HARNESSING THE AGROTOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF THE DANUBE DELTA

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Abstract

The present paper highlights aspects upon the stage reached by some possible trends of development of tourism in the Danube Delta, established in different studies and researches, as well as suggestions in successfully reaching them in order to eliminate dysfunction. Agrotourism, as an economic activity has gained its recognition and importance in the national economy because of the social role it plays due to the natural resources potential and also to the species biodiversity that are to be found in our country’s waters. In some isolated areas, such as the Danube Delta and the Danube Plain, fishing and agrotourism are the main activities that provide jobs and income sources for local populations.

Keywords: agrotourism, Danube Delta, region development, aquaculture farm, rural economy

I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the tourism market size and forecast its development as an economic activity. Diversification of economic activities in rural areas can be considered an appropriate option or partial global level and conditions in rural areas, which requires knowledge of the area development stage, structure and capacity agrotourism market. Economic crises in rural areas in the current stage, the concept of diversification by launching new dimension of economic activity, is also a means of economic and social transformation.

In Australia there has been particular conflict and defining the value of environmental amenities remains a difficult and largely subjective issue. Recreational and environmental uses of Australia’s coastal zone are part of the national culture and their amenity values can be correspondingly high (Holland & Brown 1998).

International evidence is documented in Turkey where tourism is generally associated with hotels and second home areas. To be successful these require surroundings that are aesthetically pleasing and peaceful. Conflicts with aquaculture are often associated with the infrastructure that is located close to tourism areas (Deniz, 2001).

There is an international trend for increasing nature based tourism which can include fish farm integration with recreational activities or farm tours with possible product tasting (Aquamedia, 2002).

For Romania the ’70s mean the beginning of the rural tourism (Glavan, 2003), through promoting the tourist programme „Wedding in the Carpathians” by ONT Carpati- Bucharest (in the villages Bogdan Vodă - Maramureş county; Sibiel – in the etnofolcloric area Mărginimea Sibiului
and Lereşti - Argeş county) followed by the legal experimental declaration of 13 places as „tourist villages”. This type of tourism remains in an incipient stage, unlike the situation in the politically stable countries, strongly urbanized and industrialized. Here, since the 70s the changes generated by the economic restructuring and the farms’ crisis have limited the options of economic development of the rural areas making less viable the older development strategies and forcing many people to look for untraditional methods to survive (Wilson, Fesenmaier, et al, 2001). One of the most popular untraditional strategy of development was the tourism and the additional entreprenueing opportunities, because of its ability to bring income, of generating jobs and of supporting the economic development.

It is admitted that our historical past is mostly peasant and that „the village that identifies itself with the peasantry does not belong to the peasants because their number has reduced by half” (Bulgaru, 1996) and that rural tourism will make it even smaller.

Although the enforcement of the present principles of the development of a stable tourism in natural areas has led to the appearance of ecotourism as a distinct form of tourism, meant to respect the integrity of natural landscapes, of the ecological biodiversity, in accordance with the requirements of some categories of tourists, who want to spend their holiday in nature, this can be also viewed as a part of rural tourism.

II. Methods

Key sitting criteria for agrotourism developers were found to be primarily influenced by economic considerations, including infrastructure and availability of skilled/motivated staff. In addition to economic considerations, social and environmental criteria were also developed and summarized below:

- Infrastructure and costs
- Physical environment
- Biological environment
- Socio-economic
- Impacts on environment and other users/interests

Starting from these, a series of aspects made us to focus our attention on the stage of some of the directions of possible development, even though the plan completed in the first part of the year 2009, such as:

- The Danube Delta is considered one of the tourist destination of Romania, according to the classification of the tourist destinations at national level in the data basis of the National Institute of Statistics (statistici.insse.ro), under the name of The Danube Delta, including Tulcea.
- The Danube Delta is framed in „The National Strategy of the development of ecotourism from Romania” (www.mdrl.ro) as one of the main eco-destinations from Romania, namely The Biosphere Reserve Danube Delta and Dobrogea;
- The Danube Delta is the only tourist destination of Romania which is framed, except Tulcea, in the wholeness of a protected natural area, namely The Nature Reserve of the Biosphere Danube Delta (considering the term tourist destination according to INSSB);
- The Biosphere Reserve Danube Delta was legally conceived right from the foundation to constitute also a model of development of human communities in harmony with the natural environment, taking into account the presence of human settings within the reserve; (www.ddbra.ro)
- The Danube Delta has a unique value through the existence of the natural patrimony;
- The Danube Delta, under the effect of the meaning of reserve of the biosphere, seems to be one of the tourist destinations with many projects and developing programs, some achieved through sources ensured by The European Bank Of Investment and the Government of Romania or with funds coming from external programs such as PHARE and SAPARD, others in feasibility stage or developing, and through which a series of works and actions of socio-economic importance are
running for towns on the territory RBDD, with the participation of Local Councils, of different economic agents specialized in works regarding especially the technical infrastructure.

