

# **AGRITOURISM RURAL DEVELOPMENT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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*For Romania agritourism development represents the opportunity to differentiate between the rural and urban environment, as well as the best way for the preservation of traditions and customs in the rural areas, supplying a sustainable rural development.*

*This work portrays agritourism as an element of rural development and critically analyzes the way in which the public administration should become involved in sustaining rural development in general and in sustaining agritourism development in particular.*

## **Material and methods**

In our research we have taken into consideration the reference material, especially the material presented as conclusions after the meetings at an European level (The Cork Declaration, Agenda 2000, including the revision from Berlin, The Second European Conference on Rural Development in Salzburg and the meeting of the European Committee in Brussels in June 2005).

The paper has at its basis the results of a personal study made on a representative sample from a statistical point of view made up of 330 agricultural exploitations in 15 rural places located in the northwestern part of Romania, in the Beius Depression. The investigation intended to identify the problems of the Romanian nowadays village, of the potential of practicing agritourism by the investigated exploitations and as well intended to obtain some data able to allow us the elaboration of a strategy of rural development in this area.

## **Introduction**

The EU experts estimate that in its framework but also in other European countries the rurality level of local communities and of the environment is being more and more threatened.

The second European Conference on Rural Development, that took place in Salzburg in November 2003 considers (among other things) that “the policy for rural development must: serve the needs of the whole society from the rural areas and contribute

to cohesion; be implemented as a partnership between public and private organizations and the civil society. Also more responsibility should belong to the partnership programs in defining and distributing a corresponding strategy based on the clarity of defining the objectives and the effects, the results, and living in the countryside doesn't concern only the rural society, but also the society as a whole".

Improving life quality and economic diversification in the rural areas is part of the main strategic lines of EU concerning rural development, adopted on 5 July 2005 at Brussels by the European Commission.

Agriculture, the main economic activity, in a great number of rural areas, is undergoing a profound crisis. It was noticed that: "diminishing the economic activity, population aging, the youth departure, eliminating the basic services which determine the low quality of the life of quite a numerous population, and others are a few risks many rural areas are subject to"(7).

In Romania, during the first years of the transitions period, the rural development policy was wrongly equated with the agrarian policy, putting the sign of equality between supporting agriculture and rural development, which was wrong. Many of the agrarian policy measures from this period were concentrated on saving the former state agriculture, a totally unfit sector for functioning on market principles. Unfortunately, these attempts wasted important money resources, and led to the alteration of the macroeconomic performances and delayed rural development. Paradoxically, the concerns for supporting private farmers, the most important segment of rural producers, were marginal.

"At present the majority of rural areas are poor and village inhabitants live in poverty"(6). The main cause of rural poverty is the absence of adequate earning opportunities in the rural areas. Agriculture had the role of occupational buffer, instead of being an economic growth factor. Under the present circumstances a big part of the workforce can leave agriculture without affecting the decrease of agricultural production, but for this to happen it is necessary that the other non-agricultural activities should be able to absorb it. Their underdevelopment was made worse by sectorial policies, especially the agricultural one. "Measures such as the control of agricultural products prices delayed the development of decentralized channels, competitive and privately administered ones for the acquisition of raw materials and the retailing of agricultural products"(2).

Moreover, the high percentage of agricultural exploitations that produce for self-consumption slowed down the development of agricultural markets through a reduced demand of raw materials and production factors, respectively through a low offer in agricultural products. All these factors contributed to maintaining a mono-occupational structure in the rural area. The inhabitants from villages practice seasonal occupations with little added value. The migration of activities connected to agriculture, of upstream and downstream branches, in the urban area, made the rural markets weak. "The absence of non-agricultural activities in the rural area made that the multiplication effect between agriculture, industry and commerce should be minimum"(2).

### **Results and Discussions**

The tough reduction of employees number blocked the access of rural commuters to urban workplaces, obliged agriculture to absorb the workforce excess leading to high-scale under-occupation and a reduced work productivity.

