

Aspects regarding Rural Tourism and its Perspectives in the North-East Region of Romania

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Abstract

In this paper, we intend to observe the aspects related to rural tourism in North-East region of Romania. We focus on the identification of areas with tourism potential and on the highlighting of the importance of rural tourism. The analysis of the current situation of the rural tourism in the region continues with the presentation of some opportunities of exploiting its potential. The problems that this form of tourism faces with, such as insufficient capital and human resources training, can find a solution through a more intense involvement of the authorities, respectively, a greater number of initiatives, such as the assistance in accessing EU funds. Also, we try to propose some measures and ways to improve the tourist activity in the North-East region, considering the specific situation of our country, but also taking into account other EU experiences.

Key words: rural tourism, agritourism, North-East region, rurality, E.U. Funds

JEL Classification: L83, O14

Introduction

Tourism is one of the industries that has experienced a great development in recent decades, in most countries of the world. One of the forms of tourism that keeps expanding, thanks to a growing demand, is rural tourism. This is due to a growing preference for individualized holidays in a quieter and less polluted environment, far away from urban agglomerations. The initiation and development of tourist activities have a positive impact on rural areas, offering the possibility of improving the living standards, given that, in some areas, other economic activities cannot be carried out. We intend to highlight the tourist activity in the North-East region, to identify the areas with potential and to propose some solutions to the problems that tourism sector encounters in this area.

East-European Tourist Context

In Romania and in former communist countries of Eastern Europe, domestic tourism has recorded declines since 1990, mainly due to the rising prices and the population's lower purchasing power, and therefore, leading to reduced incomes in this sector. The number of tourists from Central and Eastern Europe, which until 1990 were the main foreign visitors, has

also decreased. In this context, in terms of tourism, those regions, for which resident and East-European tourists were the largest share of the market, were consequently affected.

Most of the spa and tourist capacities were privatized, some of them changing their profile, while others were abandoned. There is a trend of an increasing share of the EU countries in the number of tourists, especially after joining this community, as there is the case of some countries like Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia, which exploited this opportunity more than Romania. This increase in the number of tourists from EU could be more consistent in the future, if our country was more intensively promoted abroad. However, EU remains the most promising source of foreign tourists, both for Romania and other Eastern European countries. Any EU concessions, in terms of visas for Russian and Ukrainian citizens, could increase the number of tourists from those countries, fact that would be felt in Eastern EU countries due to their proximity to Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Given the fact that domestic tourism will not reach the level it had before 1990, due to population's low purchasing power, the chance of tourism in Eastern European countries is to attract foreign tourists, especially from EU. The adhesion to EU brings an increase in wages and prices, but the latter are still at a lower level compared to those from many countries of the community, and this will attract tourists and investments.

The increases of the tourist activity, since 2000, are due to the privatization of the tourist capacities and to the existing foreign investments. Some of the biggest shortcomings, that still persist, especially in Romania, are the poor quality and the limited range of services. Also, the number of accommodation units of small size and good quality is bigger, many of them run by families, which is a good thing, even if the number of accommodation places has increased more than that of tourists.

Tourist Potential in the North-East Region

We are aware that neither the territory of a country, nor the one of a region, is suitable for tourist activity alike. North-East is no exception, so that, not all component counties have the same tourist potential, and, therefore, the same importance as tourist destinations. In light of these ideas, we consider appropriate to identify those favorite for tourism areas of the North-East region, they differentiating themselves from others in terms of accommodation capacities and number of tourists.

In terms of accommodation capacity in the North-East region, it had a general upward trend after 2000. As the share of counties, it has changed over the past two decades. Therefore, there is now in Bacău county only 12.95% of the accommodation places of the region (from 28.18%, in 1990), and the shares of Botoșani and Vaslui are still very small, less than 5%. Suceava county holds the largest share of accommodation places, with 37.73% (from 27.38% in 1990), followed by Iași and Neamț, with 25.74, and, respectively, 15.82%¹.

The evolution of the number of tourist arrivals, at county level, as evidenced in Figure 1, shows that this indicator has stagnated for Vaslui and Botoșani, and has decreased in Bacău. The mentioned counties currently have, much lower values compared to the others. The highest number of tourist arrivals is the one afferent of the counties of Suceava (31.3% in 2010, from 25.03% in 1990), Iași (27.85% in 2010, from 13.7% in 1990) and Neamț (21.09% in 2010, from 22.1% in 1990)².

