												
Guesthouses and agritouristic guesthouses	3917	2747	757	30	0	2082	6498	9912	5219	2497	1408	1985

Source: processed data insse.ro, base Tempo online

The ecotourism sector's development and prosperity will lead simultaneously to increases in other sectors of the economy: food, trade, transport, etc. As the demand for ecotourism is permanent and on a steady global growth, and as a continuing trend that influences the tourism market and local communities, it is the interest of local communities to promote the creation of sustainable development models.

The positive effects or what determines the correct application and implementation of quality management in any establishment providing travel services are more likely to repeat visits, increase financial performance, given that attracting new customers is 5-10 times more expensive than keeping customers at existing costs and avoiding complaints; better employee motivation, positive external effects chain (promotion, consistency in business and winning new markets).

3. Results & Discussion

From the analysis of touristic data, it is obvious that tourists are increasing demands for tourism products in the Sibiu County, especially in summer, but in 2019 it is evident that the tourist came almost constantly each month of the year. That means that the environment, gastronomy, traditional festivals and the unpolluted environment represent serious motives for the tourist to choose Sibiu County as holiday destination. This reality is reflected for the growing up of the Net use index of accommodation places.

Cultural ecotourism will contribute to the increase of rendering visible Sibiu county that can become landmark in intercultural and multicultural tourism, with benefits on local communities within the rural environment. Backing culture can be done by developing ecotourism and mutually too, the ecotouristic potential can be turned into account through culture.

Since 2007, it is clear that visitors to the city have been visiting an even wider range of attractions. As Sibiu County in general and Mărginimea Sibiului specially has developed its tourism and cultural product, the visitor experience has improved as well.

The ECOC in 2007 did not in itself produce an increase in the quality of the experience, but it seems that the legacy of the event is a notably increased visit quality. The image of Sibiu has remained fairly positive since 2007.

The cultural ecotourism represents an important step in education on eco-economic and bio-economic principles for the population in order to be aware of the value regarding the cultural and ecotouristic patrimony: cultural events and the ethno folklore activities, traditional products, other creative activities.

The touristic products like cultural ecotourism represent the best alternatives among economy, culture and environment protection and are meant to be adequate financial economic instruments for a permanent promotion of touristic actions, of turning into account the cultural patrimony in the ecotouristic areas.

Rural tourism and ecotourism represent an alternative for employment for labour force in the countryside, a way to diversify rural economy and bring income source for the inhabitants within the rural area.

The way of life for rural population is connected with a rich material and immaterial patrimony that confers specific identity for the village. These elements of originality must be preserved and turned into account in a superior manner.

Rural tourism with its component agritourism, scientific tourism and professional tourism in Mărginimea Sibiului can impose as forms of ecologic tourism. The industry of ecotourism is viable from a commercial point of view, sustainable from an ecologic point of view and responsible from a cultural point of view. It is recommended that each region where ecotourism is being practiced develop its own system of principles, directing lines and certifying criteria based on materials available on an international plan. In this respect, at a national level a Guide was conceived to work out management plans for the protected areas in Romania and it comprises among other things managerial criteria a viable management plan must answer. The management planning can be enlarged in ecotourism so as it should be accomplished by commitment, directed on the process itself, locally worked out and accomplished participially to have an adequate dimension and to reflect the size and complexity of the protected area, to be accessible to users, to be adequate reflecting the practices and procedures used currently as well as the approaches presented in the decision process, the public participation and management. At the same time, the management planning of the ecotouristic areas must be adaptable meaning that the management plan must be seen as a guide that is offering a vision and guiding towards what must be done and the decision must be taken according to the best knowledge, experiences and expertise available at that moment. The management plan must be realistic, must define and aim at ideal solutions and must be conceived to recognize and face present realities. Another side that must be approached in the ecotouristic management planning is sustainability meaning that the plan must include components that can ensure relevance in time. The management plan and the planning process in ecotourism must be officially adopted by the protected area stamped by relevant authorities for the protected areas and ideally should be approved by key groups by interested factors. Before being completely legalized the plan must be tested on the ground by the management team and by partners.

Touristic activities within a protected area must be based on the management plan drawn by park owners by consulting all the actors involved.

A good collaboration and communication among all decision factors that are involved is necessary.(local community, central authority, scientific community).

