THE POTENTIAL OF TOURISM IN THE NEAMȚ COUNTY

Gabriela Dârloman*

Key words: sustainable tourism, ecotourism, agrotourism, management of tourism, natural potential, „Creangă Land”, monasteries, protected areas, local community

Summary: The Neamț county has a diverse natural and anthropic potential in order to implement a sustainable tourism in the present time. The main area for tourism is concentrated in the north-east part, where the main attractions are the Ceahlău Massif, the Bicaz Cliffs and the Red Lake, plus the Bistrița Valley and monasteries like Neamț, Agapia or Vâratec. The impact of tourism in this area also explains a higher environmental degradation.

Though in 2005, the north-east part concentrated 337 hotels, motels, cabins or agro-touristic pensions, the number of tourists has decreased to 553,3 in 2005 comparing to 1558,7 tourists in 1990. One explanation can be the lack of tourism services compatible to the international standards. In order to revitalize the tourism in the Neamț County, the local authorities have initiated “A Plan of Marketing for the Development of Tourism” in 2004. Being helped by USAID and Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), there have been fulfilled 2 projects: "Tourism – An Opportunity for the Economical Development of the Neamț County" and „Creangă Land”. The local authorities have underlined the importance of revitalisation of summer and winter tourism (creating 3 new skiing slopes and a ski-lift which connects Mount Cozla to Mount Pietricica in Piatra-Neamț or creating a modern skiing slope at Durău resort). Another attention should be paid to the development of rural tourism in the mountain area (such as the Ceahlău Massif) or in the area with monasteries, because this form of tourism can increase the budget of the Neamț county.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, tourism has become one of the biggest industries in the world, keeping on developing very rapidly and having more than 500 billion dollars profit. Many specialists in the industry of tourism consider that an healthy and attractive environment is essential for long term survival of their commerce. This opinion about tourism has been recognized since 1982 by World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). Today, more and more tourists are looking for holidays which don’t destroy the environment and don’t offense the local culture. While tourism can have a positive influence in the socio-economical development and environmental protection, a non-controlled increase of tourism can lead to environmental degradation, to fragile ecosystem destruction, to social and cultural conflicts.

TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Tourism and environmental conservation can be often compatible and can have reciprocal advantages, but only if tourism is developed in a sustainable way in the respective spaces.

“Sustainable Development” concept has become important due to its potential for biodiversity protection, but also due to the fact that tourism brings economic benefits to low developed countries and to the rural spaces.

At the World Summit for Environment held at Johannesburg in 2002, World Tourism Organisation along with UNCTAD have underlined the role of touristic industry for the socio-economical revival of the poor countries, being launched “Sustainable Tourism-Elimination of Poverty” Program.

* High School of Commerce „Nicolae Kretzulescu”, București
In achieving a sustainable global society, tourism takes an important place. Indeed, the most famous touristic companies use terms like “Ecotourism” or “Moderate Tourism” (Bran Florina et colab., 2000). But nobody can appreciate yet which term suits to the nowadays evolution of world tourism.

The definition unanimously accepted for the Sustainable Tourism is “all the forms of touristic development, management and touristic activities which maintain the ecological, social and economical integrity and also the balance between natural and cultural resources” (Neaşcu, 2000).

Today, there is a significant potential in order to implement a sustainable touristical infrastructure:

a) Without an instrument of evaluation, there is a lack of making the difference between the touristic facilities and the development strategies of the touristic industry. Using an efficient instrument for evaluation means to use the comparative evaluation of the impact studies accordingly to the marketing policy and the management of resources (Swiezewski, 1980).

b) An important role have national governments. These should implicate protected areas’ administrators and tourism industry in the development and implementation of sustainable tourism plans. These plans should be integrated in the national strategies for sustainable development and should be included in the individual plans for the management of the protected areas.

The measures for protected areas includes: the change of non-sustainable existence in more sustainable forms; sustainable standards for the new developments, especially in the very sensitive environments; reduction of pollution; avoiding long-term and intensive tourism in the protected areas; benefits for local communities; protected areas managers trained for implementation of sustainable tourism.

2. PERSPECTIVES FOR A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE NEAMȚ COUNTY

The Neamţ county has perspectives for a sustainable tourism due to both its natural potential and anthropic potential.

The Neamţ county is situated in the North-East of Romania and partially covers the Eastern Carpathians, The Moldovian Subcarpathians and the Moldavian Tableland (Acrășmăriței et colab., 1971).