¹ Values obtained by processing the National Institute of Statistics (Romania) data (<https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>)

² *Ibidem*.

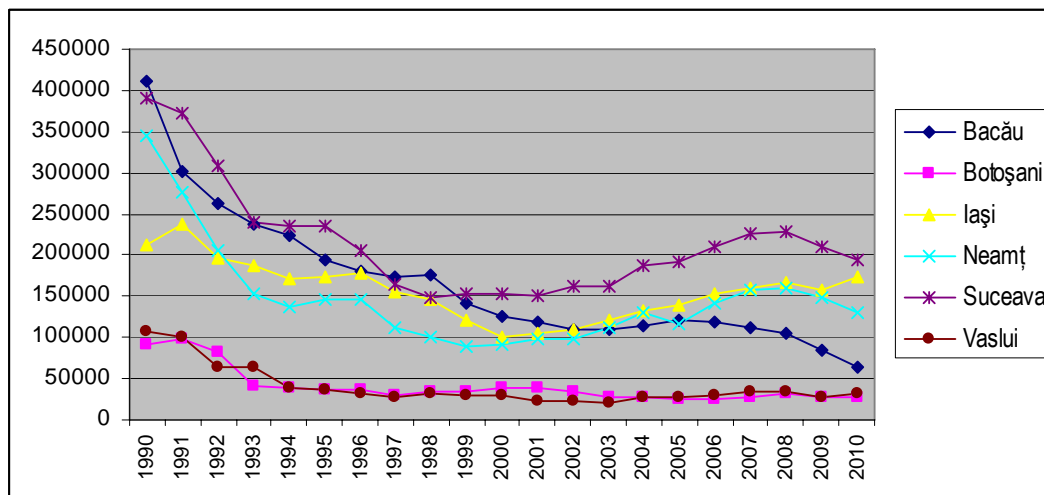


Fig. 1. The evolution of tourist arrivals in the North-East region counties, in the 1990-2010 period

Source: elaborated using data from National Institute of Statistics (Romania) (<https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>)

In terms of number of overnight stays, county level evolutions are similar to those of arrivals, stagnations being recorded for Botoșani and Vaslui, as well as decreases in the case of Bacău (Figure 2). Most overnight stays are recorded in Suceava (33.56% in 2010, from 27.46% in 1990), Iași (25.99% in 2010, from 14.37% in 1990) and Neamț (20.02% in 2010, from 17.02% in 1990)³.

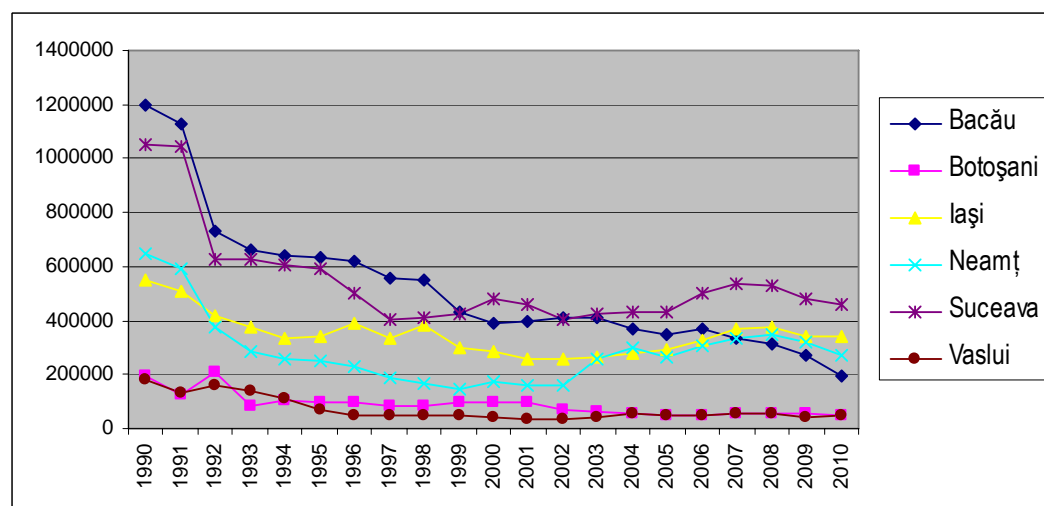


Fig. 2. The evolution of tourist overnight stays in the North-East region counties, in the 1990-2010 period

