



The Impact of Rural Tourism on the Development of Regional Communities

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Abstract

Tourism activities are increasingly participating as a source of income in both developed and developing countries. The internationalization of tourism activity was therefore confronted with the protests of those who supported the protection of the environment and who called for the alignment of these activities to the principles of the concept of global environment. Preserving the rural world together with everything that is significant from an economic, social, cultural point of view, implies the initiation and development of rural tourism. At the same time, tourism can actively participate in maintaining the viability and stability of rural localities. Rural tourism must become an alternative to the problems of agriculture and rural areas. The aim of this empirical research is to investigate the impact of rural tourism on the development of regional communities from a theoretical point of view using qualitative research based on observations, case study and textual analysis. The findings suggest that the launch of the tourist villages will determine the rural civil community to respond promptly to the social recovery order in the midst of an unpolluted, balanced and beneficial natural environment. Rural tourism, through its effects, will become a constant and inexpensive tool of social progress of the rural communities.

Keywords: development, regional communities, rural tourism, sustainability.

Introduction

Tourism is a form of globalization of the economy and, at the same time, a very difficult one to assess (Stukalo et al., 2018). Tourism must be viewed from both an economic and a cultural perspective. While independent travel is relatively widespread, all tourists traveling abroad have to use the services of numerous companies, large and small, domestic and international, which organize and coordinate travel and tourism. The growing importance of geographical mobility of goods, services and people is directly related to the dynamics of internationalization and globalization (Bryson et al., 2020; Williams & Shaw, 2011). The fluidization of the flows of goods and people is the result of the socio-economic mechanisms generated by the increasing globalization and the intensification of the exchanges on world scale (Girneata & Dobrin, 2015). This global system, which is based on the application of modern technologies in all areas of activity, has brought about profound transformations of trade relations, considerably strengthened the control of markets by developed countries and accentuated the differences between this group of states and that of developing countries (Cardoso & Faletto, 2021).

The world economic system acquires new commercial structures, which in turn generate important transformations in the field of transport, so that the space-time relationship has changed radically (Sheppard, 2011). In parallel with the intensification of trade, the increase in leisure time has given tourism a leading role in terms of movement of people, even to the point of transforming recreational activities into an important element of economic development (Holloway & Humphreys, 2019). In this sense, in the process of consolidating a new world system, transport appears as an important basis for the development of commercial and tourist processes.

Tourism activities are increasingly participating as a source of income in both

developed and developing countries (Winter et al., 2020). Tourism is considered a component of foreign trade (Liu et al., 2019). In some countries it has turned into a real monoactivity, which increases the economic vulnerability to the problems that can appear in this sphere of activity.

Sustainable tourism through the development of its many forms of concrete manifestation such as tourism management and marketing, ensures the natural and economic integrity of the environment and rationally capitalizes on natural and cultural resources, but retains the necessary potential for future generations and is practically identified with a dynamic equilibrium of supply and demand, which outlines any modern tourist market (Khartishvili et al., 2019). Revenues from tourism can help finance the protection of natural areas and increase their economic importance. Due to their attractiveness, protected areas are the main motivations for visitors for many categories of tourists.

In the field of tourism, as in any economic activity, profit maximization (Deac et al., 2016a) and customer perceived value are essential (Deac et al., 2016b). For this, extra-economic aspects must be taken into account as natural factors influence to a great extent the activities of any organization (Trifu et al., 2014): for example, the succession of seasons, climate change that has become radical in recent years and changes in consumer tastes. For example, many resorts dependent on winter tourism have suffered from snow cover mitigation as a result of global warming. In addition, the overestimation of the potential of certain destinations, while reducing administrative requirements, have created unpleasant surprises for some top bidders.

The internationalization of tourism activity was therefore confronted with the protests of those who supported the protection of the environment and who called for the alignment of these activities to the principles of the concept of global environment (Cohen-Shacham et al., 2019). The environment, before being a physically grounded element,

represents above all the existential space of society as a whole, of communities and individuals, which in turn belong to cultures, which the physical environment serves as a support.

