

ETHICAL TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: *Tourism is one of the sectors that has experienced a particular development in recent decades, both as an investment option and from the point of view of the increase in the number of tourists. However, tourism does not only mean travel but also human behavior, social relations, and relationships with the environment. At the base of all these relationships, but not only, there must be ethics-rules that regulate the tourist's behavior towards himself and towards others. Rural tourism, through the numerous benefits it can bring, is important to be considered in the context of the sustainable development of rural areas. This paper explores the ethical aspects of tourism from the perspective of tourists' behaviors in relation to the environment. The impact of tourism on rural communities is additionally mentioned, based on the concept of sustainable development. In this approach, the Wine Road project in the Arad Vineyard is analyzed. The paper highlights the special economic and sociocultural impact of ethical and sustainable tourism in rural communities and at the regional level.*

Key words: *rural tourism, ethics, sustainable development, environment, tourist behavior*

INTRODUCTION

In the current era, the new possibilities and means of movement offered by technology, so that by air, on the same day, we can be in different areas of the globe, as well as freedom of movement, have facilitated the development of tourism to levels that were not anticipated just a few decades ago. Added to these facilities is people's desire for knowledge and interaction with other cultures. According to data provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the number of tourists traveling internationally was 165 million in 1970, and in 1990, their number reached 440 million. In less than three decades, by 2017, the number had reached 1.25 billion, an increase of 750% in the number of tourists in just a few decades [1]. International tourists are defined as people who travel from one country to another and whose main purpose of travel is not commercial but sightseeing [9].

The development of tourism with such a large influx of tourists has put a certain pressure on travel agencies and tourist destinations through overcrowding and, at the same time, through its particularly strong impact on the environment. Growing concerns about environmental degradation and the negative effects of our consumerist contemporary society of tourists have been the subject of research in which it has been highlighted that tourism is an important factor in terms of both global pollution as well as the reduction of natural resources and even the exploitation of workers from the host destinations [3, 6, 7]. In this context, a new concept has emerged - ethical tourism - which encourages the consumer and the tourism industry towards responsibility and a behavior that expresses awareness of its own consequences on the environment, people, and the local economy. The concept of ethical tourism is a response to global concerns about environmental effects, with the help of which it tries to manage tourism in such a way as to benefit all involved, highlighting the importance of limiting its negative impact [2]. As a result, the ethical tourist will consider how their acts may influence the environment, local people, and ecological sustainability. From this perspective, ethical tourism can be defined as sustainable tourism that benefits all parties involved: environment, the economy, and the local community.

In its approach to ethical tourism, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) was involved through a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) adopted in 1999 by the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization and two years later by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The code can be understood as a fundamental frame of reference comprising a set of ethical principles to guide actors involved in tourism [5]. The Code also includes a voluntary, non-legally binding, implementation mechanism that recognizes the role of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics (WCTE). The content of the 10 GCET articles covers the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of tourism [5].

In addition to international tourism, rural tourism is increasingly taken into account, which, through sustainable projects, can contribute to the development and growth of rural communities. Rural tourism is understood as an alternative to mass tourism and a possible source of support for the local economy. The concept of ethical tourism is also present in this type of tourism, and from this perspective, GCET represents a red thread around which specific local norms can be woven. According to [8], through the ideals and, at the same time, the efforts made regarding the preservation of the natural environment and natural beauty, an attempt is made to fix biodiversity to what is defined by science as "natural". The participation of rural communities in tourism is crucial for sustainable development from the perspective of the objectives of increasing material well-being and cultural and environmental conservation, an aspect highlighted by the World Bank in 2011 [11]. Some authors [4] emphasize the importance for these communities to recognize and evaluate the impact of tourism activities in the destinations they offer, taking into account that often tourists pollute the natural environment, affecting the communities' perception of the value of tourism.

Ethical tourism in rural areas helps highlight local assets, can bring material benefits to families living in the area, and can provide new jobs for local people, thus preventing labor migration. In this context, members of local communities become very active actors in what it means to develop rural tourism. Local residents can be involved in the sale of handicraft products and the capitalization of existing rural experience and traditions in the sphere of accommodation units [10]. Increasing the well-being of families by sourcing products and services locally benefits the entire community. At the same time, rural tourism creates at the community level a certain emulation, feelings of value, and cohesion in the local context and thus helps to revive the pride of belonging to the community.

However, it is crucial to involve the local administration in sustainable rural development to ensure the transport infrastructure and other facilities necessary for the practice of ethical tourism, so that the environment is not altered and certain imbalances that could disrupt rural culture are prevented. In Romania, rural tourism has a great potential for development due to the natural attractions and cultural traditions that were relatively underdeveloped until 1990. Romania's integration into the European Union created the possibility of accessing rural development projects and programs that support the promotion of rural tourism and the preservation of local values and traditions. At the same time, support is offered for infrastructure and the practice of protective tourism in relation to the environment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

While writing this paper, we employed the methodology of a literature review. The information utilized to present this research came from a variety of sources, including articles, reports, and other secondary sources of information.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In this paper, the Wine Road tourist project from Arad's Vineyard is analyzed from the perspective of boosting rural tourism and the role it plays in the sustainable development of the communities in this area. The analysis of the literature and the accessed data highlights the importance of practicing ethical tourism as a crucial factor for sustainable development in the countryside. The way in which it was developed, the principles promoted by the authorities, and the other factors involved put the Arad Wine Route on the map of global rural tourism and made an essential contribution to the development of rural communities.

