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WAYS OF INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF THE ROMANIAN RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

Romania has a remarkable natural heritage, with landscapes that are unique in the world and with villages still preserving the habits and traditions unaltered. Country's potential for the practising the rural tourism is high, with fair chances of transforming villages that are less visible at the international level into actual emblematic destinations. As the urban pollution and organisational stress rise, the vacations in the rural area may be a plausible way of reinvigorating the spirit. However, the lack of visibility of the Romanian destinations requires that new promoting methods be identified.

By the quality analysis carried out by the author in this article, new ways to increase the Romanian tourism visibility and to attract new tourists are argued. Aspects such as promotion by art, by thematic museums, with the help of opinion makers or by means of popular literature pieces have been considered. Thus, the potential methods of promoting the authentic Romanian village have been identified, assuming that each reference in the foreign press, cinema or other communication channel must be identified and exploited for the benefit of the Romanian tourism.

Keywords: rural tourism, Romanian rural tourism, promotion by art, promotion of rural tourism, promotion in tourism.

JEL Classification: L83

Introduction

The tourism is in perpetual alteration and the innovation in the related sectors has major implications in the modelling of the offer and demand. The development models in this field have not been producing the expected results any longer, as a result of the change in the tourist destination and preference profile, determining a more thorough analysis of the new forms of tourism (London Tourism Summit, 2016). The tendency to excessively bring information to the tourist and their desire for more and more experiences, caused the new forms of tourism to be privileged, in order to meet those who are after any experiences first and foremost half way. Because the mass tourism is not as attractive as it was in the past decades, the tourists looking for new ways of spending their spare time, the niche areas are promoted more and more. This trend is visible at world level and, according to the OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2016), the global future trend is heading towards diversification.

The challenges of ever more emphatic globalisation and technical progress resulted in the modern man seeking peace and connection to nature. Their return to the picturesque places, unaltered by pollution, which preserve traditions alive, is beginning

to be a real trend among the European countries. The rural area is no longer associated with agriculture and with a slow and hard work, but it starts to be regarded as a therapy destination, in which people can introspect and recover after a long, stressful period.

The interest for time spending in the rural areas has started to pick up in the 19th century, together with the development of the industrial cities, and factors such as globalization, industrialization, urbanization, rise of pollution or increase in the stress level, have created an environment favourable to the increase in the number of holidays spent in a rural area (Bran et al., 2010). This way, the rural tourism has started to gain more and more ground, being integrated into the local, national and even European development strategies.

1. Rural Tourism – Short Presentation

The rural tourism is considered one of the forms of tourism with the greatest supply of resources. Each individual element of a culture may represent an important resource, including such aspects as art, folklore, forms of agriculture, hand-made tools, cultural and religious events, legends, dances and customs. At the same time, the fact that each area is marked by a dialect or speech, specific music, handicrafts or local food, offers an invaluable value to each location (Aslam și Awang, 2015), no area comparing to another.

Although the rural tourism has been practised since ancient times, the technology was developed rather late, which generates confusion in the employment of the fundamental notions. Most times, the concepts of rural tourism and agrotourism are erroneously employed, being considered synonyms. However, the differences are clear, the agrotourism being a form of the rural tourism (Ogârlaci, 2012), and the differences are also mentioned in the Romanian laws (Tourism Law, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that none of the terms can be regarded individually, only in close connection to the term of rural area, in which the specific activities take place. Although defining the concept is rather difficult to render, because of the multiple aspects that must be considered and which differ from an area to another, such as the rural concept, Ashley and Maxwell (2001) have managed to explain the term in a concise manner. They defined the rural area as the space in which the human establishments and the infrastructure only occupy limited parts of the area, and the inhabitants work in farms. At the same time, these areas are marked by a low price of the land and by a high cost of trading due to the long distances that must be covered in order to reach these destinations and to the deficient infrastructure (Okech et al., 2012).

As regards the running of tourist activities in the rural environment, according to Trukhachev (2015) the rural tourism may be developed from two perspectives: a traditional one, which includes agricultural activities and accommodation in the households, and an alternative one, which includes the leisure, ethnographic and cultural activities. However, all these activities must be run considering both the positive and the negative implications, generated by the tourism activity (Naser et al., 2011), and approaching each action from a sustainable perspective (Sharpley, 2016; Dorobanțu and Nistoreanu, 2012).

At world level, the rural tourism is identified by World Tourism Organization as a vector for the development of villages in a new manner, which will cope with the current challenges. By organizing the European Congress on Rural Tourism (2012), seven main

aspects have been emphasized: the importance of the tourism for the rural areas, innovative products and concepts in the rural area, community and cultural heritage preservation by means of tourism, the presence of this form of tourism in the online media and the natural resources. Similar concerns have become visible in Romania too, as a wide scale event took place in 2011 for the first time, “The First Romanian Congress on Rural Tourism”. Moreover, other national initiatives that come to support the development of Romanian rural tourism are the start-up of the pilot project on the thematic specialization of tourist and agrotourist boarding houses in the Bran-Rucăr ethnographical area (ANT, 2016), including this type of tourism in the country brand (MDRT, 2011) or the Rural Development Programme for Romania 2014-2020 (MADR, 2014).

