

PROPOSAL ON THE CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFICATION THE AGRO - GUESTHOUSES AS ECO - GUESTHOUSES

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Abstract

Evaluating the preliminary conditions for accrediting the pensions in Sibiel as eco-pensions will be done by field investigation and surveys. Transforming the agro-tourist pensions from the village of Sibiel into eco-pensions, thus making Sibiel the first green village in Romania, and training the administrators of pensions and other key members of the tourist business have the role to forming an eco-economic view of the sustainable development. Eco tourists demand higher environmental care-taking (regarding waste management, water purification, etc.), than the local population does. Interest in wild faun and flora and in ecosystems rise awareness and respect towards the regions nature assets.

Keywords: eco-economy, ecotourism, sustainable development, agro-tourism

INTRODUCTION

Developing a rural eco-economy depends on the global vision of the natural resources and on a broad understanding of the restructuring of economic notions and concepts needed to realize this vision. Knowing, understanding, and interpreting the concepts and techniques of analyzing theoretical models regarding the rural tourism and climate change allow the elaboration of a set of measures that aim to reduce the antropic impact in the tourist villages from Mărginimea Sibiului, by raising the awareness and responsibility of the population, through the means of promoting unpolluting sources of energy, as well as an environmentally friendly demeanor, with the purpose of having a sustainable development of the area. The rural population once it is correctly informed and coherently made aware of the situation, can become more responsible in protecting the environment.

Ecotourism has the advantages of experiencing a new model of tourist activity, the only one viable, and we are counting on the perceptiveness of the administrators of pensions in Sibiel, which will in this way be able to keep Sibiel on the top of rural tourist destinations. Evaluating and directing

the activities from the field of tourism in relation to the ecotourism criteria allow the exploitation of local natural and economic resources through the certification of eco-tourist products and that of destinations and accommodation structures, in order to guarantee the eco-tourist quality. The food products obtained in the household through ecological farming and stock raising activities could be valorized as traditional products and ecologically certified, in accordance with the effective legislation. The eco-economical principles are essential elements when deciding to transform an agro-tourist pension into an eco-tourist pension. Ecotourism creates jobs, sustainable development alternatives, and a well defined image that can be used in marketing the local, regional, or national products. By implementing adequate marketing strategies, we can promote a realistic and attractive tourist product.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

One of the first definitions of “Ecotourism” was formulated by the International Ecotourism Society in 1991: “Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and sustains the well-being of local people”. The socio-economic and conservation-related goals of an ecotourism concept are corresponding with the following key objectives:

- To mitigate environmental impacts;
- To contribute financially to protected area management and conservation;
- To create environmental awareness;
- To generate job opportunities and benefits to local communities;
- To ensure social and cultural compatibility and political empowerment.

Adopting ecological technologies requires a systematic effort in formulating eco-economic policies, especially for restructuring the traditional agricultural activity. Sibiul has been chosen as location for this project because it has an old tradition (before 1989) and, more recently, holds the “Golden Apple” trophy for the hospitality of the people and the well established agro-tourism. This project benefit from the support of local authorities and that of “ Mărginimea Sibiului ” Association.



Fig. 1 “Golden Apple” trophy

The marketing of ecological tourist services (accommodation, food, and leisure) that blend tradition and environmental protection allow the sustainable development of the area. Ecotourism is the best practice for tourism in a sustainable environment (Bogdan A. T., 2008).

Eco-tourism comprises the accommodation and catering sector which operates with environmental standards as well as the management of national and regional nature reserves (Muntean Doina, 2011).

The results obtained gives the possibility to formulating some proposals for issuing a series of methodological norms of classifying the reception structures with the function of tourist accommodation of the type of eco-pensions, in collaboration with ANTREC and other professional associations of the kind. We monitor the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the eco-tourist potential of the natural capital, clean technologies, ecological agriculture, the exploitation of non-polluting natural resources, the evaluation of the ecological impact and strategic eco-marketing, in order to identify those pensions that have an eco-tourist potential. The use of the expertise and results of the research will enable the implementation of food biotechnologies, the preservation of biodiversity, and the development of eco-friendly economic activities, including ecological agro-tourism (Antofie Mihaela, 2010).