The study carried out shows that the average degree of occupation of the labor-force in agriculture in an exploitation is about 24%, which shows the surplus of labor-force within the investigated agricultural exploitations.

Among the economic growth strategies, the diversification of activities has a very important place. At present the role of non-agricultural enterprisers, as a source of workplaces and incomes in the

rural area is limited. This is why the development of integrated non-agricultural activities in the exploitation and complementing the agricultural ones may be an alternative for the rural society.

In order to support the development of non-agricultural in the rural area, the government will have to elaborate a coherent set of policies for stimulating upstream and downstream activities in agriculture, such as the manufacturing of agricultural products, providing raw materials, mechanized services, tourist services etc. In this sense we need an adequate macroeconomic framework, as well as support for credits, training and consultancy services, facilitating the access to information about technology, retailing etc. and the simplification of administrative procedures that affect the environment of small entrepreneurs.

Supporting these non-agricultural activities in the rural area must comprise a series of measures in which an important place should belong to subsidies for settlement or for investments granted to rural enterprisers who start or run businesses in certain rural areas. These subsidies should be granted not through subsidizing the credit but through applying a simple system in which subsidies should be granted proportionally with the number of workplaces created. This system leads to achieving the objective of rural development with reduced costs. Also such a system doesn't discriminate among different businesses regarding their size or activity.

We consider that the distribution of these subsidies should be done according to simplified procedures, without many conditions or eligibility criteria, others than the essential one, creating workplaces in the rural area and obviously the business profitableness eliminating the sectorial eligibility criteria.

The local community and the state must find an alternative for the rural development under the present economic conditions. Agritourism could be such an alternative as it takes place in the agricultural exploitation and it influences the rural area.

Generally speaking, rural tourism and agritourism in particular have effects upon the tourists, the agricultural exploitation that offers agritouristic services, the local community and the region. The influences could be economic, social and cultural. The whole rural community has to gain from agritourism that becomes an active factor of rural development. So practicing agritourism doesn't lead only to unilateral advantages for the agricultural exploitation but also for obtaining advantages both for tourists and for the local rural community and for the whole region.

Agritourism, through the workplaces it creates, leads to maintaining the population in the rural community, achieving a stability of population and a territory balance. Also through the incomes obtained leads to the development of the agricultural exploitation and implicitly of the rural areas, preserving at the same time the values and the traditions of the rural space where there are the agricultural exploitations that have agritouristic activities.

The fact that the small agricultural exploitations are administered directly by the owners is because they live in the villages where they develop their activities. They have living spaces that can be adapted to the necessities of agritourism, which allows improving the living conditions and facilitates infrastructure development and prevents damaging the environment. "Under the general circumstances of Romanian economy, where there is a strong restructuring of the industrial sector, families go back to the rural area"(4), through agritourism it is avoided the decrease of rural population, it reduces the migration process rural-urban or even changes its direction and ensures a continuity of the specific rural life because rural activities will not lose their specificity. Summing up we can say that:

From the *economic point of view* agritourism offers to rural communities new opportunities for business, new workplaces, encourages traditional activities and leads to increasing the inhabitants' incomes through better using the local resources, preserving in the region the incomes from

tourist services. Also the presence of tourists allows the creation of development funds of the new infrastructures.

Practicing other forms of tourism in the rural area may have negative effects if these are developed without certain coordination with the rural area.

From the *social point of view*, agritourism contributes to developing life quality in the rural space, developing sanitary and behavioral education for the population, diversifying the occupations of the rural population, especially young people, increasing the stability of rural life, changing the age structure because of the new occupations, educating and preparing the young generation, establishing friendly relationships between tourists and villagers, a better interregional cooperation, preventing social tensions, reducing development differences between regions and creating a more favorable and attractive image for the rural areas in Romania.

