

STUDENT'S CORNER

AGROTOURISM IN ROMANIA - PROMOTING THROUGH THE REPRESENTATIVES IN THE AGRICULTURAL FIELD -

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ABSTRACT

The Agrotourism is a form of tourism by which Romania can diversify its offer in this field, as to other countries. The rural area habits, landscapes and foods which are made in the own household, all contribute to attracting both domestic and foreign tourists. Most often than not, they are people who spend most of their time in crowded cities and want to have a traditional style holiday.

This article includes a quality research of the promoting materials distributed by the entities in the agricultural field and a quantity research regarding the evolution of financing of the projects submitted as part of Measure 313 – “Encouragement of tourist activities” in the 2008-2011 period. Elements were considered, such as: accuracy of the information presented, complete presentation of the contact points, presentation of good practices and examples of businesses in agrotourism.

Keywords: agrotourism, agrotourism in Romania, rural tourism, European funds in agrotourism.

Jel Classification: L83.

Introduction

Agrotourism has become very popular, particularly in countries that try to diversify their tourist offer: destinations such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain (Smith, 2009) become more and more in demand during the past few years by the tourists who are willing to experience a traditional style holiday. In some of these locations, the state grants an important support by facilitating long-term credits, provided the tourist activity is carried out for a minimum period of 10 years, as in the case of Portugal (Nistoreanu, et al 2010).

As regards the singularities, this type of tourism features some specific characteristics, which distinguish it from other forms, i.e.: the tourist consumption takes place in the rural environment, the tourist offer is authentic, it is a complementary activity to the agriculture, it does not require very significant investments and is not compatible with the mass tourism (Glavan, 2003). The fundamental element in the rural tourist product is the form of accommodation (at the farm) and the way in which the spare time is spent, these being the main reasons for which the tourists prefer to spend the vacation in the village (Bran et al, 1997). Thus, each location is highly singularized, as no two places have the same tourist offer.

Agrotourism – benchmark for Romania

Romania is among the countries with a real agrotourist potential; the country has become more and more visible at the European level in the latest years, especially thanks to the landscapes and the wild nature, to which the modern people now want to return. This is a country with a genuine agrotourist potential (Ciurea et al, 2011), with multiple traditions which were preserved along the centuries and which have been integrated by the technological revolution in the Western Europe.

However, for a destination to be considered a reference mark for tourists, the potential alone which it holds is not enough. Another aspect that must be considered is the human capital. The relationship between the rural tourism and the human resources is complex, of inter-conditioning (Talaba, et al, 2009). Finding the suitable personnel in the rural areas is a challenge most of the times, one of the causes being the migration of the labour towards the urban centres or towards other countries, with attractive material possibilities.

Although this type of tourism can be a representative one for Romania, the interest shown by the state institutions is not one that matches up the expectations, the rural tourism ceasing to be a major objective of the local public authorities (Nistoreanu, 2006). A chance for the development of this segment is the Common Agricultural Policy, which also includes the Rural Development National Programme. However, in this case, the tourist activities by which the farmers diversify their activity only operate if they can make the surroundings attractive, preserving and respecting the environment (Soare et. al. 2013).

The economy has the greatest influence upon the development of the rural tourism. Such factors as the GDP, wage level, inflation, unemployment rate, interest rate, foreign and public expenditure have a great contribution. Moreover, through its supporting policies, the European Union contributes to the development of the rural area, and one may talk about an important local development by increasing the number of farms, hostels and other activities, which facilitate the business environment in this space (Snieska, 2014).

The local development is in direct ratio to the development of services, including the tourist ones (Ionciã et al, 2005). This represents “the process by which various actors in the public sector, in the business sector and in the non-governmental sector collaborate in order to create better conditions for economic growth and to generate new jobs” (Popescu, 2003). In case of the agrotourism, the actors involved may be considered the local public authorities, the European authorities, the hostel owners and the public food units or non-governmental organizations whose goal is to protect the rural resources and values.

The local development, through the tourism, represents a very interesting subject for the Central and South-Eastern Europe countries that, after the fall of the Communist rule, have rediscovered the importance of the territorial players responsible for their regions (Brujan, 2008).

