

# RURAL TOURISM – THE CHANCE OF THE 21th CENTURY

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## Summary

Global changes in the tourist market are characterized by an increasing representation of tourist forms differentiating from those for which the system 3S is valid (sun, sea, sand). The contemporary trend of moving from the concept of mass tourism to the individual forms of tourism opens to rural tourism the position in the world market of the 21th century. Rural tourism has no characteristics of massiveness and it is compatible with the aspects of sustainable tourism.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is a very important economic, sociological and ecological factor of the society. In spite of all changes happening in the world, tourism includes about 11% of GNP and about 13 % of the world export. According to the total transaction amount, tourism is approaching the oil and car industries.

The world tourist market is developing constantly. The data of the United Nations World Tourist Organization (UNWTO) speak in favor of it: International tourist arrival reached 903 million in 2007, up 6.6% on 2006. International tourism receipts grew to €625 billion in 2007 (US\$ 856 billion) corresponding to an increase of 5.6% on 2006.

All regions showed increases, with the fastest growth recorded in the Middle East, Americas and Asia and the Pacific. All sub regions also reported positive results.

The global economic situation is affecting consumer confidence and could hurt tourism demand. UNWTO expects the increase of international tourist arrivals within the range of 3-4 % in 2008 (UNWTO Barometer, No 2, and June 2008).

According to the estimations of UNWTO, 1 billion and 600 millions of foreign tourists will be in the world in 2020.

The Secretary-General of UNWTO Francesco Frangialy said that experience taught us that tourism was resistant and the need to use vacation was very strong in the post-industrial society. Recession in the U.S.A. and West Europe exerts influence on the change of consumers' habits but travels have not been stopped.

Estimations say that the crisis will exert less influence on tourism than the 2003 SARS epidemic, when the numbers of tourists decreased suddenly, especially in Asia.

Judging by all these facts, international tourism easily overcomes the influence of the economic recession in relation to the other segments of the social and economic development. American and European consumers spend less in tourist destinations, especially in restaurants, entertainment and transport. Therefore, the stay at friends and cousins', as well as in camps and other cheaper overnight stays have become popular, says the Secretary-General of UNWTO.

Is it the chance for rural tourism?

## **2. Rural Tourism**

### **2.1. Why?**

The world population lives mostly in large cities with a lot of concrete, asphalt, skyscrapers, cars, noise, polluted air, fast tempo of urban life, stress. Have the people enough reasons to become tourists?

Tourists increasingly look for new space, adventures and experiences. The answer to big disturbances on the beaches and narrow coasts the tourists have found themselves spontaneously in the same way as they used to find wild coastal regions. Such areas offering natural possibilities for the real rest tourists have found in villages.

Rural tourism includes a series of activities, services and adding contents in the organization of the rural population. It is developed mostly in family farms. This tourist product offers the tourist demand of the village environment thermal springs, rivers, lakes, hospitality, life values of the native population. It is the alternative to mass tourism because it attracts tourists interested in rural cultures and the environmental quality.

Rural tourists watch trees, not skyscrapers; they walk through the forests, not in the city streets, breathing flowers instead of smog and listening to chirping of birds instead of squeaking of car brakes.

Rural tourism is a significant European market segment. It consists of 200,000 of tourist facilities, 2 million beds and about 500,000 employed. The greatest receptive and accessible markets of rural tourism are France, Germany, Austria, Great Britain, Hungary. Tourism in rural areas may make up 10-25 per cent of all forms of tourism activity (Hall, Roberts, Mitchell, 2004).

The key elements of rural tourism:

- It is developed in settlements under 10,000 inhabitants,
- Natural environment,
- Weak infrastructure,
- Strong individual activities,
- Small facilities,
- Tourism supports other interests (agriculture),
- Eco and ethnic framework.

### **2.2. Activities of rural tourism**

Rural tourism includes different forms of tourist activities (Hall, Page, 2007), as:

- Agricultural tourism, farms – tourists watch and participate in traditional agricultural jobs,
- Activities in the nature – recreation and fun (hunting, fishing, cycling, walking, mountaineering),
- Eco tourism – tourism supporting the natural resources protection,
- Rural experience – tourists participate in everyday village life,
- Cultural tourism – it relates to culture, history, archeology,
- Other combined forms of tourism of special interests – events, festivals, recreation in the open air, production and sale of local souvenirs and agricultural products.

Rural tourism enables the contact of the urban and rural population giving the social aspect to it. Rural areas are characterized by the stronger feeling of community spirit, local not cosmopolitan cultures and the way of life being slower, less materialistic, harmonized with the nature. Rural tourism contributes to strengthening the awareness about the ecological and natural values and it makes its ecological aspect. The economy in rural areas is based on traditional and agricultural production, forestry and the use of raw materials. Rural tourism provides the possibilities of additional income for the local inhabitants and it is its economic aspect (Stetic, 2007).

