ELEMENTS THAT DETERMINE THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES IN ARAD COUNTY

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***Abstract*:** *People who live in rural areas should be the main actors in agrotourism activity in order to be the main beneficiaries. However, the traditional hospitality of peasants must be accompanied by specific training of tourist accommodation activity giving to the visitors the satisfaction of civilized accommodation and, in the same time, the possibility to discover new places and people.*

Tourist village is the place where rural tourism is practiced and which leaves its mark on tourism forms. In order to enter into tourist circuit it must meet certain conditions such as: attractive natural setting, with various natural monuments and reduced pollution; existence of anthropic attractions, cultural and folkloric traditions and traditional customs; basic infrastructure for tourists, to ensure accommodation, meals and entertainment services.

***Key words**: rural area, agritourism, hospitality of peasants, tourist accommodation, rural tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Agrotourism can be a lever for local development of a large number of rural areas. However, agrotourism is not an universal „cure" for all development problems and, in addition, not all rural areas are suitable for it. For tourist offer to have high value it is necessary that the economic value of activities adjacent remain at a high level. This principle does not only concern the attractiveness exercised by rural environment, but also specific activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors of the paper were used as methods of work: data collection, processing, analysis, observation and their interpretation. This work was a part of the research during the contract *POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132765.*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of tourist activities carried out in Arad County is conditioned both by favorable elements and restrictive factors.

- natural tourist potential (physical and geographical conditions) specific to Arad County favors the development of tourism. The existence of various relief, relatively proportioned (although the plains are predominant), decreasing altitudinal from east to west, a temperate and continental climate with oceanic influences and numerous areas with refuge topoclimate (depressions of Hălmagiu, Almaş - Gurahonţ, Moneasa, Mureş Corridor), considerable extension of forest areas, presence of natural reserves (Mocrea Hill - Ineu mixed natural Reserve about 107,2 ha, located in the administration of SC Romsilva SA, Moneasa mixed natural Reserve) and dendrological parks (Mocrea - Ineu dendrological Park about 8 ha forming, together with the mansion in the village of Mocrea,

an attractive resort for tourists, dendrological park of Ineu, 12 ha), existence of mineral water springs (alkaline carbonated water at Moneasa, carbonated ferruginous in Lipova Hills) create the natural premises with immediate positive impact on the development of tourist activities;

- anthropic tourist potential is another favorable element for economic and tourist activities and it is represented by historical attractions (stone fortresses at Şoimoş, Şiria and Dezna), over 20 castles (at Macea, Curtici, Şofronea, Şiria, Pâncota, Conop, Săvârşin, Birchiş etc.), monasteries, historical and architectural monuments (Hodoş - Bodrog, Lipova, Radna etc.), churches (Bodeşti, Hălmagiu, Luncuşoara, Ţărmure, Ioneşti etc.), ethnographic (pottery production centers at Bârsa and Târnăviţa), popular costumes at Şicula, Bârsa and Buteni traditional folkloric customs such as the Fair of girls on Găina Mountains; the Fair of kiss at Hălmagiu) and rural economy (watermills at Rădeşti, Valea Mare, Iacobini, Vârfurile and Roşia), municipal buildings, industrial vestiges (classic train, steam locomotives, halls, industrial equipment in Arad);

- geographical position of Arad County, in the western part of the country, presence of border crossing points (Nădlac Vărşand, Turnu - road points and Curtici - the most important rail crossing point in the country), existence of a dense network of road ways (E 68, E 671, DN 7A), national and European railways (important point in the national network on Paris - Istanbul main railway), International Airport of Arad (recently modernized) made, from Arad County, the main entrance gate of tourist flows from Europe, encouraging tourist traffic of transit and business;

- Developing the concept of agrotourism has determined some houses owners in rural areas to provide services in tourism field; currently, in rural area of Arad, 13 agrotourist units operates, of which 11 are classified with 3 and 2 daisies, concentrating 78% of all accommodation places;

Despite the factors identified as favorable for tourist activities development, this type of economic activity is not, as a value of income resulted or flows size of labor involved or population served with various tourist products, at the level of those carried out in other counties. In official documents concerning the development strategy and development plan of the Western Region, it is estimated that tourism is not enough developed, as in the case of Arad County.

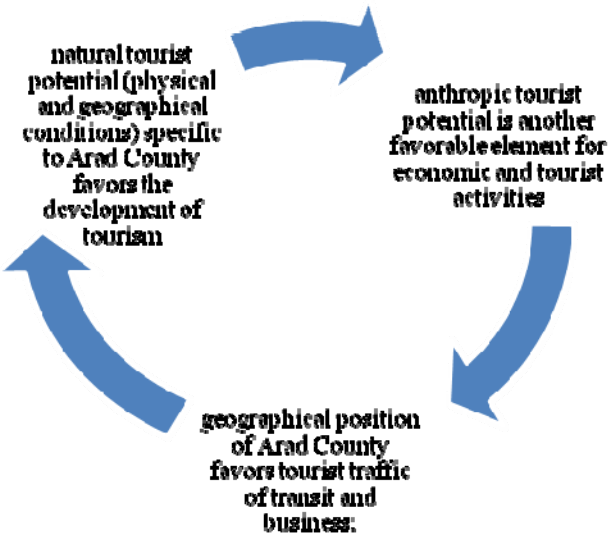

Fig. 1 - Favorable elements for the development of tourist activities in Arad County