Thus, development of the agrotourism represents an important component in the strategy of the European countries which profit by the rural tourist resources and which want to tempt a larger and larger segment of tourists – particularly those who want to break the routine at a certain time interval and go back to the traditions that define them.

Romania is a country which can become a main player in the European and even the worldwide tourist market by properly making the most of some rural tourist products, which in other areas were lost or were integrated by the technology.

The local development in the context of agrotourism is a current topic and Romania is at the beginning. However, the country has all the premises to develop with a significant enthusiasm in the future, which is generated by such elements as: growth in popularity of the Romanian village (e.g. Viscri), the European funds for farmers intended for the rural development (NRDP 2014-2020 – The National Rural Development Programme), preservation of the local colour and some habits which are unique in the world.

Methodology

The research methodology employed for the elaboration of the article is mainly based on the quantity research and on the fundamental/quality research.

The knowledge stage implies carrying out of a detailed study of the professional literature, aiming to find the information and their critical analysis. This analysis is based on the research of the articles, catalogues, reports of the national bodies presented on the web portals and which attended the Farm Fair, Agriplanta.

The research part of the article includes such elements as accessibility of the language employed in the literature shared at the Fair, presentation of the target group of the business connected to agriculture that may be carried out with European funds and hierarchization according to regions in regards to the number of projects funded by Measure 313.

The field research was carried out at Agriplanta Fair between June 4-7, in Fundulea, Calarasi County, which approximately 11,000 farmers attended. The Fair is well known and promoted among the persons in the rural environment who activate in agriculture, the number of visitors being on the rise with 17% as to year 2014.

The results of the research of the materials gathered at the Fair were correlated with those presented on the websites of the bodies which had issued them and, at the same time, a statistic was

elaborated with the number of projects accepted for financing pertaining to Measure 313 – “Encouragement of tourist activities”, by which diversification of the agricultural activities is stimulated among farmers.

This Fair mainly addresses the persons whose basic activity is agriculture and who want to also develop other businesses, such as agrotourism. Government bodies also attended this event, such as: The Agency for the Funding of Rural Investments (AFRI), The National Rural Development Network (NRDN) or the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), which offered literature with the purpose of local development, among others. At the same time, to attract as many persons as possible to their booths, they had bags with the unit name as promotional materials, and the stand was catchily decorated with colour posters and with flags.

After attending of this Fair, I carried out a descriptive and quality research in order to draw the profile of the literature offered free.

The research objectives observed:

- If the information was presented in an accessible language;
- If examples of businesses connected to agriculture were presented, which could be carried out with European funds;
- If all contact information was included (physical address, working hours, phone number, e-mail, internet).

To create a more complex overall image of the farmers’ interest of diversifying the agricultural activity through the tourism activity, a hierarchization was also made region wise, in regards to the number of projects from Measure 313 accepted for funding.

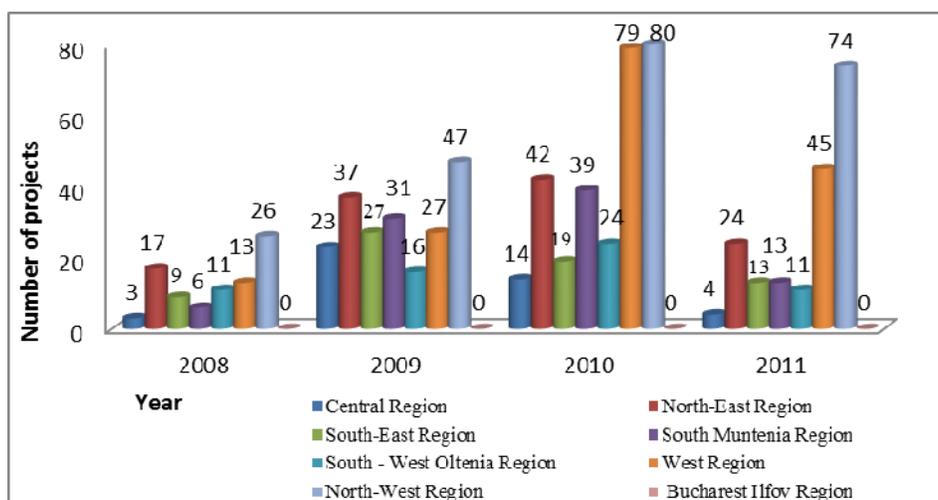
Results

Following the analysis carried out on the literature, I determined the fact that the language was accessible, easy to understand by the target group; this category mainly consists of people from the rural environment, with secondary studies at the most. The literature was accompanied by suggestive, high quality images, which provided visual examples of ways in which the farmers can diversify their activity, including by rural tourism. Good practice examples were also described, which those interested could consider.

