

EVALUATION OF RURAL TOURISM IN THE DISTRICT OF BERETTYÓÚJFALU

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ABSTRACT

Tourism and – in the countryside – rural tourism can fulfill an essential role in the economy and in rural development. The strengthening and diversification of the economic base of the countryside cannot be viewed as sufficient on its own; there can be a need for the development of the activities which use local means with the diversification and variegation of those activities. The implementation of diversification, production, processing, and marketing of folk-like goods, linking agriculture to tourism can contribute to the economy and to the increase of the region-carrying power of the given population. In our study, we examined the tourism of the district of Berettyóújfalu. We found out that the possibilities for tourism in the district of Berettyóújfalu are less known and the seasonal fluctuation connecting to programs means a particular problem. Helping the information flow, organizing and popularization of traditional and rural-like programs, tasting of local foods and creating program packages can result in a more balanced season and can provide a more reliable source of income for the hosts of the rural district.

Keywords: rural tourism, rural development, district of Berettyóújfalu, rural accommodation

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, tourism has a defining role for countries and nations because it is one of the key sectors of the economy. In regions with favorable conditions, tourism can provide sustenance and livelihood; it has an effect on the social, cultural and economic life and to the international relations as well. For society, it means an escape from the world of work; hence they can spend their earned money on travelling, resting and relaxation. “If it is developed sufficiently, it can be the motor of the economic and cultural rise of whole countries, if not; it can destroy the natural environment and can transform value into product (PUCZKÓ AND RÁTZ, 2002).

The rural-, agro-, agri and farm-tourism terms are usually referred to by professionals as synonym words. Since this area of tourism is connected to agrarian economy, hosts provides accommodation, food, local specialties, outdoor activities and knowledge about the area’s sights, using the aptness of the local environment (KOVÁCS, 2003).

Rural tourism completes the income from agriculture in a classic sense, however, between Hungarian relations; the two actions are rarely connected. It is not only about villages but it can work in small rural cities which do not belong to the part of spa and recreational districts (SZABÓ ET AL., 2009). In our research we aimed to measure the environmental, cultural and economic potential of the district of Berettyóújfalu to the rural tourism and we decided to examine the state of the district’s rural tourism and the possibilities to its development.

Conceptual demarcation of rural tourism

The European perception and interpretation is very diverse, there is no unified definition or practice in connection to rural tourism.

According to the current demarcation, rustic restaurant activities are not typical to the spa and recreational districts, just like earlier, before 2009. The latest legislation concerning rural accommodations (239/2009. (X. 20.). Government regulation about the detailed conditions of operating an accommodation and about the order of the distribution of the accommodation-operating license) however, – compared to the previous action – restricts the scope of settlements which are suitable for rural accommodation, that this action can happen in places with less than 5000 capitals and where the population density is less than 100 people / km², shrivel those settlements from the demarcation which environment or tradition would be suitable for the requirements of rural hospitality.

The activity consists of the provision of three services: accommodation, meal and programs; from the guest's side it means a cheap and active relaxation, during which he can get to know the specific landscape's traditions, can be the part of the local, rural-like work, e.g. weaving, basketry, harvesting, pig-killing or even can get familiar with the typical local tastes. It is really successful if the activity connects to agriculture, complete the income from that and in that way it can make the programs more colorful. At the same time, it also helps the diversification of the management (DÁVID ET AL., 2003).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The district of Berettyóújfalu is located in the region of the Northern Great Plain and it is on the south-east part of Hajdu-Bihar County. Its location can be viewed as disadvantageous because of the eastern "poverty" and the distance from the capital city. Three city (Berettyóújfalu, Biharkeresztes, Komádi) and 22 township (Ártánd, Bakonszeg, Bedő, Berekböszörmény, Bojt, Csökmő, Darvas, Furta, Gáborján, Hencida, Körösszakál, Körösszegapáti, Magyarhomorog, Mezőpeterd, Mezősas, Nagykereki, Szentpéterszeg, Told, Újiráz, Váncsod, Vekerd, Zsáka) belongs to it.

Due to its geographical location, the district's transport is mainly characterized by the Berettyóújfalu - Biharkeresztes spatial line (No. 42, E60 highway) which is part of the Budapest-Nagyvárad national spatial line and the Central-European international transport corridor. The center of the district is the south-north direction with a regional significance, located on the Nyíregyháza-Debrecen-Békéscsaba-Szeged route (OROSZ and TÓTH, 2014).