Source: elaborated using data from National Institute of Statistics (Romania) (<https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>)

Previously observed evolutions lead us to some conclusions, such as the fact that tourism activity of the North-East region is concentrated mainly (about three quarters) in three of its counties, with different weights. Thus, Suceava county includes approximately one third of the regional tourism activity, followed by Iași, with about a quarter, and by Neamț, with about 20%.

³ *Ibidem.*

These areas have great tourism potential, particularly the one known as Bukovina⁴ (which is part of Suceava county), but, for a more efficient capitalization, several measures are necessary, some of them being related to promotion.

For tourism to contribute substantially to the regional development process, some based strategies should be developed. Even if the private sector dominates the tourism industry, the state has the important role in guiding and organizing by strategy developing and related instruments finding. Given the complex nature of tourism, the implementation of its policy is influenced by other policies (economic, social, etc.).

In Romania, an important strategic document is the National Development Plan, to whose development, each region contributes with a Regional Development Plan. Then, by the Regional Operational Plan, priority fields, for which one can access EU funds, are determined (tourism being one of them).

We believe that the tourism industry in Romania lacked a policy to organize and to guide it. An ambitious project developed at central level, in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization (WTO), is the *National Tourism Master Plan of Romania from 2007 to 2026*, occurred at more than ten years from a previous one, whose measures were not implemented properly. The master plan is intended to be a “general framework of the policies for sustainable development and management of tourism industry in terms of natural and cultural resources”⁵. The Master Plan covers all essential aspects of tourism: the cooperation of central administration with local administrations and the initiatives of the latter, the human resource development, the local tourism planning, the link of the Plan with the Regional Development Agencies through the role they have in assisting to obtain European funding, the stimulating and attracting of investments and the tourist destinations marketing. The important thing that this plan brings, in addition to making a diagnosis of the tourism state and objectives formulating, is to establish specific actions, within each section, as well as to design an Action Plan, with terms and holders of measures to be implemented.

The Situation of North-East Region From the Rural Tourism Point of View and the Capitalization Possibilities of the Existing Potential

Even if, overall, the share of tourism in the economy is not great, there are areas, such as some rural ones, where tourism may have or gain a notable importance from the point of view of positive effects that it may cause. An efficient variant of development through tourism is the one in which this field is integrated in the economy, being present in an overall strategy. *Integrated tourism* is the tourism that represents a component of the regional economy, engaging some previously unused resources and creating connections with other economic sectors. In this way, additional income and jobs can be created, especially in the areas with a modest development, where other activities are not very efficient (e.g., agriculture), directly from tourism, or by products for tourism. It is also the case of rural households, where most of the incomes come from subsistence agriculture, supplemented by those from public administration, occasional employment or from funds sent by relatives working abroad. Therefore, development of tourism activities is motivated by increasing incomes and rising living standards. Economic and social development of rural areas, as a result of tourism activities is also reflected in many studies of international literature, which observe these changes⁶. Referring to Romania, according to the

⁴ It is about the southern part of Bukovina, its northern part being, presently, part of Ukraine, since 1944.

⁵ Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Turismului, *Master Planul pentru turismul național al României 2007 – 2026*, Bucharest, 2007

⁶ For example: G. Canoves et al., “Rural tourism in Spain: an analysis of recent evolution”, *Geoforum*, 35 (6), 2004, pp.755–769; A. Paniagua, “Urban–rural migration, tourism entrepreneurs and rural restructuring in Spain”, *Tourism Geographies*, 4 (4), 2002, pp.349–371; L. Petric, “Constraints and

data provided by an observation on successful manifestation of rural tourism⁷, the receipts brought by this represents between 25 and 50% of a household income, mostly during the summer, when at a price of 15-20 Euro per day in half board regime, tourists stayed an average of 3-4 nights. Additional activities, such as hiking, practicing sports or cultural visits, that often supplement the offer of accommodation and food, help to increase the stay period. Even if, as a rule, tourism activity decreases in autumn and winter, one tries to attract tourists by offering specific winter activities such as skiing and sleigh rides, so, the total number of tourists is increasing. The successful experiences of some entrepreneurs, the tourists' satisfaction, as well as the improving of their social status stimulate them for further work and further development, giving them self confidence. However, there is little cooperation between these businesses, joint initiatives, sometimes necessary for all of them (infrastructure, promotion), being quite rare.

