

## **AGRI-TOURISM STIMULATION POLICIES BASED ON ETHNIC PRINCIPLE**

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### **Abstract**

*Romania must adapt its economical, agrarian and rural structures to those from European Union. Regarding the development of the rural space, Romania must adopt a new evolution philosophy, and that is: rural space in Europe constitutes a precious landscape, the result of a long history and its salvation is a real concern for the society. Rural environment can accomplish its function of purveyance, relaxation, equilibrium, one of the most wanted in the society, only if it remains an attractive and original life environment, granted with a good infrastructure, a viable agriculture and forestry, local conditions favorable to the not agricultural economical activities, an undamaged environment and a tidy landscape. Also, the agri-tourism activity in Romania can be stimulated by two categories of actions, such as, legislative policies, which will include all normative acts which sustain, promote and encourage this activity, and government policies, which, by combined, national actions, support and encourage this activity.*

**Keywords:** rural area, ethnic, local development, rural tourism, agri-tourism, touristic services

Regarding the development of the rural space, Romania must adopt a new evolution philosophy, and that is: rural space in Europe constitutes a precious landscape, the result of a long history and its salvation is a real concern for the society. Rural environment can accomplish its function of purveyance, relaxation, equilibrium, one of the most wanted in the society, only if it remains an attractive and original life environment, granted with a good infrastructure, a viable agriculture and silviculture, local conditions favourable to the not agricol economical activities, an undamaged environment and a tidy landscape.

The new philosophy must also be fundamented on local, global and lasting development concepts, which supposes an important rural part component and also an important agricultural component (or silvicultural, depends). The problem of rural global and lasting development constitutes the quintessence of economical and social politics of the development of local (rural) communities in an harmoniuos assembly.

Agrotourism is a new concept in European Union, and it reffers to the different forms of tourism directly related with the agricultural activities and/or with the constructions which had other destinations besides agricultural. This specific form of rural tourism is sustained by small landowners from the country – usually as a secondary activity – the activity

from their own household remaining the main occupation and income resource. It is often made a distinction between „agrotourism” and „farm tourism” (farm type tourism) or its equivalent, which is usually used to name simple and clear the renting and use of the farms as accommodation spaces for the tourists (guests houses rented during the holidays, health houses). This is not agrotourism in the strict sense of the word, as long as these rustic houses lose their agricultural function or are not inhabited by active peasants owners of the houseoldings. In spite of loosing the direct connection with the real agricultural activity, „farm tourism” is an important form of rural tourism, with a considerable contribution in the local economy, where it is practiced.

Agrotourism is a form of rural tourism which uses for accommodation and serving the table only rural touristical boarding-houses and agrotouristical boarding-houses, taking advantage of an unpolluted and picturesque environment, of the natural touristical attractions and cultural-historical values, of the habits and traditions from the rural space. The rural space satisfies through its components a large motivation platform: rest and recreation, knowledge, culture, practice of sports, course of air or balneary course, sportive hunting and fishing, offering to the agrotourism a large area of all loisir possibilities. Because of all this agrotourism is a way of valuing the rural environment, with its agricultural, touristic, human and scientific potential.

Agrotourism has some features which make it different from the traditional, standard tourism, such as: touristic consume takes place in the rural environment (essential are the touristic or agrotouristic boarding-house quality and the particularisation and adaptability of the received services of the farmers, knowledge of the natural, human and cultural environment and also the originality of the touristic products), the touristic offer is authentic, original, diverse and personalized, organized and lead by the farmers (people from the village with a characteristic dimension for their ethnicity) it is an authentic activity, complementary with the agricultural exploitations and not an alternative or a substitute of this ones; it offers to the population with low incomes the possibility of rest and comfort, of spending the free time (from holidays or week-end in the picturesque landscape of the rural environment, with cultural-educative activities and with a specific hospitality); it does not require big investments for general infrastructure and touristic instrumentation; is a diffuse tourism (by the specificity of its diversified and largely scattered offer); with a good management, the farmer can create a favourable environment for a time raid to his guests unforgettable memories from childhood; it is not compatible with mass tourism (developed in touristic resorts and centers and in periurban areas).