For the exploration of the tourism of the district of Berettyóújfalu we made a research among the hosts of the rural district. The reasons of the choice besides this district is its essentially rural-like nature and also its disadvantageous situation; in that way rural tourism as a rural developing tool can have a crucial role in the strengthening of the district's ability of population retention. 17 rural hosts got into the research about the operation of rural tourism; they give 76% of the rural hosts of the examined district. The questionnaire contained 30 questions: after the general questions the characteristics of the accommodation, the economic details of the service, the characteristics of the agricultural activity and the changes and actualities about the rural tourism were presented. During the research, besides getting to know the operation we could also focus on how the activity is connected to agricultural activities and if the hosts are willing to deal with organic farming. We conducted the survey in July and August of 2014, personally, hence our aim was to receive a more detailed view of the district's rural tourism and also to receive information at from the first hand about the operation of the rural hosts. We evaluated the results with the help of Microsoft Excel program.

RESULTS

Presentation of the area under investigation

Berettyóújfalu and its surroundings are the deepest part of the Plains, a small region with an above sea-height between 87 and 140 m (II). Its climate is moderately warm and dry. The weather is very extreme; the rain is tight and extreme in the district. The most important natural value of the district is its thermal water. The district of Berettyóújfalu' Bihar Plan's Landscape Protection Area is between two tourist landscapes. From the north, the Hortobágy National park and from the south the Körös-Maros National Park straddles is. This area provides a perfect opportunity to the introduction of gentle tourism especially in the area of rural and horse tourism. The Landscape Protection area is approximately 20000 acre big which has a significant bustard population and a buffalo reservation.

The area of the district is 1073,90 km². The constant population of the district shows a decreasing tendency in the last 34 years, while in 1980, 55128 people lived in the district, in 2015 44779 did. The district has a rare density, the general population density is 41,6 person/ km². Wandering since centuries and the decreasing of the population because of the negative sign of the natural reproduction is typical to the district's villages. As for the district's categorization based on the district's constant population, 18% of the population is under 18, 59% is between 18 and 59 and 23% is above 60. The decreasing of the number of births and the growth of deaths along with the wandering of the youth contributes to the ageing process. 31 nursery schools operate in the district and the educating and teaching of primary school-aged kids happen in 29 schools. In Hajdu-Bihar region only Berettyóújfalu has a hospital besides Debrecen, which provides specialist service to those who live here. Besides Berettyóújfalu, Biharkeresztes and Komádi also have outpatient services. Based on the description, the human-infrastructure services are considered good. The district's population's typical nature is that only here lives a considerable amount of nationality, Rumanians, who still keeps their cultural and partly lingual traditions.

The entrepreneur activity is low; the number of unemployment is high in the district. In 2015, the number of unemployed was 2477; the rate of unemployment is half as much again as the national average. The main reason behind the formation of unemployment was the decreased number of big employing companies, in that way the population is trying to earn money as micro - or small entrepreneurs, agricultural entrepreneurs, family entrepreneurs or manufacturers, in many cases as forced entrepreneurs. Growing plants and keeping domestic animals can mean a form of income. The status of accommodations is varying, but the renovation of residential areas is necessary. The automobile substance run-down, the state of public utilities is acceptable however the infrastructure, the improvement of railways and public roads could contribute to the upswing of tourism.

Results of the questionnaire research

Rural tourism is typical on the district's bigger settlements: in Berettyóújfalu, Biharkeresztes, Mezőpeterd and in Komádi, because of this, we did our research on these places.

General characteristics

70% of the asked hosts belong to the age group between 41 and 60, in a smaller rate (15%) of them are above 60 and are pensioners. We are mostly talking about a complementary way of income, hence 43% of the hosts work in the supplier sector, 22% in agriculture, and only 14% works specifically as rural hosts. Most of the hosts are dealing with rural tourism since 6-10 years, one quarter of them since more than 10 years. According to the interviews; it was hard to start in the beginning phase, since this area was unknown for

them however within a few years they managed to successfully build partnerships. Most of the answerers said that approximately 3 years is necessary for the activity to start sufficiently and to have constant guests and as a result the activity can provide income in the 4th year.

As for qualification, it can be noticed that more than 80% of the involved done some kind of course connected to rural hospitality. The other hosts feel that they have those skills which are required for the guest's precise and hospitable accommodation without any qualifications. Only one-third of the hosts are in connection with the National Rural and Agricultural Tourism Association and with the local Touristic Destination Management Association, which can help them in qualification and in the marketing work.

When discovering the reasons behind the beginning of rural tourism, 50% of the asked hosts always wanted to have this activity as their job. The opportunities were given, they had empty rooms and they did not had a well-paying job, which all paired to the before mentioned, so as a complementary way of income, they started this business.