The management of natural and anthropic objectives, put at the service of tourism, is involved in shaping the basic motivations for organizing recreational activities, restoring health or cultural ascension. The variety and the multitude of these objectives represent the guarantee of the permanent ascending evolution of tourism. For this reason, the tourist potential must be researched through two components of the tourist resources:

- *the natural component* - represented by spectacular landscapes, the varied configuration of the relief, the favorable climatic conditions (low frequency of negative phenomena, the absence of excessive temperatures), the therapeutic value and the abundance of some natural factors,
- *the anthropic component* - represented by secular or religious monuments and art objects, museums and museum collections, elements of ethnography and folklore of great beauty and originality, current prestigious achievements, etc.

Rural tourism is also part of the anthropic tourist resources, but in the establishment of the rural tourism product also adds other specific rural elements, which are part of the daily life of locals in rural areas (Evgrafova, Ismailova & Kalinichev, 2020). Preserving the rural world together with everything that is significant from an economic, social, cultural point of view, implies the initiation and development of rural tourism (Fang, 2020). At the same time, tourism can actively participate in maintaining the viability and stability of rural localities, given that the phenomenon of depopulation is increasingly evident, by the departure of young people to urban areas, by abandoning old households and land. The connection between the rural environment, a particularly fragile environment and the dynamism imposed by

the tourist phenomenon raises the issue of the risks generated by the restructuring. We can say that rural tourism must become an alternative to the problems of agriculture and rural areas.

Research Methodology

The aim of this empirical research is to investigate the impact of rural tourism on the development of regional communities from a theoretical point of view. In this regard, a qualitative research was utilized, based on various observations, case study and textual analysis. Therefore, a systematic literature review was conducted analyzing numerous scientific articles, books, specialized reports that address the issue of rural tourism on the development of regional communities.

The results of the analysis undertaken pursue the following objectives:

- presenting the evolution of rural tourism as part of the sustainable development of tourism and addressing fundamental transformations that are registered at the level of the villages;
- highlighting the main benefits and damages of rural tourism on local communities and the environment;
- establishing some general principles that must be respected by rural tourism in the future sustainable development of the rural area.

Literature Review

Economic growth is understood as a multiplication of an area's capacity to supply more and more economic goods, amid investment in top technologies and institutional and ideological adaptation. Tourism compared to other fields brings added value, namely money in the country's treasury and by capitalizing on resources not valued by other fields, the additional capitalization of some related to other fields, respectively of creations designed for other purposes. Rural tourism falls into the category

of sectors of activity whose evolution begins as an element of completion of the main activities and culminates with the current complexity of the forms of manifestation whose utility is full for both population and society (Rosalina, Dupre & Wang, 2021). Tourism activity, in general, determines a series of direct, indirect and induced influences on other sectors of the economy, which shows the multiplier effect of tourism. A clear picture of the multiplier effect in tourism is obtained by establishing the architecture of tourism spending and its influence on the economy in essence, rural tourism and agrotourism are activities that produce alternative incomes, thus creating new opportunities for rural development (Randelli & Martellozzo, 2019). In order for these revenues to materialize at a level as close as possible to the tourist potential of the area, an extensive process of modernization, development and innovation for tourism, as well as the realization of current and competitive tourist services is necessary. In particular, the tourism infrastructure does not rise to the level of tourists' requirements in terms of accommodation structures, respectively recreational, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Increased attention must also be paid to supporting the promotion of rural tourism which, through relevant marketing together with numerous forms of support, contributes to a better visibility of the potential, diversity and attractiveness of the unique products of rural tourism and to a better capitalization (Pato & Kastenholz, 2017).

The development of rural tourism starts from the fact that the agricultural household is, generally located in a natural environment, the agricultural farm has natural resources that can ensure the accommodation of any tourist (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997), and that the gates of rural areas are opened and agricultural products owned by pure rural farmers. The village or agrotourism area represents the real space of attraction, the space where all the elements of local development are assembled (Romanenko et al., 2020). Between the activity of rural

tourism and the economic and social development of rural areas there is a correspondence, reciprocity relationship (Martínez et al., 2019). The increase of the tourist circulation is done through the overall development of the respective rural areas, development that is achieved through the tourist activity. The development of the accommodation offers leads to the appearance of a constant quality framework, which aims to improve the architectural aspect of the village.