In the European Union it is considered that the success of the agrotourism activity has only one strategy: quality of services. This strategy is applied in all components of the tourism activity and allows some competitive touristic services, allows to complete the existent deficiencies in defining the agrotouristic products, in the operational control for the tourists protection under the aspect of labour conscription, organisation and distribution of the differentiated and multiple touristic offer in shape and content, personalized and dispersed in the territory. The concept of quality accentuates farmer's responsibility at the level of his offer, of the net where he integrates, but also of the local, economical environment.

This is why, in the rural tourism and mostly in agrotourism there are three essential components: territory (with its environment – natural and built – and with its touristic resources, represent the support and starting material in agrotourism), touristic products (must be very authentic and qualitative) and people (which are the responsables for the agrotourism activity, who organise and lead this activity). Professionalism, partnership and creativity are the axes which lead the agrotourism in order to become a true factor of rural development, source of using the labour force, direct and indirect, in a changing rural environment, and the farmer is the main actor, in the attention of governments and organisations who take charge of the rural space arrangement and development. Therefore, agrotourism is not only a component of the rural tourism, but it has larger implications in the optimal capitalization of local touristic resources and in raising of the inhabitants life level, in the social/professional development of the rural village and of the community in general, and last but not least, in the protection and preservation of the natural and built environment, in the context of an economical activity based on ecological principles.

Besides the inherited natural beauties in our country we have many historical, cultural and ethnographical values. The multiethnic mix generated during the ages preservation of traditions, habits, ethnography and authentic folklore.

The Romanian village represented, through its millenary existence the pillar of our people continuity on this territory, actual Romania, as an adaptation to the geographical environment which constituted the creosote of its formation, culture and civilisation.

Touristic potential from the Romanian village is very complex, including natural and cultural historical components of a great variety and touristic attraction.

Near the natural environment made from landscape elements, flora and fauna elements, the attractive relief forms, rivers and lakes, natural cure elements, some natural reservations, national parks, the Romanian rural space takes benefit also for an authentic and original ethnographic and folkloric

potential. This treasure is kept in almost all Romanian villages, but mostly in the mountain and hill areas, where the tentacles of contemporary emancipation have been infiltrated in a slower rhythm. This is why it is a must that the Romanian village remain the keeper of the Romanian authenticity.

From the European countries' experience (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France) we can see that rural tourism and the agrotourism are well defined from the point of view of organisation and promotion in local, regional and national area and that are a part of the European Union policy of rural environment management and development, and of supporting the population from this environment. Also, in the local touristic activity are involved the local authorities and communities, other associations, firms and physical persons which concur at the deployment of the touristic activity, each one having a financial contribution to the development and promotion of it.

Rural tourism, with its empirical component, agrotourism, is practised empirically in Romania for almost 60 years, but an organised development on the internal and external market appeared only after 1990. The promotion of the rural tourism at a national level was the reason for setting up the ANTREC, with 32 branches, in the mountain area of the FRDM, and at local level appeared other organisations too.

Agri-tourism activity in Romania can be stimulated by two categories of actions: legislative policies, which will include all normative acts which sustain, promote and encourage this activity and government policies, which, by combined, national actions, support and encourage this activity.

Legislative policy in agri-touristic field appeared to be more consistent after 1990, when the tourism reorganization was tried by framing some law packages and adequate mechanisms, regarding mainly the environment protection and preservation. First normative acts which established the Romanian rural tourism activity were H.G. no. 102/1990 applying the Decree-law no. 54/1990, which was further modified by H.G. no. 364/1990, being modified also the necessary use agreements and notifications, as they were simplified, for the familial associations and for natural independent persons, in certain conditions.