The development of ecotouristic activities in the protected areas entails socio economic profits namely: generating the appearance of working places locally (directly in the touristic area or connected areas), stimulates the local economy by developing services (structures of touristic accommodation, foodstuff, transport, souvenir industry, craftsmanship products, and guiding services. Once developed within a protected area it is for tourism that the local/regional/national authorities be stimulated to contribute to the development of periphery regions by capital insertions. It encourages the growth of agricultural productivity on narrow surfaces (intensive agriculture) to maintain a larger surface with natural vegetation; it contributes to the improvement of intercultural relationships in a region (often tourists are trying to get acquainted to the traditions and customs of some ethnographic region and the hostess community is thus being stimulated to revive popular traditions). If there is a normal development tourism can entail self-funding of the development mechanisms that can be profitable for the authorities in the park as instrument for preserving natural areas; it creates re creative facilities that can be used by local communities over one year; it backs the aim to preserve by convincing governments and the public on the importance of natural area.

Here we have some of the economic advantages of ecotourism: it is one of the means considered most efficient to combine the preservation of nature with the socio economic development; more than any other economic activity ecotourism confers to the wild nature an economic value; it brings more benefits and

causes less destructions to nature than the conventional- industrial tourism; it is more consistent with the traditional way of life than other forms of tourism ; it needs less investments than the conventional- industrial tourism; it creates working places and development alternatives by backing nature and local, regional culture and at a national level.

The socio economic advantages entail some concessions too. The activity of managerial authorities for protected areas is suffering because of the lack regarding economic resources, technical and organisational ones necessary for the development of touristic activities. These should be put at disposal by central and local authorities. In such cases it is more suitable the granting of the protected areas and offering to administration the infrastructure and touristic endowments. This aspect was regulated in 2003 by the Romanian Government but the system can be put into practice mostly to scientific reserves and nature monuments. For national and natural parks with large surfaces it is indicated a partnership among the representatives of government in the territory- nongovernmental organizations- local authorities.

Ecotourism is a form of niche tourism but very dynamic keeping into accounts the regulations regarding the environment protection adopted by our country, by the economic, social, cultural advantages that tourism can bring to local communities. Once admitted the importance of this sector for the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural patrimony, for the economic and social development of local communities in the natural rural areas and for the growing touristic experience efforts should be taken to render profitable the rich patrimony that our country has got. The economic impact engendered by the ecotourism programs unfolded by tourist operators is obviously increasing but the local impact is over the average of classical tourism. In spite of the fact that our country has a special ecotouristic patrimony with a potential still not completely turned into account, ecotourism is still a fragment that is rather narrow on the touristic market confronted with many problems such as: weak cooperation locally, modest promotion nationally and internationally, limited offer, weakly developed, weak development of infrastructure specific for ecotourism at the level of protected areas, migration of working forces, weak level of training regarding the staff.

In the successive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism has seen dramatic declines. Tourist expenditures and revenues have undergone significant changes, both by decreasing the amounts and by typology. Tourism has been one of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic and all countries has been affected, with travel restrictions generating an unprecedented decline in the number of international and national tourists. Air, road or sea and river transport companies, have suffered substantial financial losses. In Romania, tourism enterprises whose activity has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic will benefit from a state aid scheme whose budget has been estimated at 500 million euros, for granting financing from national public funds and/or non-reimbursable external ones, in order to survive or relaunch them. The aid in the amount of 20% will be granted to the beneficiaries in the form of grants, to partially cover the loss of turnover or turnover, suffered in 2020 compared to 2019.

The latest surveys on consumer concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic show that the intention to operate outside the home varies by country. Most respondents opt for walking, cycling or private car use and avoiding crowded places. Telework and flexible working hours could also influence choices about residence and work, diminishing the trend towards urban sprawl that has been observed in recent years, the study shows.

Habits developed during the pandemic period predominate - travel is shorter and shorter, the demand for private transport increases, the passenger air transport sector could have some recovery, while rail transport would be more pronounced.

In the case of the tourism sector in Mărginimea Sibiului, three scenarios are foreshadowed:

- Rural tourism returns to the pre-COVID-19 situation. Vaccination will encourage people to travel - first domestically, then internationally, the study shows, noting that insurance policies will certainly be a *sine qua non* for traveling;
- Rural tourism uses the crisis as a catalyst for change and rebuilds more resiliently; the transformation of the industry towards a greener, smarter (digital) and more inclusive tourism is the second scenario.
- Rural tourism remains at a low rate, the return being lasting. In this scenario, domestic tourism will remain popular in the long run, and travel abroad will be significantly reduced. In most cases, business travel will be replaced by virtual meetings through the use of new technologies. The number of tourism companies and jobs in the sector will decrease significantly. The effect is that as fewer tourism players compete in the marketplace, the price of tourism products will increase.