From the qualitative and quantitative analysis of tourist activities undertaken across Arad County, as well as the geographical differences recorded, we have highlighted several factors / elements that stop the proper development of tourism:

- Access infrastructure is deficient, being favorable for tourist activities only at county level, because, at local level, numerous malfunctions are noted: local roads sums up 1.685 km, of which only 51,4% are county roads (74% of all county roads are modernized and, of all modernized roads, 774 km, respectively 59,7% have the operational life expired); high-speed routes and quick access are missing; intermodal transport systems are poorly developed; bridges over Mures are missing, too, etc.

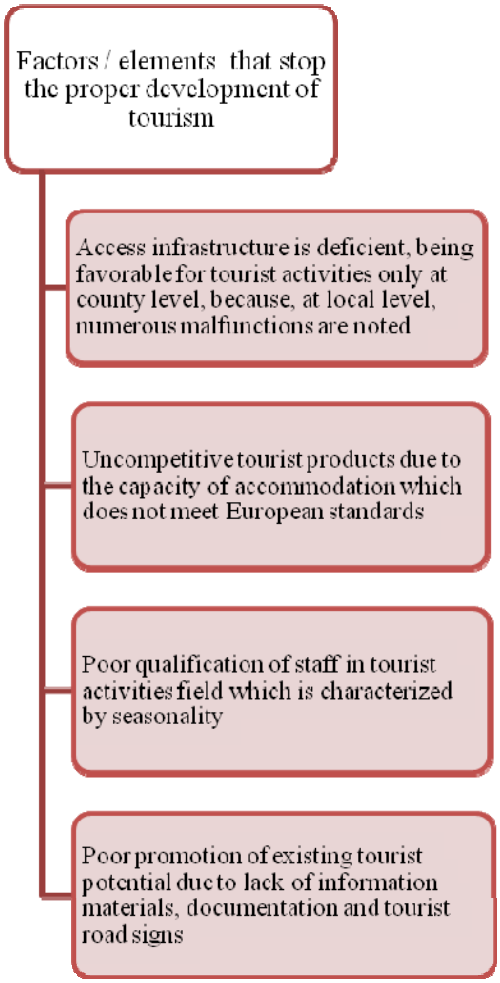

Fig. 2 - Factors that stop the proper development of tourism in Arad County

- tourist products are not competitive due to the capacity of accommodation, which does not meet European standards: accommodation structures as hotels and motels, where the investments for construction, modernization are high, data related to the number of accommodation structures and beds have not significantly changed over the years; only 29,7% of the total number of tourist accommodation has qualified facilities with 3 and 4 stars, from remained majority more than 74% being classified in the category of 2 stars; total number of beds decreased from the half of the last decade to the middle of the current

one, with 305 beds (7,04%) and reception capacity in units of 3 and 4 stars represent only 1/3 of the total; there is no communication network between the companies operating in the tourist field in order to develop specific tourist products, in accordance with natural and anthropic potential of Arad County, and to promote tourist activities on the market (defined from the perspective of segments of the population involved in tourist activity - tourists, labor force employed temporarily or seasonally, targeted natural and anthropic attractions);

- poor qualification of staff in tourist activities field which is characterized by seasonality and which implies the involvement of many persons who operate on a definite period. Arad County faces malfunction in terms of qualification of labor force in tourism, induced by the lack of qualified staff in basic jobs and public alimentation (the waiter, the cook, the receptionist);

- poor promotion of existing tourist potential due to lack of information materials, documentation and tourist road signs

CONCLUSIONS

The practice of agrotourism development in Romania highlighted the fact that, due to the lack of an unified strategy of local development, it could not be realized within the general urbanism plan, which is why it came as the sites, with tourist function, to achieve incidentally, without basic market studies, based on the principle of creating objective in order to stimulate interest. This principle has caused malfunctions by achieving goals, outside the general tourist framework. This practice endangers a large part of investments made until now, considering that the development of rural areas involves structuring of infrastructure elements into other perimeters. It appears, therefore, that the investments were largely based on projects that removed the constructions out of the area specificity, especially in terms of the exterior, with a danger of occurrence of monotony elements. At present, the tourist sites are mostly constituted in entity somehow separated from the traditions and traditional occupations, from the local specificity, which can only have negative effects for the present and especially for the future.

In parallel with the development of agrotourism, under the impulse of tourists, the infrastructure and cultural elements and those related to traditional occupations (including artisanal ones) were amplified, which have become attraction factors in rural areas.

A great attention should be taken into account when we state the objectives in order to not confuse them with activities. The activities describe how to meet the objectives. The objectives represent „an end", while the methods represent „a way".

Agrotourism is an activity with an important role in the development of Arad County, because it can determine mutations within territorial movement. In this way, regional imbalances attenuate and change the configuration of areas by spatial planning, by actions encouraging the development of public services, of industrialization.

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