The richer peasants and their children returned to their homelands have copied the western model and have managed to transform their households into little businesses, trying to survive through agrotourism. Looking for solutions to access the European funds, they have permanently faced the severe standards of the European agricultural model, very different from the communitary way of life of the Romanian village. Even the drawback created through the Law of the Land Fund (no.18/February) from 1991, when the Romanian peasants were given „The Title Deed” and at the same time, the parceling of the owner’s lands has given a different sense to agrotourism unlike in the western countries.

The rural society as well as the Romanian rural economy could remain traditional only on resizing circumstances at rates comparable to the average EU27, of adjusting to the modern type of organic ecologic agriculture and of making it profitable (Nistoreanu&Ghereş, 2010, p.42). The agritourism will gain due to the fact that agriculture is supported in its development as a result of the Common Agricultural Politics.

Where the local people have become shareholders and owners of agrotourist hostels these are an alternative for the decrease in the agricultural incomes and and of those from fishing and pisciculture, providing the visitors a natural and rural experience, and for increasing the monthly average income per household as a result of agrotourism; there are little farms within the Delta with a mixt profile, belonging to the owners of agricultural lands. These also involve feminine work force alongside with the masculine one. Many specialized studies have shown that woman’s work is essential for the survival of the agricultural households, a domain traditionally led/run by women, focused on promoting the values of the local culture and the environment protection.

The cultural patrimony of the space has a historic and dynamic load which is within the importance of the Danube and its mouths in the international trade traffic as an area of meeting for the interests of the great world powers in the last centuries (of the installation of The European Commission of the Danube in the middle of the XIXth century and the founding and development of the present town Sulina, of the geographical location of the ports within the Romanian Principalities, today Galati and Braila, near The Black Sea as links in the merchandise traffic and their Porto Franco status, the existence of consulates, etc) and secondly of the presence of a multitude of ethnic groups (Turkish, Greek, Russian, Ukrainian) and of their religious status, just as a result of the position and functioning of the space analyzed as an entrance gate to the east within the European continent, as a transit and refuge place in the south–western end of Russia.

The rural inhabitants of Dobrogea area, in terms of density can determine that the following types of villages:

- Small and very small villages with density below 100 inhabitants, mainly in Dobrudja element and having a more limited potential habitat and can not meet the minimum economic requirements offer fish;
- Medium-sized villages with 500-1,000 inhabitants and widespread especially in the plateau. These villages by measures of consolidation and modernization can become economic centers capable of developing fisheries;
- Large and very large villages (2,000-4,000 population) located mainly along the Danube and in the plain between Tulcea rail Medgidia Razim lake complex, Black Sea and Carasu Valley.

On the whole, one can notice an increase in the total of tourists’ arrivals in the last decade, being significant the annual increases (see Fig.1) generated by the contribution of the insert of the tourist flows outside the country especially after 2006, and when Romania becomes member of EU, even holds a privileged position from all the tourist destinations (the second place after „Bucharest and towns-county residences, except Tulcea” at foreign tourists’ arrivals; for example in the year 2011 the number of foreign tourists was almost 40% of the number of the Romanian tourists and a little above a quarter of the total number of tourists. About 95% of the foreign tourists are involved in organised tourism on tracks established yearly and a small percentage of Romanian tourists are involved in the unorganized tourism, individuallly which is still practised with licence in places well
established by The Administration of The Biosphere Reserve of Danube Delta (ARBDD) (Gastescu & Stiuca, 2008).

Functionally speaking, the ecotourism on the outlet market mainly unfolds individually or at a low scale (groups of 25 tourists and hotels with less than 100 beds) and is achieved through small and medium tour operators in natural areas; it has an educational component and specialized local guides are used (Epler Wood, 2002).

The Danube Delta has reached a more advanced level of the tourist activity after a long period of time, even troubled by failures, thanks to many attempts at different level, individual or collective, with public or private responsibility, focused on the tourist activity and tourists. The criterion of durable development of the natural resources has permanently been followed having as permanent strategic objectives connected with the preservation and efficient usage of the renewable resources (water, vegetation and fauna). It is essential to mention the first legal actions, when 13 tourist villages are experimentally stated through The Order of the Ministry of Tourism no. 744/16 July 1973, among which also Mahmudia and Murighiol from The Danube Delta, and this shortly after Romania (the ’70s) „signs” for the beginning of the rural tourism through promoting a tourist program by O.N.T. Carpaţi – Bucharest (Glăvan, 2003).