In the North-East region, there is sufficient potential to underpin tourism development, based on the various types of tourism manifestation. It is, however, to mention that, mass tourism, which brings the most consistent income, is only suitable for mountain areas and resorts; although, in other areas, mass tourism is not operable due to the variety of types of tourism, activities in this field cause, however, beneficial effects in the respective communities.

Rural tourism is the form that we consider the most important for the North-East region. In some areas, such as Suceava county, the large share of rural population in total, could be an advantage, if it is to be considered in terms of tourism. In rural areas, traditional lifestyles have been preserved, often, sheltered by an excessive obsolescence⁸, but, however, modernization will undoubtedly take place, even due to some required standards. In such a context, the problem that occurs is how the rural tradition would be preserved, in the conditions of the modernization requirements, and which are its limits, in order not to affect this cultural component of rural areas⁹.

Rural tourism refers to holiday in the countryside and in holiday farms (agritourism). To develop this type of tourism it is necessary to exist well organized activities and a pleasant environment (rural roads, trails for hiking, walking and bike paths, inns, shops, evening entertainment options). In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, this form of tourism is seen as one with perspectives. Numerous initiatives in this segment are considered as opportunities for development of peripheral areas and for reducing disparities. Romania has considerable potential for rural tourism due to very good endowment from the natural and cultural point of view. Areas in the vicinity of tourist mountainous resorts and of culturally major towns are places where rural tourism is already growing. In the North-East region, this form of tourism has also begun to expand, evidenced by the increasing number of boarding houses and farmhouses, with 597.33%, and, respectively, with 623.19%, between 2000 and 2010¹⁰. The number of places in these types of accommodation recorded the largest increases, as can be seen in Figure 3.

possibilities of the rural tourism development with the special stress on the case of Croatia", *Ersa 2003 Congress*. University of Jyväskylä, Finland <http://ideas.repec.org/p/wiw/wiwrse/ersa03p105.html>; R.M. Yague, "Rural tourism in Spain", *Annals of Tourism Research* 29 (4), 2002, pp.1101–1110.

⁷ Monica Iorio, Andrea Corsale, "Rural tourism and livelihood strategies in Romania", *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26 (2010), p.158

⁸ Less than half of the rural areas inhabitants are connected to the water distribution system and canalization systems.

⁹ Doru Botezat, *O posibilă doctrină de dezvoltare regională a României. Regiunea Bucovina*, Teză de doctorat, Universitatea Al.I. Cuza, Iași, 2009, p.495

¹⁰ Values obtained by processing the National Institute of Statistics (Romania) data (<https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>)

