

STUDENT'S CORNER**AGRO-TOURISM:
A PIECE OF HISTORY AT OUR FINGERTIPS¹****Vlad Bauer***Undergraduate student, 2nd year, Faculty of Commerce
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The agro-tourism is an important component of the overall touristic activity, with multiple benefits for both local communities and environmental protection. This touristic activity plays an important role in getting the young people who left their rural communities to come back to them. The role that the agro-tourism has in this matter is to create jobs and by stimulating the businesses in the rural area, to participate in the development of rural communities. It is a wide spread form of tourism, especially in countries such as France, Germany, Italy. Romania has a great potential for this type of activity and also, a great need for the advantages that this type of tourism brings.

KEYWORDS

Ecotourism, Agro-tourism, Sustainable development, Renewable energy

JEL Classification

Q 17, Q 18, Q 13, P 25

What is agro-tourism and ecotourism?

In the past decade more and more people, organizations, and institutions raised their interest concerning the environment, sustainable development, renewable energy, forestry.

An important component of these efforts to conserve the environment is the ecotourism. This type of tourism is a fairly new component and benefits from the implication of multiple factors such as: experts in food security, renewable energy resources implementation and so on.

Agro-tourism is a type of tourism that combines the agricultural activities with the touristic ones. For example, the activities that are offered for the tourists include: participation in daily farming activities, trips to local craftsmen, learning about local culture, crafts; also, a very important component is the integration feeling that the tourist should have during their stay. This feeling is achieved by inviting the tourists to local fairs, festivals, taking part along the community members into local activities.

Why are ecotourism and agro-tourism important?

On September, 15 2011 United Nations officials have stated that the ethical component of touristic activity is of a great importance. "A tourism sector without an ethical conscience can harm our planet," was the declaration of Taleb Rifai, the Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), at the opening in Madrid, Spain, of the International Congress on Ethics and Tourism.

As the ecotourism is more and more promoted, an increasing number of tourists became interested in this type of travelling and way of enjoying their vacations. The ecotourism has multiple advantages; among them, environment conservation, wildlife preservation, promoting cultural objectives and historical points of interest.

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An important role of the ecotourism is to give people the opportunity to achieve new capabilities that they will maintain when they return home; such as, those habits that will represent their contribution to the environmental protection.

In Romania, a country with a highly developed agricultural component of the national economy, investors started to see the potential that agro-tourism has.

Being eco is nowadays a very popular lifestyle. An increasing number of people are trying to protect the environment by recycling their waste, buying food products with the ECO label on it, reduce their energy consumption and trying to use renewable energy resources such as solar energy. Due to the technological advance, this type of technology is now affordable for a wide variety of persons and plus, the energy becomes free once one starts using this technology.

But this type of consumers wish that even when they are on holiday, their impact on the environment still remains at a low level. So they started choosing their destinations as well as the hotels, boarding houses where they are going to spend their vacation on the criteria of the impact that these units have on the environment. Also, an increasing number of tourists are now interested in discovering the "old" ways in getting their food, feeding their animals, growing their crops. To satisfy this relatively new demand, boarding houses that offers the tourists the opportunity to harvest the crops, taking care of the animals, learn traditional crafts, taking part in traditional festivals and, in general, be a part in the life of a rural community, appeared.

For a boarding house to maintain a minimum impact on the environment it has to go through a complex process, but in the end it all pays off, financially and socially. For a farmer to produce ecological vegetables or animal products it has to implement a management system that allows him to do just that. The EU developed a set of rules that must be obeyed if we are to produce ecological food products. These rules are put together as a regulation of the commission, Regulation 834. In this regulation are detailed all the rules that must be obeyed and the methods that should be used for planting, harvesting and materials to be used in all the processes that take place in a farm.

The agro-tourism, as was stated before, is a combination between two major aspects of human life; the first, agriculture. The second, tourism, is characterized by a combination between history, culture along with having a good time, in a nice place, with good food and nice company.

The two main components of agro-touristic activities are the boarding house and the framework in which the farming activities are taking place. For a boarding house, in order to reduce its impact upon the environment multiple aspects must be taken into consideration.

- The materials used in the construction process
- Sanitation
- The use of renewable energy resources

The cultural component is ensured by offering the tourists the opportunity to visit cultural objectives, accompanied by an authorized guide to present them the historical data concerning that location. Also, the opportunity to see local craftsmen at work and even to try themselves the traditional techniques such as pottery or other traditional techniques present in that specific area.

What the agro-tourism brings as a novelty in the tourism field is the mix between the farming experience, cultural component and the classical boarding activities. This relatively new type of tourism has already been successfully implemented in France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and other Western European states. The potential for agro-tourism that Romania has is one of the most important resources that we should exploit. Romania is well-known for its traditions, extraordinary folklore and hospitality.

Actual state (Romania and Moldova)

In Romania, during the last two decades, the number of entrepreneurs that developed businesses in tourism has been growing. Development in agro-tourism has had several causes:

- It's open market character;
- High profit rates;
- European Union's interest and funding opportunities that it has provided.