The Wine Road from Arad's Vineyard is approximately 50 km long and crosses the communes of Păuliș, Ghioroc, Covăsânt, Șiria, all with deep historical roots in the field of viticulture. Documentary attestation of the Arad Vineyards (since the 9th century): the Wine Road is located in one of the oldest vineyards in the Romanian area. Moreover, viticulture is an important occupation for the inhabitants of this Arad area, still practiced since the time of the free Dacians [14].

The revitalization of tourism on the Wine Route was made possible by accessing the REGIO Project - Regional Operational Program, in 2010, with a total value of 61,353,550, 95 lei. The involvement of the authorities for the development of rural tourism is essential because only in this way can be accessed projects that rehabilitate the regional infrastructure and contribute to the economic and social growth of the area, and have the strength to create an adequate framework for attracting investors and new jobs.

The outcomes of the Wine Road project implementation are reflected in the rehabilitation of the county roads DJ708B and DJ708C (24.02 km.) which cross the localities of the Arad wine-growing area. At the same time, these roads facilitate tourists access to the Lipova Balneoclimateric Resort and to other tourist attractions in the area: Șoimoș Citadel, "Buna Vestire" Church, Șiria Citadel, Feredeu Monastery with Hermitage, Ghioroc Lake, and Vine and Wine Museum. The rehabilitation of the roads also involved their widening. The development of transport infrastructure means new opportunities for investors who want to open businesses in the area. The modernization of these county roads brings Arad Vineyard to a privileged position as a regional pole in relation to the surrounding counties, openings up new possibilities for tourism development.

At the social level, the development of the Wine Road contributes to the creation of new jobs, allowing locals to avoid commuting to neighboring cities, as well as an increase in material well-being. This can also be accomplished by increasing the number of private wineries in the area.

In the medium and long term, the investment made through the implementation of the Wine Road project as a form of sustainable development will lead to:

- Increasing the attractiveness of this area for tourism and new investments;
- Stimulating the creation of new businesses and attracting foreign investments in the area;
- Increase in the number of tourists;
- New economic agents, as a result of economic development and tourism and catering activities in the area, will have an impact on the increase in the number of jobs in the area;
- New jobs;

- Increasing the population's standard of living in this area [12].

The activities through which rural tourism is stimulated in the Arad Vineyard are varied: fairs of Arad products; exhibitions of local wine and food producers; wine tastings in the 14 wineries in the area; folklore performances; visiting tourist attractions (Vine and Wine Museum, Electric Tram Museum, Şiria Citadel, Şoimoş Citadel).

The concept of ethical tourism as a factor of sustainable development is promoted in the County Development Strategy, thus aligning with the National Ecotourism Development Strategy (2019). Thus, along the Wine Route, ethical behavior among tourists is promoted through panels and posters in the sense of protecting the environment and biodiversity. At the destination level, tourists are informed about the natural character of the area, cultural and landscape values. Advertising and information materials provided to tourists prior to the program also promote responsible tourism for a clean environment. Ethical tourism, in addition to the goal of protecting the environment and increasing the quality of life of rural residents, also aims to satisfy the demands of tourists, taking into account the preservation of the environment for future generations [13]. These requirements are found in the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET). However, it is obvious that regarding the intention of the tourist's ethical behavior, there are factors that have a certain influence. In this sense, we consider personal factors, such as the tourist's attitude and information about what ethical tourism means, positive influences from family and friends, education received, and to a certain extent, the destination itself, including the quality of the services offered. The way in which ethical tourism is promoted at the destination and area levels can also have an impact on tourist behavior. In this way, the Wine Route of Arad's Vineyard is a tourist destination that encourages ethical behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal that, in the context of the global expansion in the number of tourists, the health of the environment and biodiversity are threatened, among other things, by inappropriate tourist behavior. This study highlights the interest expressed by different international institutions for this problem, as embodied in directions, norms, and ethical codes. The study argues in favor of ethical tourism, with a focus on the rural environment, because it helps to preserve the environment and local values, improve community well-being, and develop new jobs. The Wine Route from Arad's Vineyard case study is helpful in terms of both benefits to local communities and the development of ethical tourism.

Another conclusion drawn from the case study is that it is critical to involve local authorities in projects to provide modern local infrastructure and other elements that allow transportation in order to achieve sustainable rural development in Romania through ethical tourism. The research underlines that the quality of services provided can have an impact on tourists' ethical behavior. The theme of this study can be expanded upon by conducting additional research on the elements that influence ethical tourism in rural areas.

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