Tourist villages located mainly in mountainous or pre-mountainous areas, retain the population and contribute to the perpetuation of forestry, animal husbandry, or various crafts. In such localities, the presence of tourists allows the creation of funds for the development of new infrastructure, through taxes and fees paid for certain utilities (museums, paid parking, camping, etc.). Also, through the new conditions required by the classification and authorization of agritourism pensions, in rural localities is developed the activity of water management, modernization of water capture and treatment systems and related network, as well as the sewerage system in rural areas (Roberts et al., 2017).

As economic activities, the modern forms of rural tourism also require the development of the automatic communication network, and telephone, fax and telegraph services made available to tourists at any time. The social effects of rural tourism on rural areas are manifested by the differentiation of the social structure, as many people will move from agricultural work to activities in the field of services, manufacturing and crafts, while allowing a small differentiation of family income. In addition to the economic and social effects of rural tourism, we can also refer to some cultural effects, such as improving the conservation of nature monuments, architectural and historical, through specific revenues.

Results and Discussion

The sustainable development of tourism and implicitly of the rural space is closely related to the accommodation capacity, which is highlighted by the type of exploitation or the number of visitors that an area can accommodate without reaching a negative

impact on the physical environment and on the level of social acceptance of guests. As a complex activity, the development of sustainable tourism, involves a certain collaboration between different economic sectors (Bramwell, 1994) such as agriculture, forests, water, mineral resources, industry, transport, etc., as well as governmental and local authorities. For the development of sustainable tourism, the design and construction of tourist facilities must be considered (Lane, 2009), so as to avoid conflicts with the environment, local communities or other economic sectors and must be maintained in all other stages of tourism activity.

Unemployment affects the economies of all countries and is also the central problem of contemporary society on a global scale, especially during the pandemic crisis of COVID-19. Thus, confrontations with demographic problems will provoke governments, countries, communities responsible for human rights, to seek effective and efficient solutions. One of the solutions, without a doubt, is rural tourism. It can be stated that rural tourism will contribute to recreation and at the same time to a climate of communication between different types of personalities and human behaviors in a relatively safe environment.

The launch of the tourist villages will determine the rural civil community to respond promptly to the social recovery order in the midst of an unpolluted, balanced and beneficial natural environment. The uniqueness of rural tourism, the existing conditions, the culture and purity of people and places, doubled by hospitality, interest, motivation and aspiration for better, will impose and consecrate rural tourism in all

localities with developed natural potential. All this will contribute to the sustainable and responsible development of the village, producing inevitable mutations that will diminish its dependence on the city.

Through the high income that the people involved in the rural tourism activity obtain, the phenomenon of increasing the accommodation capacity or renovation of some constructions is manifested, which is achieved by capitalizing in these constructions the local architecture and the traditional construction materials. Another incidence of the forms of rural tourism, on the culture of the tourist who came to the rural environment, is that of socialization, giving the possibility to know directly the reality of the village life and the formation of a certain attitude (Gao & Wu, 2017). At the same time, it becomes a factor in the formation of emotions, and under certain conditions, facilitates creative activities.

The development of rural infrastructure is the essential condition necessary for the development of tourism in rural areas and includes several aspects of utmost importance, necessary to be met (Bramwell, 1994; Gao, Huang & Huang, 2009; Fang, 2020):

- Road maintenance in good condition;
- Public transport;
- Appropriate communication system;
- Electrification of villages and mountain farms;
- Supply with running water of agricultural holdings and houses in the mountain area;
- Realization of a sewerage and wastewater treatment system;
- Organizing the sanitary network in all mountain villages.

The forms of rural tourism act on the rural environment in several directions, all converging in the sense of increasing the level of development of the respective space. As a result of the development of the rural tourism activity, *fundamental transformations* are registered at the level of the villages, both in

terms of the number of activities carried out and their quality:

- There are *information centers* as a result of the need to regulate and organize the tourist traffic at the locality level. This organizational segment is meant to capture and transmit information, both in relations with the outside of the local system and with its inside. The activities of these units are carried out by persons specialized in tourism: tourist managers, operators, agents, etc.