2. Romanian Rural Tourism – A Different Perspective of Promotion

According to the survey of GAL Horizons (2012), several development models of European rural tourism may be identified: in France it is viewed as a solution for the problems in agriculture, in Austria it is regarded as a destination for rest and leisure, in Germany is traditionally regarded as a motor of development for the rural areas, in Belgium it is strictly connected to the association of five or six families that start a business in this field. Denmark is associated to the active tourism, while Bulgaria promotes the concept of identity of each village. Thus, each destination, starting from the particularities of their resources and the tourist profile, is looking to differentiate in order to create in increased value for the local communities and in order to increase the tourist experience.

As regards the particulars of the rural tourism in Romania, it has always been a national symbol, the landscapes being integrated into art, the spectacular areas being preferred as cottages – the prosperous people of the 19th and 20th century having a secondary residence in the countryside, frequently used especially during the summer season (Tălângă, 2010). However, as rural models of development from other countries, the Romanian one must consider the importance which promotion has among the potential tourists. Considering the characteristics of this niche and the profile of those who prefer to spend their spare time in a traditional household, the message communication channels must be chosen carefully.

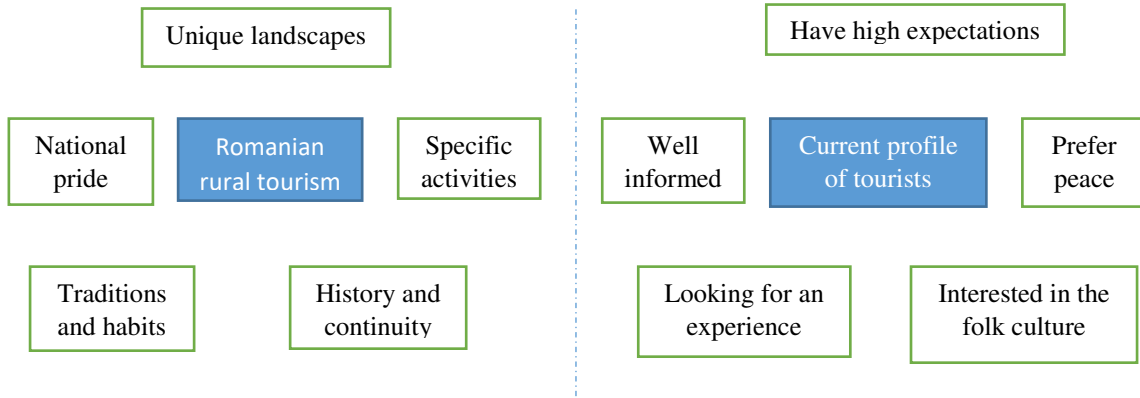
2.1 Methodology Employed

In this article, the author proposes a quality approach of the ways of making the Romanian rural area known by methods less used and acknowledged in the current practise. The survey was carried out between July and October 2016 and included presentation methods for the general public of the Romanian landscapes and village; they will be proposed as practices for the development of a product of high visibility rural tourism. The news in the well-known foreign publications, documentaries, presentation films, works of literature, art galleries and painting albums, auction houses, international tops or known public people with direct connection with this field have been observed.

Thus, we have identified the ways of promoting the rural destinations with tourist potential in Romania that have been employed and which may continue being exploited both at national and international level. In this selection, we started from the main

characteristics of the Romanian rural tourism destination and from the profile of the tourist who is interested in this form of tourism (fig. 1).

Fig. no. 1 Characteristics of Romanian rural tourism and tourist profile



Source: Carried out on the basis of the research of the author between July and October 2016

In order to create a complex representation, the particularities of the Romanian rural tourism and the current tourist profile have been analyzed. Considering the need to outline the existing background, we have started from this stage, in order to be able to propose ways of making the most of the strong points present in the Romanian villages.

2.2 Results and discussions

The analysis considered, as starting post, the particulars of the Romanian rural tourism. It is mainly characterized by the unaltered landscapes, compared to the archaic way of living of the past centuries. The scenery changes from year to year, due to the temperate-continental climate of the country, the tourists being able to discover a varied and impressing colour palette. At the core of the Romanian village, the uniqueness of traditions and habits is greatly important as in each geographical area there are villages whose inhabitants proudly wear the folk clothes to the main festivals or to church (e.g. Paltin or Nereju villages in Vrancea County), taking part in the events that celebrate the specific habits and traditions. At the same time, handicrafts and handicraft articles are still present, which the tourists appreciate. The history and the continuity of the Romanian rural area must not be ignored either, which provide credibility to the tourism activities.

As regards the profile of the tourist interested in these packages, it is worth mentioning their tendency of thoroughly informing, going to various sources. Thus, they know what to expect when arriving to the destination, what services they should receive or which level the acquired package should meet. They know other people's opinion on the places which they intend to visit and which the image of the destination is in the press. The access to internet and to other information sources makes the information available almost instantly, making the gap generated by the distance where the news occur to be almost non-existent. In contrast with the aspirations which the tourists had years ago, the current tourist wants to live an experience, to collect adventures which to subsequently

recollect, which makes the way in which the information on the holidays in the rural area be presented in an original way.