The key criteria in choosing the holiday destination in 2021 will be first and foremost: health security, non-congested areas, quality, sustainability, ecotourism, with holiday homes and apartments, guesthouses and smaller hotels preferred.

The strategy of major service providers in terms of the quality of provided services is limited to the following three steps:

- First, to divide the market very carefully and develop services to meet customer needs as they noticed that not all customers who buy the same product or service have the same needs;
- Second, they realized that only the client knows what he wants, so they pay attention to what the consumer says;
- Third, they are careful to meet customer expectations at optimum levels; they promise less and offer more.

Service providers should not try to guess the wishes of the customer, nor his / her expectations, but must try to determine them as accurately as possible, by referring directly to the consumer in connection with his perception of quality, satisfaction, value of tourism product - through surveys. The next step is to harmonize this data with the quality perception of the management team to improve service quality.

Tourist companies should establish a permanent evaluation and measuring of customer satisfaction (Minciu Rodica, 2010). This assessment must identify reactions, both positive and negative, and their likely incidence on future activities of the company. Both the blog and the forum are very useful for communication within tourist accommodation structures and beyond: the company can interact with potential clients can exchange information, they can learn new things. One advantage of using them as integral parts to a web site is that visitors can express their ideas, opinions or provide solutions to solving problems. Another advantage is the ease with which information can be accessed.

4. Conclusions

Developing a rural eco-economy depends on the global vision of the natural resources and on a broad understanding of the restructuring of economic notions and concepts needed to realize this vision. Promoting the concept of eco-pension in Mărginimea Sibiului among the administrators of the pensions selected as having eco-tourist potential and the highlighting of the profitability in time of this activity, evaluating and directing the activities from the field of tourism in relation to the ecotourism criteria will allow the exploitation of local natural and economic resources through the certification of eco-tourist products and that of destinations and accommodation structures, in order to guarantee the eco-tourist quality (Nicula V., 2012).

The eco-economic principles are essential elements when deciding to transform an agro-tourist pension into an eco-tourist pension. Ecotourism creates jobs, sustainable development alternatives, and a well-defined image that can be used in marketing the local, regional, or national products. By implementing adequate marketing strategies, one could promote, together with the interested tourism agencies, a realistic and attractive tourist product. In the same time, we shall elaborate a guide which will contain short studies, destined for the administrators of pensions, useful for implementing the eco-pensions in the Romanian rural tourism. Alongside norms regarding the use of ecological building materials, of unconventional sources of energy, the use of biotechnologies, the conservation of biodiversity, the guide will also include menus, traditional recipes for valorizing the ecological food products, and leisure activities in protected natural areas (Andrășanu A., 2014).

Ecotourism is the best practice for tourism in a sustainable environment. Adopting ecological technologies requires a systematic effort in formulating eco-economic policies, especially for restructuring the traditional agricultural activity. Eco-certification is more and more present in many of the fields of economy, including for identifying products with high ecological potential. The tourist product offered by eco-pensions can be a promoter of green tourism. Ecotourism contributes to preserving the environment and to supporting the well-being of the local population. Eco-pensions will represent a green model, focused on the strategy of the four R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Re-examine), by using eco-economic systems, procedures and strategies (Muhibudin M., 2012). Transforming the agro-tourist pensions from the village of Sibiel into eco-pensions, thus making Sibiel the first green village in Romania, and training the administrators of pensions and other key members of the tourist business into forming an eco-economic view of the sustainable development actively contributes to preserving the natural and cultural heritage, includes local communities in the sequential planning, development, and operating processes contributing to their well-being (Nicula V., 2014).

The eco-pension is an important link in the chain ecological agriculture – ecological food – conservation of biodiversity bio and eco-economic development. Ecotourism is a tourism which directly or indirectly promotes and supports sustainable economic development. Ecotourism can generate financial support for the formation, management and protection of natural areas.

The geographical and climatic conditions of Mărginimea Sibiului are to favor the development of tourism in an ecological environment. Therefore, Mărginimea Sibiului should follow the example of other regions with very rich natural and ecological reserves such as alpine region on Austria or Swiss, for which ecotourism has become an important source of income (Nicula V., 2012).

Promoting the concept of eco-pension among the administrators of the pensions which are selected as having eco-tourist potential and the highlighting of the profitability in time of this activity offers the advantages of experiencing a new model of tourist activity, the only one viable, and we are counting on the perceptiveness of the administrators of pensions in Sibiel, which will in this way be able to keep Sibiel on the top of rural tourist destinations. Evaluating and directing the activities from the field of tourism in relation to the ecotourism criteria will allow the exploitation of local natural and economic resources through the certification of eco-tourist products and that of destinations and accommodation structures, in order to guarantee the eco-tourist quality.