Juridical regulations regarding agri-tourism organization and development are established by O.G. no. 62/1994 through the Law no. 145/1994. These normative acts include the foundation and functioning conditions for agri-touristic guest houses/farms, and also the facilities which are given by the state to those who provide this activity. So, it is being specified, first, the possibility of receiving, in disposition, available fields in the purpose of building agri-touristic farms, where the local authorities have possibilities,

and secondly, the priority in installing telecommunication lines for telephone, telex and fax for the agri-touristic guest houses farms.

Also, still under the circumstances of law, the specialists from tourism agencies and state specialized institutions are obliged to offer support and consultancy to local inhabitants willing to start this activity.

Another obligation is that of keeping in records the agri-touristic guest houses/farms, to follow their evolution and to include them in the promotional and advertise materials which these institutions edit.

Because this activity is sustained and promoted by the state, it commits itself that, by its appropriate institutions to include where the situation allows and were it is possible, in the learning programs of the local educational institutions, specialized disciplines in agri-tourism and tourism profile.

Another facility foresees the exemption from paying the income tax for a period of ten years for the inhabitants from the rural areas who practice agri-tourism. The 1994 legislation is more important also because it designates and defines clearly the notion of agri-touristic guest house/farm, showing which the minimum criteria in selecting and declaring them are. Still, the normative acts from 1994 have a restrictive character, because are foreseen facilities only for the mountain area, the Black Sea shore and the Danube Delta.

Legislation was improved in 1997, when through the O.G. no. 63/1997 was followed the extension of the facilities given before and were established responsibilities and competencies for the governmental and nongovernmental institutions, implied in the agri-tourism activity. According to this normative act, natural persons, familial associations and commercial societies which have agri-tourism as the activity object take benefit of the facilities which law gives to the small and middle enterprises, even if they don't accomplish the conditions regarding the annual business number and the number of employees.

The exemption from paying the income tax for a period of ten years remains in effect for an accommodation capacity of maximum 10 rooms, and also the exemption from paying the electric energy, gas and telecommunication system at the price for a domestic consumer for accommodation capacity of maximum 5 rooms.

State undertakes itself further to include in its publishing houses, guides and flyers edited by it the touristic offer of these agri-touristic guest houses and farms.

In 1999, the classification criteria and the minimum criteria for declaring an agri-touristic guest house were reviewed and put in conformity with the reality of the rural environment, the classification being made following the daisies system.

Starting from these principles regarding the problems that must be solved in the agri-tourism field, in the benefit of rural population and not least, to the tourists benefit, all the normative acts which stipulate the legislative frame and the economic facilities given for the stimulation of this activity include measures, criteria and organization, development and functioning regulations for agri-touristic guest houses and farms, in the same time with the obligation and attributions of the institutions which must ensure them support and help.

The governmental policy followed through its legislative activity two important aspects : one regarding the tourism form which is better adapted to rural area, which is agri-tourism, and the other regarding the definition of the areas of maximum interest which are suitable for applying and developing this form of tourism. Both aspects prove the state interest for a viable alternative in the rural environment, adapted to the market economy and represent a positive aspect, but they only represent a modest beginning, even a shy one, just the first steps in an activity which may constitute a main advantage in the context of economic restructuration. It is also important that all these state measures to be quickly followed by others, so that the first to achieve the intended purpose.

Firstly, it is important the efficient organization of credits system, then the encouragement of investors in this very promising area, and less, but not least, the development and arrangement of infrastructure. Analyzing the agri-tourism development in main European countries, we can easily notice the importance of stimulating the inhabitants from the rural area by giving them credits and other financial facilities in order to achieve agri-touristic capacities, re-equipments and modernizations. By now, in our country, just the own capital resources were the basis of equipment for agri-touristic guest houses and farms, as the state didn't finance this activity.

But in order to start this kind of activity it is needed a capital, which in the rural environment is really poor.