Eco-certification is more and more present in many of the fields of economy, including for identifying products with high ecological potential. The tourist product offered by eco-pensions can be a promoter of green tourism (Nicula V., 2011). The systematic construction of public support for changing the mentality implies an intelligent and concerted effort, developed with the help of well informed citizens (Grama Blanca, 2011). Ecotourism contributes to preserving the environment and to supporting the well being of the local population. Eco-pensions will represent a green model, focused on the strategy of the four R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Reexamine), by using eco-economic systems, procedures, and strategies.

This research actively contributes to preserving the natural and cultural heritage, includes local communities in the sequential planning, development, and operating processes contributing to their well being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The challenge launched is to put together in a traditional agro-ecosystem as many pieces of sustainable development as possible, based on the principles of eco-economy. Once certified, the eco-tourist pensions in Sibiel can become polarization centers for the rural tourism activity. Obtaining the eco-classification and some commercial brands and innovative products of food biodiversity will generate the development of new projects.

Mountain regions are belonging to the few natural spaces of the world that offer a unique blend of breathtaking natural beauty. They are characterized by wildness and a rich biological diversity (including lot of endemics) at the one hand side and by a high variety of human cultures, traditions, history and lifestyles at the other side. Therefore nature protection and regional economical development are the challenges of mountain region development. With the Alpine Convention of 1991 a process of regional mountain development was initiated. A platform for regional exchange and negotiations in the Alps was set up and the significance and experiences of sustainable development in mountain regions was discussed. The Alpine experience – as an approach for other mountain regions were the basis of lessons learned for a number of conferences in the beginning of these century. The role of ecotourism for integrated mountain development was discussed: the ecological importance of mountain ecosystems, the potentials and constrains of mountain tourism and about ecotourism as a concept of sustainable mountain tourism.

Mountain ecosystems are among the world's most vulnerable biological and geographical domains. They are embossed by habitats with specific biodiversity, including a high range of endemic flora and fauna. Plants and animals are well-adapted to the particular altitude and climate of their location. A sustainable utilization of natural resources and the minimization of disturbance or destruction of the biological diversity is therefore a key issue in mountainous regions. Therefore a rising number of unique mountain areas are designated as protected areas (Iagăru Pompilica, 2010).

Because traditions and life-styles of rural mountain populations are of rising interest, old habits (special handicrafts, way of cooking, patterns of constructing houses or traditional folk dances/music) are revitalized.

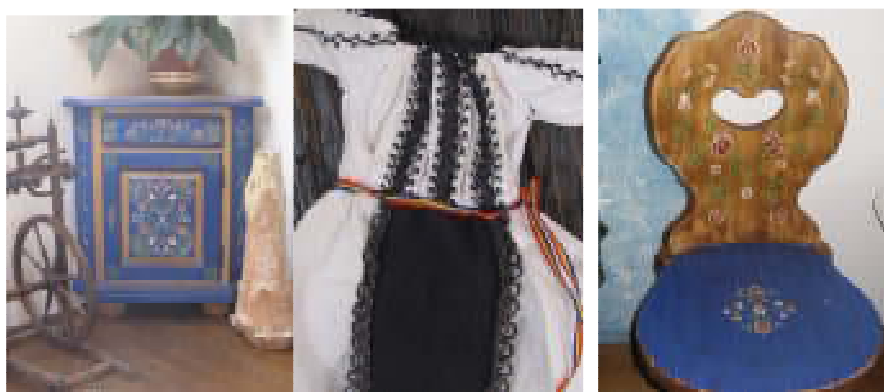


Fig. 2 “Luna Sibiului” agro-guesthouse

Rural mountain population might designate from their traditional way of land use and emigrate from the countryside, if there are no alternative opportunities for livelihood. Regardless of its stage and expansion tourism helps to diversify mountain economies and provides alternative livelihood opportunities for mountain people. But tourism development also creates environmental problems and poses new challenges. One of the negative impacts is environmental pollution due to garbage and littering along trekking routes and on camp sites and pollution of creeks, rivers and lakes. Future climate changes will also affect mountain regions. Natural water reserves will be endangered and mountain habitats of flora and fauna might be destroyed. Mountain destination will have to deal with new circumstances and will have to find solutions for a sustainable mountain development in future.