- The *activities for the provision of activities complementary to rural tourism are developed and systematized*, materialized in units such as: bakeries and pastry workshops, milk processing units, butchery laboratories, tailoring and laundry workshops, shops selling handicrafts and souvenirs, photo workshops. The sector of crafts and handicrafts occupies a special place because these activities have an artistic and cultural connotation being at the same time different from one locality to another. They were practiced and passed down from generation to generation bearing the economic and social influences of the respective areas. The peculiarities of these activities determine an advantage in the souvenir market with obvious influences on the income of craftsmen.

- *Organizing cultural centers* together with the already existing institutions within the villages: school, places of worship and other cultural units. In these centers are organized and set up performance halls, local museums, folk ensembles, choirs, and others. In addition to the economic benefits that can encourage farmers to engage in tourism, the social benefits cannot be ignored. It follows the contacts with the citizens, besides the contribution of variety.

The most important ***damages are brought to the natural environment*** (Šimková, 2007; Dickinson & Robbins, 2008; Kheiri & Nasihatkon, 2016). They can be grouped as follows:

- *changes in the composition of floristic and faunal species*: destruction of species habitat, killing of hunting animals, influencing internal and external migration of animals, destruction of rare plant species, deforestation of natural vegetation for various tourist facilities;
- *pollution*: groundwater or surface water pollution with household waste, air pollution through motor vehicle exhaust, soil pollution by subsidence, noise pollution;
- *erosion*: soil compaction and deforestation can lead to increased rainwater runoff and surface erosion, amplification of avalanche triggering processes, damage to special geological forms such as caves, damage to river banks;
- *loss of authenticity*, due to alteration of traditions;
- *degradation of natural resources*: decrease of water resources through overloading, increased risk of wildfires;
- *conflicts between the community and visitors*;
- *the need for great efforts, but low existing incomes*;
- *changing the social structure of the villages*.

The areas for rural tourism represent in many countries of the world a more recent creation, arising from the need to escape in quiet spaces, beyond the city walls or the agglomeration of tourist resorts depending on the tourist potential they find. The tourist potential represents the potential tourist offer of a territory, and together with the production equipment of the tourist services respectively the specific technical-material base, the mass of food and industrial goods destined for tourist consumption, the general and tourist infrastructure, the labor force and the commercial conditions form the real tourism or tourist heritage offer. Preserving the rural world together with everything that is significant from an economic, social, cultural point of view, implies the initiation

and development of rural tourism. At the same time, tourism can actively participate in maintaining the viability and stability of rural localities, given that the phenomenon of depopulation is increasingly evident, by the departure of young people to urban areas, by abandoning old households and land. The meeting between the rural environment, a particularly fragile environment and the dynamism imposed by the tourist phenomenon raises the issue of the risks generated by the restructuring. We can say that rural tourism must become an alternative to the problems of agriculture and rural areas.

In the future sustainable development of the rural area, rural tourism must respect a series of **general principles** (Roberts & Hall, 2001; Fennell & Cooper, 2020; Xu & Sun, 2020):

- the environment has intrinsic value, it must be enjoyed by future generations;
- the tourism activity must be seen as a complex, positive activity, which has benefits for the environment, local

communities and last but not least for tourists;

- there must be a close correlation between the tourism activity and the environment, the environment supports the tourist activity and this must not lead to the degradation of the environment;
- the development of the tourism activity must be done in accordance with the characteristics of the place where it takes place;
- in the practice of rural tourism, a balance must always be achieved between the needs of tourists and those of their hosts;
- decisions must be formulated in such a way as to respect these principles and to ensure that they are implemented.

The entire rural community has to gain from **rural tourism** (Gannon, 1994; Garrod et al., 2006; Fang, 2020). These **benefits** are presented in Figure 1 and are detailed below:

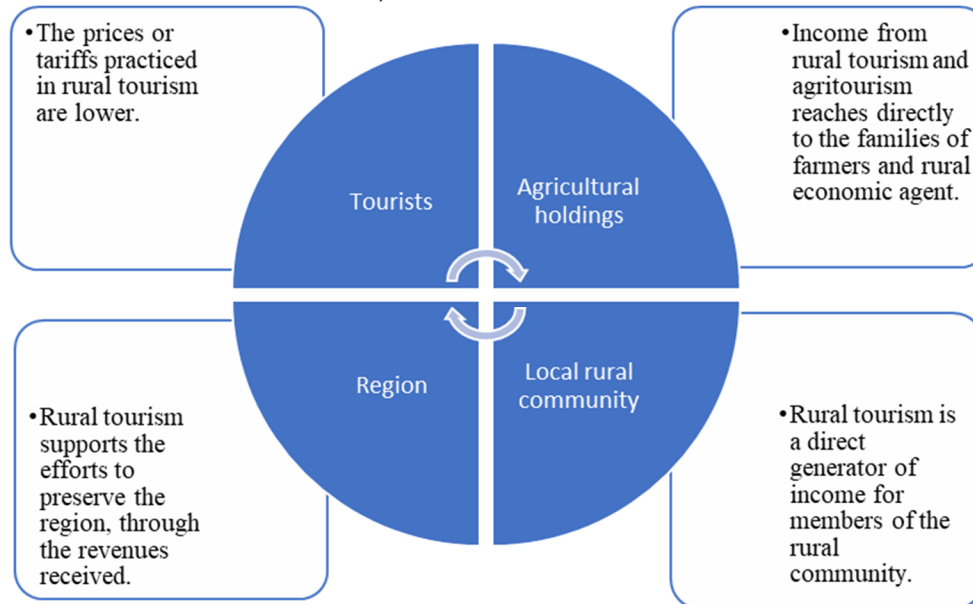


Figure 1: Benefits of rural tourism

Source: Author, based on literature review

1. For tourists, *the prices or tariffs practiced in rural tourism are lower*. Due to the fact that the prices are lower, the access of the less favored social categories is allowed. Also, the reception places are spread all over the rural area, so the tourists can spend their free time every time in another region. Good and varied accommodation conditions allow the tourist the possibility to choose the accommodation according to the financial possibilities, the degree of culture. The direct contact with the nature, with the local traditions, with the community, with the agricultural activities allows the knowledge of the rural environment and the familiarization of the townspeople with the life from the country.

2. For agricultural holdings, *income from rural tourism and agritourism reaches directly to the families of farmers and rural economic agents* without going through specialized enterprises and tourism subsidiaries that drain those incomes outside rural areas without having a beneficial impact on them, and revenues from rural tourism represent an important way to capitalize and modernize agricultural holdings.

Farmers are gaining a new professional competence different from that of farmers, in the field of tourism services that they have to do professionally. Members of rural families in a situation of unemployment can ensure a suitable job and income in their own household because agrotourism increases the employment of the farm.

Hosting tourists on farms will require the improvement of a certain part of the existing living space, endowment with elements of modern civilization (bathroom, electricity, sewerage, telephone, television), which is a revolution in rural areas, resulting in reducing the differences in endowment between rural and urban space.

3. For the local rural community, *rural tourism is a direct generator of income for members of the rural community*, allows

the improvement of living standards and especially the development of infrastructure and beautification of localities and landscape, helps prevent environmental degradation and last but not least spend funds in important public infrastructure.

4. For the region, *rural tourism supports the efforts to preserve the region*, through the revenues received. Rural tourism helps to prevent social tensions as well as to preserve or develop local traditions, to reduce development differences between regions and ensures a better understanding and interregional cooperation.

In addition to the economic benefits that can encourage farmers to engage in tourism, the social benefits cannot be ignored. These refer to promoting and supporting folk art, rehabilitation of the patrimony or attracting new investments.

Conclusion

Preserving the rural world together with everything that is significant from an economic, social, cultural point of view, implies the initiation and development of rural tourism. At the same time, tourism can actively participate in maintaining the viability and stability of rural localities, given that the phenomenon of depopulation is increasingly evident, by the departure of young people to urban areas, by abandoning old households and land. The meeting between the rural environment, a particularly fragile environment and the dynamism imposed by the tourist phenomenon, raises the issue of the risks generated by the restructuring. We can say that rural tourism must become an alternative to the problems of agriculture and rural areas.

Rural tourism through its effects will become a constant and not expensive tool of the social progress of the village, namely: the continuity of agricultural activities in a poorly productive environment; prevention,

respectively decompression of cities by the increase of the unemployment rate; raising the general degree of civilization of a large category of population, the inhabitants of the rural environment, who are more isolated, especially by improving the hygienic-sanitary conditions, the social behavior and the cultivation of the aesthetic taste.

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