The major relief is disposed in altitudes that decrease from West to East – 1907m at Ocolașu Mare in the Ceahlău Massif and 180m in the Siret Valley (Fig.1).

The mountains constitute the major relief (51% in the surface of the Neamţ county). The Subcarpathians -situated at the East of the mountain area-are represented by the Neamţ Depression, the Cracău-Bistrița Depression and a part of the Tazlău Depression. The tableland can be very distinctly seen at the East of the Subcarpathians.

The main river is Bistriţa, having 118 km length in the Neamţ county, followed by the Moldova river, the Cracău, the Ozana and the Siret river.

Most lakes are artificial, being used for complex purposes (hydroenergy, reduction of floods, irrigation, fishing, water reservoirs, entertainment). The Izvoru Muntelui Lake is the most important (3120 ha surface and around 1230 million mc volume).

The harmony of relief and natural resources of this space give the shape of its economic profile. The energetic potential of rivers, the large areas with forests, pastures, the wealth and diversity of rocks in the mountain area, the agricultural fields in the East part constitute important sources which have contributed to an harmonious economic development.
Fig.1. Physical-geographic Map of the Neamţ County

The diversity of touristic potential explains the variety of touristic activities, with a larger concentration in the North-East part where the human pressure over the environment is more intensive.

Among the restrictive factors in the development of tourism in the Neamţ county there are:
- the geology- the sedimentary rocks (the flisch) which under the influence of the big quantities of precipitations can be affected by landslides;
- the dangerous meteorological phenomena: inversion of temperature, frost, water exceed;
- the water, air and soil resources affected by pollution, especially in the areas of Bicaz and Piatra-Neamţ towns.

There also are a series of pressure-factors which can reduce the intensity of the touristic activities such as:
- the concentration of tourism in the North-East part of the county;
- the lack of a good road infrastructure;
- the lack of experience in sustainable tourism of the local factors;
- a small budget allocated to the sustainable tourism initiatives;
- the lack of a sustained legislation;
- the quality of life

Accordingly to the sources offered by ANTREC, the Structures of touristic accommodation at July 31st, 2005 in the North-East part of the Neamţ county was:

Tabel 1: Structures of touristic accommodation in the North-East of the Neamţ county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>337</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and motels</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touristic inns</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touristic cabans</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country residence/cottage</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student camp</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touristic pensions</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural pensions</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostels</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touristic halting places</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomodation on the ships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking into account these, the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism concept in the Neamț county has imposed the change of this economic activity. Thus, the local authorities have initiated “A Plan of Marketing for Tourism Development” since 2004.

Of course, the local budget was not enough in order to revival some touristic units with big potential, that is why the local authorities have started a project for local redevelopment of tourism in partnership with GRASP Agency. This project provides assistance for 5 years, being assisted by USAID and implemented by Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI).

The aim of GRASP is to encourage and support efficient and sustainable partnerships among local authorities and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) which are meant to contribute to the improvement of life quality at the level of local communities in Romania. GRASP offers the premises so that the experience and the institutional capacity necessary in the development of local public authorities and CSOs be also offered after the end of this kind of programs.

GRASP implicates in the sustain of legislative reforms at national level, being a form of support for reforms. As a conclusion, the revival of tourism can be done through decentralised actions, offering to the small entrepreneurs the possibility to deliver a sustainable tourism at European standards.

3. THE TOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF THE NEAMȚ COUNTY

Analyzing the touristic potential of the Neamț county, one can notice the diversity of the natural touristic resources and the anthropic touristic resources as well (Fig. 2). The touristic resources offered by the Neamț county can be observed in the following map:

Fig. 2. Harta turistică a județului Neamț (după ANTREC, 2005)

a. Natural potential is represented by:
   a.1 the relief: The Ceahlău Massif (Fig. 3), The Bicaz Cliffs (Fig. 4), The Șugău Cliffs (Fig. 5)
a.2 the waters: The Bistrița Valley (where it has been restarted the nautical tourism), The Izvorul Muntelui Lake (Fig. 6), The Red Lake (Fig. 7), The Crucii Lake.
a.3 climatic touristic potential: Durău (with a 400 m length skiing slope) (Fig. 7)

Fig. 8: Durău Resort

Fig. 9: Bisericani Sanatorium

a.4 the natural protected areas: the Ceahlău Massif, The Natural Park from Vânători-Neamț (which protects 12 „zimbri” - a specia of oxen, and also stags, deer and bears) (Fig. 10, 11)