From the *ecological and cultural point of view* agritourism ensures the preservation of available resources, the integrated development of rural activities, the protection and use of rural landscapes at the same time with preventing damaging the environment, resurrecting, developing and using the traditions and local festivals, the craft activity and the preservation of historical and art monuments, being in this way a direct source of income for the members of the local community.

Analyzing the information above, we can notice that agritouristic activity stimulates and creates new activities such as: small industry; handcraft, fish breeding, environment protection, activities for the village infrastructure etc. Thus, in the current stage, when Romanian villages are identifying a future development strategy, agritourism can represent a unitary development system. The fact that this activity is based more on the potential of rural areas and the necessary investments are smaller than in other sectors makes this sector more attractive for the entrepreneurs in the rural area.

Through the leverages they own, the state and the local administrative units must stimulate agritourism and give it its real importance among other activities. All these can be achieved through common efforts peasants-public entities-state, through a permanent collaboration, the result being a rural environment with high life quality, clean natural environment, and well-preserved traditions and customs.

In order to be able to take advantage of the new economic opportunities, we need new knowledge and skills. This is why we consider necessary to apply active **methods** of developing the human capital, the villagers, such as:

- Setting up professional training courses in the rural area in order to help the adult population to cover its lacks in general education and to create conditions for professional specialization and its improvement;
- Stimulating the preparation in the administration of farms and non-agricultural activities from the rural area, subsidizing publications on these topics being an efficient action way for achieving the rural development objective;
- Ensuring the access of workers from the rural area to the active measures of re-qualification provided to the unemployed;
- Making public works for improving the local infrastructure especially of those that use the local workforce.

Initiating programs, maybe financed from money coming from rural development programs, centered on developing the endowments of the community and of the infrastructure would be a major necessity. As we have shown so far, it is necessary for the local administrations to make an association for implementing a regional development strategy.

For the same purpose it is necessary to create new programs or support private initiatives for making new facilities for leisure, preparing touristy routes, facilitating access to touristy attractions.

Taking into account that the system of the agricultural exploitation is on a permanent relation with the community system, the latter supports the system of the agricultural exploitation through ensuring the infrastructure, the community facilities, the community values, the resources as well as the potential or the opportunities for using the workforce and for development. At the same time the community system is supported by the system of the agricultural exploitation through the social and moral values that it provides, through the products and services it offers, through the workforce and other contributions that come from its quality as an element of the rural community system.

From all these we have formulated a series of short-term, medium and long-term objectives for the rural community system, objective that, once achieved, are able to support agritourism in the area:

- Financing feasibility studies oriented towards agritourism;
- Providing consultancy starting agritouristic activities, juridical, economic and technical;
- Creating regional development programs through the association with other rural communities in the area;
- Setting up or supporting some association forms of the exploitations, which want to practice agritourism. This objective will be very difficult to achieve taking into consideration the fact that only about 2% of those investigated are available to make associations in order to practice agritourism.
- Allocating from the local budget funds for developing the infrastructure (improving roads quality, making channel systems, installing phone lines etc.)
- Setting up information offices for tourists about the touristy offer;
- Preparing the access to natural attractions, using at maximum the area potential;
- Creating rural development plans in order to attract funds through internationally financed programs.

We have to take into account that these objectives must be regarded all the time as dynamic, because of the market changes, business environment changes, which impose permanent readjustment of objectives or their strategies. It is also necessary to have a permanent coordination of objectives and rural community programs with short, medium and long-term objectives that form this community that is the agricultural exploitations. Without this cohesion the efficiency of the programs and resources used for their achievement will be relatively reduced.

In conclusion, we consider that it is urgently necessary to create a national, county and local system for monitoring the rural space in order to know exactly the situation of the Romanian village. At the same time we have to elaborate local, regional and national development programs and for arranging the rural area, being necessary to have a new philosophy of the Romanian countryside.

### **Referencesss**

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