Characteristics of the accommodation

Moving on to the characteristics of the accommodations, 60% of them has no certification, because they did not meet the requirements, moreover, the costs keep them away from the start of the process. 24% of the accommodations have a 4 sunflower qualification; the others have a 2 or 3 sunflower one. Besides the status of the accommodation, the number of rooms and spaces is also important. There is no hosting place with less than 5 spaces in the district. In 25% of the accommodations 6-10 spaces can be found and in three-quarter of them the number of spaces is between 11 and 16. Accommodations with more spaces has a much significant amount of guests than those with less spaces, however the chance of not using up their capacity is lower. There are hosts, whose contacts and returning guests reach a constantly growing number thanks to the yearly improvements. The average staying time of guests is 2 days, however, some of them have the opportunity to spend more days in this environment, it can be a long weekend or even a whole week.

The price of the accommodation without meals, tourist tax and VAT is between 2000-6000 HUF/person/night. The price is in a strong connection with the equipment of the room and the garden and also with the quality certification of the accommodation. The rate of those hosts who offer meals is outstanding (80%). Some of them have smaller restaurants but most of the places have a dining room or kitchen. Accommodations with less space usually do not offer meal, in this way they do not provide guests chance to get to know the local, rural-like meals. In this case, if the guests request it, they provide meals with the help of local restaurants. 38% of the hosts organize programs, so these 5 accommodations where the 3 service from the demarcation of the rural tourism – accommodation, meals, programs – are present at the same time on the service palette. The environment's rural character and even keeping domestic animals in a separated place next to the accommodation are significant on these places. They organize special programs for kids, just as animal petting, horse riding, driving around the area and also crafting activities. Pig-killing is also a program connected to animal keeping. It is especially liked amongst guests because of the atmosphere of the oven and the tasting of the food made in them. Hosts provide sport programs for the guests as well; horse riding, archery and fishing are the mostly liked from the programs. One of the accommodations provides massage, solarium, sauna and Jacuzzi as extra services, however these, besides providing comfort to guests, do not fulfill the tradition keeping functions of the district. With similar services and medicinal water, the spa of Berettyóújfalu waits for the guests.

Economic characteristics of the activity

We researched that what kind of application support hosts pressed in to service in connection with rural tourism. Little more than half of the asked did not pressed support into service because of the strict regulations and the connecting obligations. The lack of information also contributes, since for the pensioner hosts it is difficult to be informed from the supports advertised on the internet. Since most of the hosts are not members of the organizations dealing with rural tourism, they cannot receive information from the actual possibilities through them. Those who applied for a support applied especially for supports of the European Union and only in a smaller part for governmental ones. We estimated what changes they made in correspondence with the activity. Most of the answerers transformed the house, modernized it, made a fruit and vegetable garden and did renovations and expansions connecting to animal keeping. There are hosts who expanded the accommodation with bathroom, moreover tried to elongate the season with the developing of heating systems.

Investments in connection with the broadening of the services help in the preservation of the rural-likeness – which is important in rural tourism – which can reach the guest of the cities. To the question of how much money can hosts earn yearly from rural tourism, many of them did not answered, most of the answerers marked loss or stagnancy. For hosts who have less spaces, the yearly realized income can be up to 1.5 million HUF. Bigger hosts can reach 3 or even 5 million HUF incomes yearly. Along this rate it is worth mentioning that many rural hosts cannot separate the costs and expenses appearing during the activity from the costs and expenses of housekeeping, so they have no exact information of how much income they can reach in a year.

Agricultural connection

During our research we also mentioned how rural tourism works in a classical sense, so if the activity connects to the agricultural activity and if yes, how and in what measure. Most of the hosts deal with backyard agriculture, only a few hosts do larger volume of crops. Organic farming is not typical in backyard plant-growing; essentially there are no interests in it among the guests. Goods produced during farming are used for the Hungarian specialties made for guests and the use of fruit firewater and honey is also typical in hospitality. One or two hosts deal with keeping horses and pigs in which case they can offer horse riding and pig-killing as programs for the guests. Pig-killing, sausage making, sheep shearing, harvesting and sometimes food processing are also among the popular programs during rural hosting. For kids, animal feeding, pet care moreover smaller works in the kitchen garden could cause happiness. These services can only be found at the 1/3 of the accommodations.

Current issues

At the end of our research we tried to get answers to the effect of the economic crisis, to the reasons behind the change of tourist traffic, open up the services of the rural guest table and the importance of the rural-like goods in the district's rural tourism. More than two-third of the hosts experienced a decrease in the number of arriving guests and the nights spent in their accommodations because of this they could not improve further. During the economic crisis, three more accommodations opened from which one shows an increasing tendency in both the growing of the number of guests and in income. In case of the other two accommodations, 20-30% decrease could be sensed in the number of guests. The one accommodation with bigger number of decrease closed, the one with the smaller degree closed with a smaller amount of loss. At the other hosts, a smaller amount of decrease in income can be noticed. Stagnation and increase were in those places, where they could

provide something new to the guests, every year. The increased number of guests is mostly the result of the bigger expansion processes, moreover that a positive picture formed about the given accommodation and from the host and the satisfied guests not only come back but also spend more days in the place than before and they bring more guests with themselves as well. The number of guests increased with 10-15% on these places.