Moldova, an Eastern European country is, from an economic point of view, a country strongly dependent on its agricultural sector, that provided a fifth of its GDP in 2004. Due to recent

improvements in the industrial sector (light industry such as textiles and leather products) Moldova's economy is developing.

As the National Indicative Programme states, Moldova has asked for continuous support in order to implement the proper standards in goods production, including tourism services.

How can we develop Romania's expertise in this field and increase its regional role?

As for the agriculture, Romania has multiple advantages:

- Know-how developed during more than one decade;
Romania's performances in agriculture were not only related to the quantity, but also to the quality of the products;
- small usages of pesticides, fungicides and other synthetic substances, that nowadays are blamed for our worsening health (at a global level). Because of this fact, Romania has nowadays an important potential for ecological agriculture.

Romania has been known for its services, but more that, it is known for:

- Very rich folklore;
- Great spirituality, especially in the rural areas;
- Unique, well preserved natural sites;
- Rich biodiversity;
- Un-altered wilderness.

Nowadays, Romania's agricultural stakeholders are concentrating on developing a performant and efficient infrastructure adapted to ecological production of food resources. In order to achieve this objective, the main legislation that must be obeyed is the European Commission Regulation 834/2007.

Romania's geographical position offers two important opportunities:

1. Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic character offers a great touristic potential;
2. Its location, at a crossroad between the Orient and the Western world, offers the opportunity to play an important role in the region.

This role can be enhanced by two ways: one, to develop projects and cooperate with regional actors (in this case, Moldova) and the other is to offer expertise; the expertise will be offered by organizing working visits between specialists, student exchanges, continuous cooperation between academics on specific issues.

Moldova, a continental country, with a temperate climate, has a strong agricultural specific. This fact is proven by the strong contribution that agriculture had, during the last decade, in Moldova's GDP and overall economy. Its greater potential is for wine, tobacco and fruit production.

Wine has been an important commodity for Moldova, she being known in the neighboring regions for its wines. Before 1989, the wine, tobacco and fruits have been of great interest for the external buyers.

The first direction in which Moldova should take action is the agricultural sector. The EU has provided funding opportunities for its neighboring countries in order to support their development, on all aspects. Some of these funding instruments have, in their target areas, agriculture and sustainable management of natural resources, including energy.

One funding instrument available to finance investments in agricultural sector is the Development Co-operation Instrument (DCI), through its thematic programmes in the field of food security. This program is Food Security Thematic Program whose main objective is "to address the structural causes of food insecurity putting agriculture at the heart of the international debate on development."

Another funding instrument available for the agricultural sector is a thematic programme for Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources including Energy (ENRTP). Its main goal is to help "developing countries and partner organisations to address environmental and natural resource management issues".

A third funding instrument available for this sector is the Eastern Neighborhood Partnership instrument (ENPI) that comes to support the Eastern Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Moldova is eligible to obtain funds from the ENPI because she is part of the ENP and the EU has specifically stated in

Country Strategy Paper: Moldova 2007-2013 that agriculture is a main domain that Moldova should develop.

In the agricultural sector, Moldova and Romania can develop a series of projects at an institutional level or at civil society level. These projects are meant to increase awareness in the region about certain aspects on which Moldova can develop sustainable cooperation relations. These projects are, as follows:

1. Wine route

Since Moldova has a major potential for wine production a touristic route, linking all major Moldovan vineyards. This route has multiple benefits: one is touristic added value that it brings. Such routes have already been developed in Western countries and are successful. The second advantage is the possibility for investors, buyers or any other interested people to see the product at its production location, to be able to know the whole process through which the raw material is transformed into the final product. This gives them the advantage of being convinced of its actual quality and real origin.

An institutional involvement for this project is recommended for two reasons: easier access to funds and enhanced promotion of this event. The advantages for the institutions that will be involved are at economical level, the possibility of attracting new investors and, socially, promotion of the institution itself and improvement of the institution's public image.

2. Gourmet almanac

Given the fact that both Moldova and Romania are part of the Black Sea region, under this framework a gourmet almanac will be elaborated and commercialised within the tourist infrastructure. The money obtained from this trade will be used for humanitarian actions. A strong accent will be placed on the high quality level of the raw materials, this being a key issue for the food security.

These projects and cooperation opportunities are to be sustained mainly by Romania's diplomatic activity in economic area by specific Track II measures, which translate in civil society's implication.

Previously developing these projects with a physical outcome, there will be a couple events with the role of creating awareness in the region on these intentions. These awareness focused projects will be: an NGO conference, at which these regional actors can meet and establish the bases of future cooperation; working meetings with participants from both countries to start and develop their cooperation.

This logical chain of events will assure the full accomplishment of the overall objectives: to increase Romania's regional role on agro-tourism and ecotourism.

Conclusions

Given Romania's know-how on agriculture and tourism and also on the opportunities that European Union offers to the Eastern Countries, still not EU members, our country has an important opportunity to increase its cooperation with her neighbors.

This cooperation has important economical advantages as well as it consolidates our own touristic activity and can lead to an improvement in areas where Romania still has to make improvements.

Because of our geographical characteristics and historical reasons, agro-tourism is the best way to achieve all these objectives.

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