Ecotourism is to integrate tourism development and to share the benefits at the community level. Nature conservation can easily become counterproductive if local people are against it. Each tour product should in the best possible way contribute to the local economy by local sourcing, purchasing as much as possible in the area. Ecotourism is a vehicle for striking the balance of local economic development and the conservation of biological and cultural diversity.

Nature conservation in combination with ecotourism provides more local revenues than any other kind of nature exploitation. And besides that, many of the factors that often are a drawback for all other kinds of industry (long distances, low population density, wild lands etc.) in this context instead turn into important strengths for ecotourism development. Ecotourism often provides jobs locally for young people, to the benefit of the local businesses, schools, post offices or other social services.

The criteria below help the tour operators to evaluate to what extent they are actually contributing to the economy of the destination. For the ecotourism operator, the personal encounter with the traveller is in focus. Skilled and competent guides are experts in transmitting the joy of discovery and knowledge, and have the knack of raising enthusiasm among the travellers. This is often an important key to the quality of the visitor experience. Ecotourism is a question of wanting to influence visitors into having a non-disturbing and respectful attitude towards nature, local people and their cultural heritage.

Ecotourism is to travel with a curious and at the same time respectful attitude. Respect comes from knowledge and ethical values. Therefore, to inform and to influence ethical values are natural parts of an ecotourism product.

Knowing the particularities of the touristic activity is of great importance for the manager as he has the possibility to take the most suitable decisions to increase tourists' satisfaction and enhance the efficiency of touristic activity by assuming the social responsibility and by sustainable development. Romanian touristic potential is being appreciated as promising but in its evolution for being successful Romanian tourism must adopt a global mentality and consider international competition.

Agrotourism has the largest involvements in turning into account the local touristic resources and rising the life level for the inhabitants (as complementary activity to agricultural exploitation) in the socio economic development of the rural settlement and of the community.

There are situations when the investors in the rural tourism do not belong to the respective place and do not use the local resources as materials for construction and the exploitation of accommodation units are far from using the local labour force and food products either. Local authorities do not control the quality of services and labour norms as well as moral and economic behaviour or protecting the environment. All these aspects entail economic and social prejudices for the community.

Such implants related to the allotting of the fields bring a chaotic development of the space that slips the coordination of local authorities under the architectural aspect and traditions are not observed as such and neither is the sanitation services of technical endowments with negative impact on the environment.

The investors outside the places find interest for the hotel exploitation of the pension, rural hotel or villa being less involved in ethno folkloric development, of traditions, less connected to the socio economic life of the village.

The local authorities are not being involved in organizing and developing rural tourism and agro tourism too as well as there is the lack of some initiative groups in supporting the development and promoting the agro touristic offer and such socio economic components are developed chaotic and taken into account

the principle everything for me. Thus, the local population as actor of local tourism is not involved in the socio economic life of the community.

Locally, the community offers economic facilities for agro tourism development but the organizers and owners of touristic units too must give more for the community.

The touristic development in the rural area is accompanied by damages brought to the environment by the excessive exploitation of touristic resources, by pollution, destruction of natural ecosystems and sometimes ethno folklore traditions, the appearance of buildings that deform the places such as villas and hotels with architecture not in accordance with the area where traditional materials such as wood and stone are replaced with concrete and glass. Systematization is anarchic or by social and cultural pressure on local communities.

The touristic development is accompanied by damages brought by exploring the touristic resources, pollution, degradation or destroying natural ecosystems and sometimes ethno folklore traditions. Some constructions may harm places, anarchic systematization or social and cultural pressure on local communities.

Decorations and touristic and sport equipment within the rural area by bio versification of the agro touristic offer, road facilities, insalubrious equipment, lack of garbage holes are factors that contribute to the degradation of the environment that diminish the attraction for rural places.

It is the interest of the local communities and authorities to tune the rural tourism policies with those for the protection of the environment and local population.

It can be concluded that the performance is due to the ongoing concern of managers to improve the quality of products and customer service. For these companies, quality is not only a requirement, but has become a value, an essential component of organizational culture.

Quality Assurance as part of quality management means creating confidence among tourists interested in purchasing ecotourism programs and can be considered as an evaluation of different perspectives on how a tourism business operates and the way it needs to provide quality products to its customers.

We can state that the majority of tourists consider tourism products within the following quality parameters: competence, safety, hygiene, availability for the customer, accurate and timely information, timeliness, reliability, trust, safety, etc. Management methods and techniques of quality management are scientifically based on management tools, organizations which promote the marketing of quality products that meet present and future needs of customers.

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