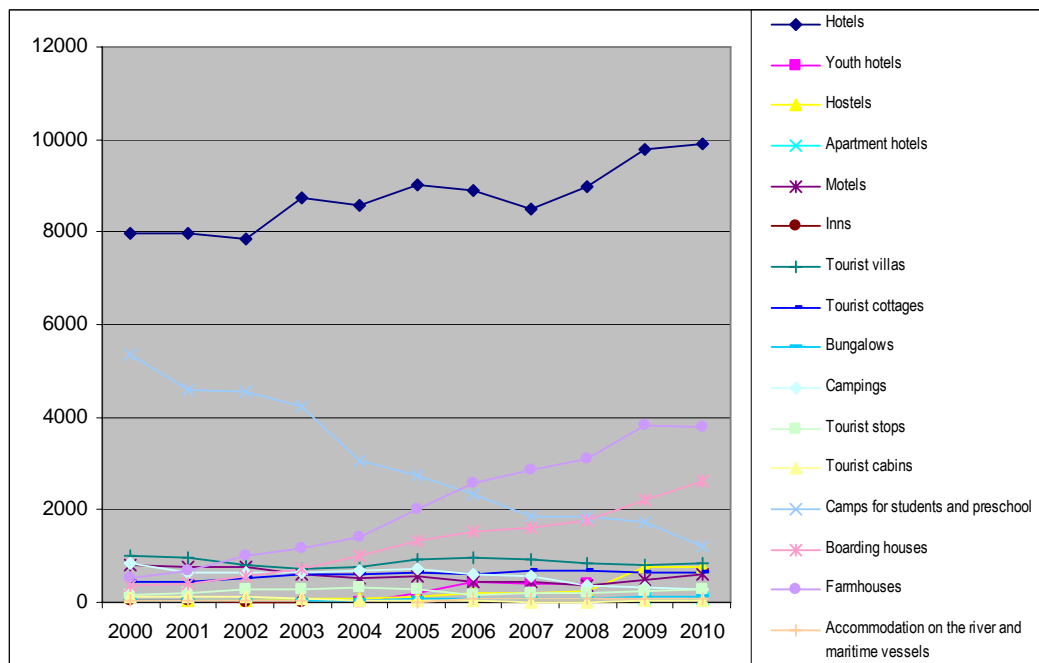


Fig. 3. The evolution of number of places in accommodation units, in the North-East region counties, in the 1990-2010 period

Source: elaborated using data from National Institute of Statistics (Romania) (<https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>)

From the total number of accommodation places, about half of them are in hotels, but, boarding houses and farmhouses reached a significant share of 30.17% in 2010 (from which boarding houses 12.29%, from 2.11% in 2000, and, respectively, farmhouses 17.88%, from 2.96% in 2000)¹¹. On component counties, as from data of 2010, most boarding houses are located in Suceava county (52.89%, increase of 486.02% compared to 2000), Neamț (17.78%, increase of 496.15% compared to 2000) and Iași (15.68%, increase of 5.025% compared to 2000). Most of farmhouses are in the counties of Suceava (46.14%, increase of 616.33% compared to 2000) and Neamț (43.09%, increase of 978.29% compared to 2000)¹².

In the North-East region, the weights of the number of accommodation places corresponding to hotels and guesthouses in total, are not the same in the case of tourist arrivals, so 65.45% of them opt for hotels, 8.73% for boarding houses and 11.82% for farmhouses¹³, which means a degree of use relatively low for pensions. This can be observed also at the country level, from the utilization index values by type of accommodation, hotels recording an average of 29.9%, inns 25.1%, and boarding houses and farmhouses, only, 14.6%, respectively, 12.6%¹⁴.

Agritourism is a form of tourism closely linked to rural areas, as activity place, by providing accommodation and related services by peasant households. It should be noted that it is not compatible with mass tourism, where productivity is everything, such an approach, leaving it without the substance that it gives consistency and potential (customs, traditions, etc.). A danger that may threaten the traditions and cultural values of rural inhabitants, consists of some structural changes imposed by the EU, in order to reach certain quality standards. Peasants

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

should be made aware to keep the cultural heritage, which has the ability to sell the tourism product.

Certain components of the tradition have authenticity only if, they are themselves part of this way of life, thing that it not happens if they are seen only as exhibits for tourists. Although E.U. applies a number of exceptions to preserve cultural values, the trend towards modernization will occur anyway, and the agro-tourism opportunity is rural tourism product offering, while maintaining a traditional lifestyle, rather than a luxury one afforded by the increasing material possibilities.

However, there is some hesitation in considering rural tourism as a miraculous solution for the improving of the living standards or for solving all the rural problems. A possible explanation would be the fact that, for the time being, the rural tourism mainly exists in the proximity of some points of interest, such as the old monuments. Although, nowadays, this form of tourism is continually encouraged by policies, for the rural tourism to become an essential factor of regional development, it is necessary to carry out a thorough analysis, which should include costs, effects, possible evolutions, as well as relations between local strategies and tourism. Also, the interaction of the rural tourism with the natural and cultural one are favorable to the local development, especially if it has an adequate marketing at the national and international levels.

Besides the rural tourism, this region is also suitable for practicing the health, leisure and relaxation, cultural and urban, research and thematic tourism.