### 2.3. Who are the clients of rural tourism?

Generally speaking, a typical rural tourist is the person who has travelled much all over the world, highly educated, very interested in culture, ecology, even for gastronomy (especially in wines). He/she lives in the urban area, two or three hours of driving from the desired destination. The rural tourist mostly uses weekends for vacations in the rural area, while the longer stay is rare, but sometimes it can last to ten days (Horwath Consulting, Zagreb, 2006) According to researches carried out among rural tourists, typical activities of the rural vacations are:

- Enjoyment in rural landscape (73%)
- Gastronomy (70%)
- Visiting lakes and rivers (58%)
- Sightseeing historical and cultural attractions (41%)
- Fishing, hunting, boat driving (32%)
- Cycling, riding, walking, mountaineering (24%)

As for the projects of rural tourism, the so-called wine ways experience an increasing popularity in the world, relating to wine offer in the wine cellars in some geographical area marked by special maps. The wine way is the synonym for visiting wine cellars together with wine degustation and enjoyment in national dishes. To promote the wine culture of some area, wine centers as educational, information, selling and tourist points are developed in the wine growing areas.

Based on researches with a view of adapting tourist offer of rural destinations to tourists' requirements, it is necessary to perform market segmentation. Segmentation criteria can be age, family status, income, behavior, interest in this kind of tourism, place of residence. There are several broad segments associated with rural destinations (Stetic, 2007).

- *Visitors interested in daily picnic*

The importance of this segment is big, especially in country areas near cities. The major factors exerting influence on decision-making are the quality of infrastructure, attractions, and approaches to the village.

- *Visitors interested in short vacations*

The length of vacations has been changed into more short vacations in the greater part of rural Europe. These visitors usually require better quality.

- *Families*

Popularity with this segment of rural tourism varies so it should be divided with regard to age of children. For example, families with small children enjoy they stay in the country, but they have special needs.

- *Senior citizens*

They enjoy the country tradition, quietness, and they are very interested in rural destinations. They require higher standards.

- *People with special interests*

Their major objectives are recreation, bicycling, walking, and gastronomy.

- *People with disorder*

This is a big segment, including families and specialist care, and it is important to adapt the village households and make them accessible to the people with special needs.

## **2.4 Positive effects of rural tourism**

The typical effects of rural tourism are:

- Increased employment of the local population in rendering services to tourists,
- Earning an adding income of the local population,
- Finding market for home-made products, services and handicrafts (embroidery, carving, artistic things, souvenirs), preserving customs and old crafts,
- Preventing migration from the country to the city,
- Making possibilities for the population to return to deserted villages and households and their revitalization,
- Providing new, alternative sources of investment,
- Including non-developed areas into the tourist offer,
- Protection and preservation of natural and cultural inheritance,
- Enrichment of the tourist offer, support to integral development of rural tourism,
- Broadening the basis for tourism development,
- Income increase by tourism.

## **2.5 Some elements of advancing rural tourism**

Rural tourism represents one of the possibilities that exert influence on the economic development of rural areas. Tourism business within the framework of farm tourism (providing room and board, opening restaurants, agricultural products sale) enables providing an adding income with minimal investment by farmers themselves.

Besides facility supply, the rural population, wishing to include in tourism, should have a desire, capabilities and possibilities to render qualitative services. As the human resources are the basis of success in rural tourism, professional training (all the members of the farm household) is necessary to increase the positive effects in satisfying requirements of tourists. The education of tourists is also necessary because of the specificity of space where tourists stay and human relations appearing there.

The Internet and contemporary technologies contribute to the development of rural tourism, especially in the field of promotion and communications. The efficient use of applications, as online booking, requires better training of those who render services, as well as the equipment of rural areas by needed infrastructures for information technologies.

Special attraction is the offer of rural tourism combining vacation in two different countries. This is the advantage of destinations in the vicinities of state borders and the possibility to include into the inter-border initiatives.

To provide quality, besides problems, it is important to create and implement united quality standards. Problems to determine quality standards in rural tourism appear because of the impossibility to recognize the basic quality standards in rural tourism and the need to preserve the attractiveness of rural areas (Stetic, 2007). The tourist offer of rural tourism has the unique values and the specific tourist product of rural destinations must emphasize the authenticity but it should also be justified according to the demands of specific consumers.

Contributions to advancing rural tourism and increasing the European quality standards is given by the European Association of rural countries having in mind that this Association realizes €13 billion per year from the rural offer, and almost €17 billion for selling souvenirs . The nature and values of the living environment are of substantial importance for rural tourism and it makes rural tourism a significant component of the sustainable development. The sustainable development means tourism development which satisfies needs of today's tourists, tourist destinations and all participants in tourism, with simultaneous preserving and increasing potentials for using tourist resources in the future, without endangering the possibilities of the future generations to satisfy their needs. This is the general directive for developing rural tourism.

### **3. Conclusion**

Rural tourism provides a series of positive effects both for the tourist offer and users of tourist products and rural tourism. It is the driving force to revitalize the rural areas and the carrier of changes in their socio-economic structure. On the other side, rural tourism gives tourists a new experience different from everyday events.

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