This recession is the result of the Hungarian economic situation, however, in a national level, the economic crisis was beneficial for rural tourism; this, cannot be seen in the examined district. People have less money, they cannot use thermal water in an appropriate measure and the reputation and marketing of the spa is far from the spa of Hajdúszoboszló. The organization and advertising of festivals is less effective, at many times, events are only last for one day, so visitors do not use accommodations. Rural guest table is one of the most relevant services of rural tourism, however this can only be found at one-third of the hosts because of the lower need. Hosts provide rural-like goods, foods typical to the district. Besides Hungarian specialties, hosts provide oven-roasted meats, breads, bread scones and cakes for guests. As a local food they offer a special version of the Hajdú-Bihar stuffed cabbage and the sausage-pasta soup and grated noodles.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The touristic opportunities of the district of Berettyóújfalu are less known, since Hajdúszoboszló can be found next to it and it attracts more people because of its accessibility. Improvement of infrastructure could help a lot in the accessibility of the district of Berettyóújfalu. M4 and M35 highways would make the transportation between bigger distances easier in the western and eastern direction. If the expressway would be built between Debrecen and Nagyvárad, both of the big cities would be accessible faster.

For the district's rural hosts' more organized operation it would be necessary for every host to have contacts with one of the organizations dealing with rural tourism with which the hosts' protect of interest, regular information, organized hospitality and certification of the accommodation would be possible. With finishing of a specialized tourism course and along with this, with the expansion of the gastronomical and program offers the importance of the preservation and introduction of the rural lifestyle would be noticed. The vast majority of the asked accommodations are without certification, only two of the hosts plans to improve the comfort level and entering the sunflower certification system. The certification of accommodation in a long run is one criterion of a quality hospitality which is advised to the other hosts as well. Rural tourism is starting to connect with the agricultural activities done at home which helps the formation of the classical form of accommodation. The co-existence of meals and programs is still bare, although rural tourism is only complete with accommodation, meals and programs which would be helped by the serving of agricultural products and the guests involving into traditional, agricultural work. The rural guest table service could motivate small producers and rural hosts dealing with agriculture to produce agricultural goods with traditional methods typical to their district which they can sell directly to their guests. Based on the local specialties, the contemporary, traditional agricultural methods, contemporary trades can be reproduced, which are presented during local or cross-town programs for the visiting guests. All of these force citizens to cooperate, helps the formation of their identity during which they can rediscover the values of their district. Seasonal fluctuation means the problem for hosts. The biggest traffic is in the month at the end of spring and in summer since this few months are the most ideal for hosting guests from an environmental point of view. The most relevant programs of the district are organized at this time which waits for

the guests with a variety of programs in every year. The lack of information about the events can be a blocker of the growing of the guest's number so a special attention should be paid to the development of information flow so more and more people could get information about the opportunities and programs. During some events, the number of guests decreased hence they could provide less programs to visitors. Hosts with displaying their own flyers in local-, regional- and national publications and with creating separate flyers for their internal and foreign guests can solve this problem.

With the multi-day events, putting traditions to the first place and with the tasting of local foods and the introduction of Hungarian specialties, the appeal of the district could be increased. It would be expedient to organize constant programs and events with a tradition-keeping nature. With organizing family celebrations, such as weddings, birthdays, name days, wedding anniversaries or balls the number of guest night could be increased. Besides medical tourism, the capability of natural resources could be used in a greater volume, for example by visiting the Csere Forest or the Bihar Arboretum within the frame of a tourist program or by visiting the rich animal population, for example the bustard and buffalo reservation. We advise the formation of tourist program packages, which assumes the co-operation of the district's touristic members, small and medium entrepreneurs and farmers, moreover the co-operation between private accommodations could help in the strengthening of the activity if they start to promote each other's services to their guests. An example for these program packages are the following: craft and creating camps (leather working - weaving- embroidery-, wood carving-, hurdling-, straw-bottoming-glazing-, pottery- and whip making, fishing, hunting, forest school.

In this way, rural tourism can have a great role in the preservation of the district's folk traditions and customs and in the maintenance of the rural lifestyle. The fact that the rural lifestyle and knowledge which went from father to son, mother to daughter is a huge treasure to the next generation and the district's citizens and especially the older generation should be aware of that; and it's preservation and passing onto the youth is one of our relevant tasks.

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