The real support that the government is giving to the rural inhabitants consists in giving some financial banking facilities, mainly the possibility of obtaining some preferentially credits with reasonable interest, for endowment and improvement of the rural households or for building some vacation houses in areas with agri-touristic interest.

State must offer financial possibilities for endowment, repairing, preservation and protection of some cultural or historical objectives which have an impact in the areas where agri-tourism is practiced or is wanted to be practiced.

It is also important the state intervention in what it concerns the development and modernization of the infrastructure in the areas with agri-touristic interest. These works must be conceived so that they integrate in

the landscape as discreet as possible, with the compliance of the environment original models. Modernization, reparation, replacing of the canalization, the water supply, access roads, electric energy, and gas can be accomplished in the rural environment only with the state involvement and with the promotion of some protection and development policies of the areas with touristic potential.

It is necessary that the public authority to impose a series of facilities for those willing to invest in the areas with a touristic impact in order to carry agri-touristic activities. By an efficient credit system, with accessible interests, by giving grace periods for repayment of the loans, the economic agents can be encouraged to be interested in these domains.

Another important aspect that regards the state attention, both under legal aspect and also effective, is represented by overall of measures of systematization and endowment of the territory so that the preservation of the cultural, ethnographic and architectural patrimony to be accomplished as well as possible.

Because practicing agri-tourism implies mostly re-endowments of the living space, it is very important that these modernization to be made in total agreement with the local environment, preserving the tradition.

The state must permanently follow, through an adequate policy the preservation and protection of the environment.

Another aspect on which it can be intervene only through a proper legislation and a national attention, regards human resources destined to this activity. In general, the success of an activity can be assured only through a quality adequate to the human factor. It is very important the proper education and instruction of the human factor in the areas with agri-touristic activities. This field assumes many aspects which must be approached:

- a) a first aspect regards a national campaign launched by the state, in order to modify the present view upon the notion of tourism and in order to obtain a favorable opinion on tourism in general and on agri-tourism in particular ;
- b) second aspect regards building a human network capable to develop such an activity at a high qualitative standard. State must develop an efficient learning system, well connected between different levels of learning; only in this way, the young generation can develop;
- c) a third aspect of human resources regards managerial training, which is a weak point in our country.

At the level of an agri-touristic area, for an efficient development of this activity there must be an institutional frame which, through well designed actions, to act in its benefit, otherwise, agri-tourism can only develop into a chaotic, no system manner and without spectacular result.

The state has the duty to intervene also by making researches, studies, papers, projects, in order to analyze the opportunity of practicing agri-

tourism in different areas of the country, to estimate the efficiency of this activity in concrete situations and to try to value the touristic potential of the areas which have not enter on the agri-touristic market yet.

State can also involve in developing the agri-tourism by building a legislation that will allow financing the social feature tourism. This allows, on one hand giving subventions for building agri-touristic villages, favoring the regions with economic difficulties, but which have the advantage of a touristic potential, and on the other hand, allows the population with small incomes to spend a few days of holiday in rural agri-touristic areas.

Another possibility by which the state can encourage and promote the growth of the agri-touristic demand is the promotion of the educative – qualitative tourism, and, in parallel, the preservation of historical monuments and rural houses, by keeping the authentic elements from the rural environment. The simplest way is that of applying differentiated fiscal treatments for the inhabitants who arrange their houses in the spirit of authenticity and tradition.

Also, the state must contribute in an organized and coherent way at the accomplishment of a high scale campaign for tourism promotion. The agri-touristic product is a commercial product which is successful if it is revealed and if it has an adequate promotion.

Without promotion, no matter how well organized the agri-touristic farms would be, they would still remain unknown.

Contemporary with the electronic, electrotechnic, computerization, and especially with the supercomputers era, we assist at an increased computerization and promotion process, with results worth of this era of speed and at the launching on the European and world market of agri-touristic services.

The range of increasingly diversified service benefits, benefits by practicing rural tourism is a factor of progress and will influence substantial local rural economic development, with direct implications for regional economies and even at continental level.

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