Knowing our own carbon footprint enables a significant reduction of the negative impact on climate change. Quantifying the carbon footprint, analyzing and reducing it, might be the solution for preventing these changes from occurring. The difference in the ecological conduct is based on education. We prove that also the rural population, if correctly informed and consequently made aware of the situation, can become more responsible in protecting the environment. Each of us has its own carbon footprint based on the different lifestyle. A Romanian pollutes on average with 9.2 tons of CO₂/year, with 2 tons more than the European average. We can catch up by planting a tree for every ton of CO₂ with which we annually pollute the nature.

The developing of a sustainable rural eco-economy depends on the global vision on natural resources and on a thorough understanding of the need to re-organize the economic conceptions and concepts so that this vision can be materialized (Tănăsescu Cristina, 2011). The rural population

properly informed and consistently made aware of this problem, can become more responsible in protecting the environment.

In order to actively contribute to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, a key element is to include the local communities in the processes of sequential planning, development and operation that will help increase their welfare. The need for ecological agriculture, food safety, the use of clean technologies, and the implementation of eco- and bio-economy principles represents an educational challenge.

The changes in the weather and climate events of Sibiu region have begun to be of real concern. In Sibiu Depression, climate change is manifested through the rapid succession of days with temperatures higher or lower than normal, through episodes with very cold or frosty days, or on the contrary, very hot days, through the greater frequency with which risk weather phenomena occur: blizzards, increased wind, storms, torrential rain with heavy falls of precipitations.

The exposure to risks associated with climate disasters is asymmetrical. In the case of developing countries, one person in 19 is affected, while in developed countries the ratio is of 1 to 1500 people. The impact of climate change takes shape in five key elements:

- reduced agricultural productivity;
- increased uncertainty in what concerns the water supplies;
- increased exposure to extreme climatic phenomenon;
- the collapse of ecosystems;
- increased health risks.

Climate change is considered to be the most sensitive issue with which humanity is being faced at this moment.

Waters, forests, and mountains where flora and fauna thrive position Romania at the top of the list of European countries with a rich biodiversity. The classification made in 2010 - the year of biodiversity, places Romania only at number 23 of 29 in Europe, first places being occupied by Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria.

The greenest countries have the lowest total scores. The performance indicator on climate change shows that no country has taken sufficient measures to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

The impact that the number of visitors has on the community in the tourist villages of Marginimea Sibiului has a positive effect on the occupational level, but a negative effect on the environment (Spănu Simona, 2011). Based on questionnaires there have been identified the following aspects of tourism in the area:

- the means of transport by which the tourists travel,
- short visits versus long stays,

- the existence of accommodation offers accredited with a green label,
- the purchase of local food products and souvenirs,
- the degree of organization of the places with tourist attractions.

In the tourist villages of Marginimea Sibiului it is important to promote a “green dream” type of tourism, in which the tourist is accommodated in an eco-hostel or tent for five days, travelling from his residence to the destination by train, rents a bicycle for a tour of the area, takes most meals in an agro-hostel at low prices, visits one tourist attraction every day, and ends his trip by attending a festival (Nicula V., 2011).

On a medium to long term, tourist villages can become models for the reduction of carbon footprint by developing and applying methods of organic agriculture, green tourism, and the use of clean energy sources (Spănu Simona, 2011). The idea may become an important piece of an organic food system, organic agriculture, biodiversity conservation and eco-bio-economic development and allows post-accession structural funds for sustainable development of the Romanian village (Nicula V., 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

Ecotourism is usually taking place in nature surroundings, often related to protected areas and conservation. Therefore mountains are predestinated destinations of ecotourism activities. In a lot of mountain regions there is an urgent need for activities, which help diversifying income sources, providing alternative livelihood opportunities for mountain people and, simultaneously, which help promoting environmental care and gaining benefits for nature protection. In this connection ecotourism offers considerable potentials, because it addresses the twin problems of rural mountain areas: “poverty reduction” and “minimizing environmental degradation”. It makes mountain tourism being an important sector in integrated mountain development.

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