The literature was presented as brochures and catalogues, well highlighted in colours. The terms employed were harmoniously interblended with vivid, descriptive images, which helped describing the businesses such as: ecological apple fruit garden in the Cheresig area – Bihor, modernization of the dental offices in the rural environment, the step towards diversified and high-quality services in the Praid commune area – Harghita or the excellence centre (accommodation and recreation) for educational traditions of the rural tourism in Cornatel village – Dambovita. All these were highlighted in order to provide examples by which people could achieve local development in areas in which the main activity is agriculture. Thus, a preference may be noticed to offer the villagers another alternative to get an income, which does not depend on the weather to a great extent.

Regarding the presence of contact points, following the analysis of the physical literature and the websites of the issuing bodies, the fact was determined that the following information was clearly included on the last cover or in the “Contact” section (in case of the web version): physical address, phone number, e-mail, web link. The only detail that is not included in the literature which was distributed free at the Fair is the opening hours. They are only mentioned on the web sites, which is a weak point of these materials, as most of the times the concerned farmers do not hold internet navigation knowledge.

As regards the number of projects accepted for funding from the 8 regions of Romania, the situation in period 2008-2011 is presented in the following figure (Fig. no. 1). Initially, years 2012-2014 were also included; however, the value of these time series was 0 in each case, which determined their removing from the graph, for an optimum visualization. The lack of projects in the latest years may be mainly caused by the funding available for business in tourism.

Figure no. 1 Situation of the number of projects funded by Measure 313 (2008-2011)

Source: Elaborated by the author, based on the information on the website <http://www.afir.info/>

Among the 8 study regions, the Bucharest-Ilfov region has no project accepted for funding. From the year point of view, the conclusion may be drawn that the North-Western Region has the most projects accepted each year. The highest level for almost all regions is registered in 2010, except for the South-Eastern Region, which had a better evolution in 2009. Most of the projects submitted concerned building of agro-hostels, by which the owners hope to get an additional income, helping them to capitalize on the products that they have in their own households.

The lowest values are those in the Centre Region, only 3 initiatives of this kind being accounted for in 2008. At the same time, this year is the one in which all analyzed areas show minimum values, the main reason being the fact that this coincides with the beginning of the period of implementation of the measure, and the potential beneficiaries did not know the details very well and were not sure about the evolution of the stages, either.

Although there are initiatives for diversification of the agricultural activity, the target group is restricted to the population in the rural environment with secondary education the least (baccalaureate diploma), which results in most agricultural workers with small-sized farms not being able to develop a business in the field of tourism by applying to these funds. This is how the low level of projects is also explained, in regions such as Bucharest-Ilfov (0 projects), Centre (3 projects in 2008), South-West Oltenia (11 projects in years 2008 and 2011).

Conclusions

Romania is among the countries which have a real agrotourist potential, and this becomes more and more visible at the European level thanks to the landscapes, the wild nature and the numerous traditions which have been preserved along the centuries, the Western and North-Western regions remaining the areas where the agrotourism harmoniously interblends the agricultural and tourist potential of Romania.

As a result of the research, the conclusion may be drawn that at the level of state institutions, efforts are made towards promoting the measures of diversification of the agricultural activities, promoting this way the idea of developing a business in agrotourism. The literature offered to those interested is useful, containing all information required both from the point of view of contents and the contact information.

Since 2008, except for the Bucharest-Ilfov region, projects for tourism businesses, projects intended for the people in the rural environment have been registered and funded. Their evolution has been fluctuating, the year 2010 being the one in which most initiatives were recorded.

To conclude, agrotourism is a segment of tourism in which Romania should involve its financial and human resources, as a sustainable development to this effect is beneficial.

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