From the analysis of the quantification of some series of statistic data on the receiving/welcoming units functioning as accommodation units (types, capacity, degree of comfort) starting with 1994, including the ones reproduced in Fig.2, connected with the situation on the field, as it has been perceived by us, results a situation influenced by motivations coming from the inside (which are up to communities), and also from the outside (here also including the tourists’ preferences).

The selection and shuttering have gradually been ensured for almost 20 years, situation which we believe to get head in perspective, bringing the accommodation structure to the standards imposed,
through the application of the recommendations from 2003 by the World Organisation of Tourism to the National Tourist authorities in order to support the implementation of a certification in order to achieve a durable tourism to satisfy the national peculiarity, but to be based on the one that is valid internationally; a system of certification in ecotourism (Talaba, Talpas et al, 2008) was not established in 2008, although there were already systems of certification in this domain some general and global, others local and specialized.

There is variety in the network of tourist accommodation units (see Fig. 2). It is made of the majority of types of units existing in Romania, according to the legislation in force, as effect of a game in keeping some in spite of the possible fluctuations in number, capacity and comfort, and others’ inclusion or exclusion, lately coming into prominence the agrotourist hostels, tourist hostels and tourist villas – as the tourists’ favourites.

For example, unlike the tourist hostels, the agrotourist ones are registerd after 1999, moment which coincides with the measures taken at a legal level regarding the development of the Romanian tourism, the revival of the Romanian village through the rural tourism; in the data series of the National Institute of Statistics the urban hostels have recently redefined in tourist hostels, and agrotourist hostels comprise the rural and agrotourist hostel, a consequence of reviewing the typology of accommodation units, in accordance with The Minister’s Order no. 636/2008.

The increase of requirements, of attractiveness towards this type of accommodation units is given by the fact that the inventive entrepreneurs have built hostels in chime with the local environment, using local materials and domestic design, allowing the tourists to stay in a relatively high comfort enjoying the opportunities to see even the magnificent fauna „from their doorway”.

The entrepreneurs are supported by The National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC), a marketing consortium of the rural accommodation, through the involvement in promoting 92 hostels from those 126 existing in the county Tulcea (www.cazarelapensiune.ro).

The fact that the period 2003-2009 indicates values a little higher of the net usage of the capacity of accommodation in service in comparison with the rest of the analysed period (see Fig. 2), although this is extremely low under 30%, means a slight revival of the situation (insignifican but existent), with a maximum in 2008, reflected in the average duration of stay. Fot the time being, the stay period remains around 2 days, an obvious aspect even from the graphic attached, the total number of nights generally being twice as much as the total of arrivals (see Fig. 1).

There are increased chances to satisfy the motivations of different groups of potential Romanian or foreign tourists (youngsters, elderly couples, high-street tourists, very experimented and adventurous tourists, etc) interested in natural landscapes, entertainment, circuits, sports, history/cultural patrimony, local characteristics and cuisine, scenery and rural environment, city-break holidays to influence the quality of tourist offer and its diversification, as it is shown in the „Strategic Plan for developing a durable tourism in The Danube Delta”.


Tab. 1 Domestic travel for vacations, business and religious pilgrimage (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of the trip</th>
<th>Vacations and business</th>
<th>Religious pilgrimage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 3 overnights</td>
<td>15,083</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Processing the information according to the National Institute of Statistics - Data Basis TEMPO - TUR104C, TUR105C (accessed on October 23rd 2012)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overnights</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 – 7</td>
<td>20,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – 14</td>
<td>4,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 28</td>
<td>3,552</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The organizer of the trip**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On your own</td>
<td>42,485</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>588</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The main mode of transport used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Train</td>
<td>12,211</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>5,512</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own cars</td>
<td>15,803</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9,547</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The main way of accommodation used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and similar establishments</td>
<td>11,219</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campings</td>
<td>7,718</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rented housing, relatives, friends</td>
<td>5,869</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents, grandparents, relatives, friends</td>
<td>14,749</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other accommodation types</td>
<td>3,518</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>43,413</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL OVERNIGHTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>250,177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: I.N.S. (March 2011), Demand touristic the residents of the Romania in 2010.*

**III. Conclusions**

Even though the rural development will be one of the most difficult tests in the integration of Romania in the economic and social structures of the European Union and the rural tourism will fully benefit, the Romanian village must remain the clear expression of stability and Romanian continuity in the Carpathian – Danubian and Pontic space, which gradually gathered a stock of exceptional cultural values beneficial to the Romanian farmer, the rightful beneficiary of creations, goods. Thus, through the atested tourist value it can become a „tourist product” of high originality and a brand for the Romanian rural tourism.

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