With these aspects in mind, the following ways of promotion have been identified, with an impact above average. Having also included the ever higher education level of the tourists and their tendency of keeping up with the latest news in real time, I have included examples that interest regardless of the social category to which the tourists belong, increasing the possibility that the message reaches as wide a public as possible (Tab. no. 1).

Tab. no. 1 Ways of promoting the Romanian tourism

Promotion Method	Example
Through art: artistic displays of national and international interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paintings signed by N. Grigorescu (“Car cu boi”, “Țărăncuța odihnindu-se”), Nicolae Tonitza (“Catiușa Lipoveanca”), Ștefan Luchian (“Moara de la poduri”); - Films: “Cold Mountain”, “Moromeții”, “Ion”, “Amintiri din copilărie”; the documentary film series made by Travel Channel “Wild Carpathian”, the tourist promoting films “Explore the Carpathian Garden”, the Top Gear episode dedicated to Romania; - Plays and literature pieces – plays written by I.L. Caragiale or emblematic novels of the Romanian literature written by M. Sadoveanu, C. Petrescu, I. Creangă, etc;
Through museums	- The Village Museum, Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Astra Museum, Folk Art Museum Constanta, County Folk Art Museums ;
International figures	- Prince Charles - Prince of Wales;
Travel books and classifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OPT classification of The World Geography - Reviews made by: TheCultureTrip.com, DailyMail.com, the Guardian.com, Telegraph.uk;

Source: Elaborated by the author after having studied the following sources: www.muzeul-satului.ro, www.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro, www.muzeuetnocta.ro, <http://www.muzeulastra.ro/>, <http://www.artmark.ro/>, <http://www.galeriadearta.com/>, <http://mnar.arts.ro/>, <http://www.travelchannel.com/>, <http://turism.gov.ro/>, <http://www.romania.travel.ro/>, www.youtube.com.

Following the analysis carried out, the conclusion may be drawn that the Romanian village can be promoted using the current media, such as news sites, distribution channels (such as YouTube), international classifications and guides and rankings elaborated by international publications. Using the lobby of such figures as Prince Charles in favour of the unique rural landscapes, the model of success seen by the Viscri village, attracting other personalities and engaging them in discussions focused on the Romanian rural uniqueness. The field visit to Viscri, which the author paid in August 2016, has sustained the idea of promoting the traditional village by visual arts, which can

set out the strong points of the locality. The preserved architecture, the specific colouring, without interventions in the classic style, the attraction of funds for the restoration of the houses without altering the unit image, the materials employed, preservation of the road according to the old model, placing gutters on the main roads for the animals to drink, all contribute to the authenticity of the site and tempt tourists interested in the traditional places.

Together with Romania's becoming a destination for shooting foreign movies, the known actors, such as Nicole Kidman, can be stimulated to express their opinion regarding the visited rural areas, their answer providing high international visibility. This way, the Romanian village may become a destination for the tourist segment interested in visiting the sets of the box office success movies or those that won important prizes.

At the same time, using museums in promoting rural destinations can be successful especially as the most important ones - Village Museum and Museum of the Romanian Peasant – are located in Bucharest, the favourite destination for the foreign tourists. The art may be used for the same benefit, especially as the Romanian painters are starting to be in the public eye and the paintings signed by Grigorescu, Tonitza or Luchian promote the Romanian village through its folk cloths or through specific activities, being sold for higher and higher prices (Auction House Artmark, 2016).

As regards the literature pieces, they represent an opportunity for the education of the young segment of consumers – potential future tourists interested in the rural tourism. By placing the focus on the information of the well-known writings, studied in school, the young people can be attracted by habits and by various specific objects that they can see or even create in art workshops. Moreover, the benefit of this approach can be manifold, the visits to the Romanian villages generating a more thorough understanding of the literary texts, reflected in a visible school progress.

Starting from the current trend of people being informed and checking the news by means of various devices, the promoting of the favourable reviews and rankings that are published in the well-known news media is essential. The fact that, many times, the opinion makers tell their experiences in the rural area in writings or on video-blogs represents a cost-free way, with a maximum impact, of strengthening Romania's position on the international market of tourism.

Conclusions

Thus, the Romanian village can gain high notoriety both on the domestic and on the international market, employing methods that have been exploited little so far and whose impact is not fully acknowledged. The potential result of the examples provided may have a notable scope considering the fact that there already is a base from which one can start, a coherent strategy being required to enhancing it in favour of the rural tourism.

The international competition in the field of tourism is sharper and sharper and, in order for Romania to be able to be on the map of the hot destinations, it needs to propose an authentic product, which will attract through its unique elements. The rural tourism may constitute the answer in this sense, considering the specific architecture, landscapes and habits.

However, the poor visibility at the international level and the low domestic interest, cause the promoting to be regarded as a necessity, so that the information will reach the target audience. Thus, considering the particulars of the Romanian tourism and those of the

modern tourist, the author brings forward the new way of making the destinations known and creating interest for the traditional village.

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