Fig. 10: „Zimbri” at Vânători-Neamț

Fig. 11: Stags at Vânători-Neamț

b)Anthropic potential offers:

b.1 customs, traditions: on August 6-th – „The Ceahlău Massif Day” and rural tourism (in 94 pensions, according to the information offered by ANTREC Neamț)

THE LIST OF RURAL PENSIONS IN THE NEAMȚ COUNTY

Agapia (11); Alexandru Cel Bun (6); Balșătești (5); Bicaz (9); Bicazu Ardelean (1); Borca (1); Ceahlău (4); Cordun (1); Dulcești (1); Dunbrava Roșie (1); Durău (15); Fărcașa (2); Gârcina (1); Girov (1); Hangu (1); Negulești (1); Oglinzi (1); Piatra Neamț (11); Pipirig (1); Roman (1); Ștefan Cel Mare (1); Tarcău (3); Târgu Neamț (10); Tâlău (1); Tupilați (1); Vaduri (1); Vâratec (1)

Source: ANTREC Neamț, 2005

b.2 settlements with touristic importance: - Piatra Neamț (Bârca Doamnei – Fig. 12, The Tower of Stephen) (Fig. 13), The Neamț Fortress (Fig. 14), The Anuța Inn, The Palace of Cneji people in Ceahlău
- monasteries: Bistrița (Fig.15), Neamț (Fig.16), Vânători, Agapia, Sihastria (Băcănuț et Iacob, 1995) and The Church of Stephen the Great in Piatra Neamț (Ichim, 1974).

*b.3 institution for culture (museums, memorial houses):* The Museum of History, The Museum of Ethnography, The Museum of Natural Science in Piatra Neamț, Memorial Houses: Ion Creangă (at Humulești) (Fig. 17), Mihail Sadoveanu (at Nemțișor), Calistru Hogaș (at Piatra Neamț).

Fig. 14: The Neamț Fortress

Fig. 15: The Neamț Monastery

Fig. 16: The Agapia Monastery

Fig. 17: The Memorial House of Ion Creangă in Humulești

This diverse touristic potential mostly concentrated in the North-East of the Neamț county explains the bigger number of the accommodations and the intensity of the touristic activity in this area. Despite these, there is still one more problem – the low capacity of
accomodations according to the great number of tourists. That maybe an explanation for the low number of tourists in 2005 comparing to 1990 (Tabel 2).

Tabel 2: The Capacity and the Touristic Activity in the North-East of the Neamţ County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Capacity of Accomodation existing 1) (places)</th>
<th>In function (thousand places-days)</th>
<th>Incoming (mii)</th>
<th>Overnight Accomodations (thousand)</th>
<th>Indicators of net use of „in function - capacity” (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>24986</td>
<td>6233,9</td>
<td>1558,7</td>
<td>3824,5</td>
<td>61,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>20250</td>
<td>5265,3</td>
<td>820,0</td>
<td>1987,3</td>
<td>37,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>17745</td>
<td>4624,1</td>
<td>543,0</td>
<td>1467,8</td>
<td>31,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>17965</td>
<td>4963,5</td>
<td>553,3</td>
<td>1450,5</td>
<td>29,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ANTR CEC Neamţ, 2005

4. PROJECTS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE NEAMŢ COUNTY

Within the initiative of GRASP Agency, there have been fulfilled 2 projects of sustainable development of tourism in the Neamţ county.

I "Tourism – An Opportunity for the Economical Development of the Neamţ County” (TORENT) – The Foundation for Local Initiative ”Petrodava”, with a budget of $40,667. The main targets were: the increase of local income for tourism service, mainly using activities which lead to the diversification and increase of numbers of suppliers of new touristic services and the increase of number of tourists

II ”Creangă Land” - ”Nemţeanca” Association , with a budget of $27,740. The main targets were: maintaining the cultural identity and the revaluation of touristic attractions existing in the area of Târgu Neamţ (Fig. 18).

CONCLUSIONS

The Neamţ county has a favorable touristic potential in order to develop a sustainable tourism. Though there can be revaluated both the natural potential and the anthropic potential of tourism in the Neamţ county, some improvements are necessary:

- the increase of spaces for accommodation and the improvement of these spaces according to the international standards;
- the decentralization of touristic activities and the increase of local initiatives contributing thus to the profit of national income and improvement of life quality in the Neamţ county;
- the development of tourism for winter sports (especially at Piatra Neamţ and Durău), of cultural tourism (near the monasteries area and „Creangă Land”) and of rural tourism;
- increase of international collaboration in order to obtain new finances for new projects in tourism, but also for improvement and share of experience.

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