There have been several projects financed by the European Regional Development Fund, such as *Christmas in Bukovina* and *Easter in Bukovina*, carried out by the County Council of Suceava, which had the purpose to capitalize and promote the winter and, respectively, the Easter traditions and customs in Bukovina area, aiming to reinforce its tourist attractions. Regarding the induced impact of the two projects, we can state, after analyzing the available data, that, even if the registered values of the number of tourists did not rise up to those predicted (compared to 2008, an increase of 15% in the number of tourists, for Christmas in Bukovina, and, respectively 5%, for Easter in Bukovina), we can still see a positive effect. By comparing the present data with the previous ones, if we refer to the number of arrivals, overnight stays and occupation index, we can say that the most visible effect was registered by the Christmas in Bukovina project, unlike the Easter in Bukovina project where the feedback was smaller (an increase of approximately 5% in the number of arrivals, and, respectively a decrease of the decline manifested as a consequence of the financial crisis). If we had to find the reasons why the results were not those anticipated, we could mention, first of all, the reduced possibility of the population to travel, caused by their precarious financial situation, in the context of the financial crisis. Other reasons, equally important, refer to: the illegal tourism, too high prices for low quality services.

It is advisable to keep investing in such promotion programs, which have, as a whole, the role to reinforce the Bukovina brand, in the consumer's mind. One step that may increase the future tourist activity aims to adjust the offer to the consumer's needs, as well as to include in these programs some promotional offers for holidays, such as: "pay accommodation for three nights and stay four".

Main Problems that Rural Tourism Faces with

One can say that, in Romania, the development of tourism was, in the last few years, uncoordinated and without a coherent and strategic vision. A coherent strategy should rely on the analysis of the current situation, the selection of the major aspects of development and the elaboration of some strategic objectives.

The slow progress of tourism is mainly due to the population's *low purchase power*, to the existence of an *increasing unemployment* and to the *too high prices compared to the quality of the services*. Also, a hindrance in the development of the private initiatives in tourism, especially in the case of the family companies in rural areas, is caused by the *lack of a professional training* and of an innovating spirit, which brings them limited possibilities of a future development despite their easy access on the market. In this context, a greater involvement of the authorities in *sustaining the private initiatives*, the initiation of some *training and technical assistance programs* would be very useful. Various national associations, such as ANTREC (the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism), which includes about two thirds of the total of 1000 accommodation units), and others, have a certain contribution in the promotion and in the initiation of some EU development programs (SAPARD, PHARE, ISPA). These organizations and the central authorities, as well, are not perceived by operators as making significant marketing campaigns.

Other shortcomings, which may sometimes appear in the rural tourism, refer to the *necessity of some resources for investments and marketing*, bigger than the financial possibilities of the entrepreneur or the consequent possible benefits. Thus, we consider that more people could initiate tourism activities, if they were financially encouraged under various forms (easier access to credits, reduced interests, lower taxes), and, if the state became more involved in sustaining the rural tourism. Also, it is perceived as necessary the development of a better cohesion between all the governmental levels in order to carry out some training and integrated territorial marketing programs¹⁵.

The main reasons for the weak tourism activity, in general, also highlighted within some representative studies¹⁶, are: *inadequate transport and communications infrastructure, inadequate effective systematic planning, insufficient collaboration between the local and national authorities*, leading to a fragmentary and rather unknown offer abroad. We also need to point out the *obligation to adjust to the EU requirements*, regarding agriculture, food production and hygiene, these rules proving to be too rigid and hard to apply, requiring further investments. On the other hand, along with the EU adhesion, the private initiatives in tourism will be more and more encouraged, thus contributing to the tourism development.

Measures for Solving the Problems of Rural Tourism

In order to develop tourism, it is necessary to systemize the development directions, the necessary measures and to establish the responsible people and the means.

In the case of some areas, tourism can become a basic component of the economy, capable of producing important changes in territorial profile, contributing thus to the social-economic development of some underdeveloped or with no other resources areas. The North-East region has an important potential for developing the mountain tourism or the cultural and religious tourism. Tourism registered increases after the EU adhesion, situation noticed in other Eastern European countries, too. In this way, we can predict a continuation of tourism development in the North-East region, too, even if the progress was small immediately after the adhesion. The opportunity which has to be exploited aims at attracting tourists from EU.

The intensification of the tourism activity in the North-East region may produce notable effects at regional level (or at least at some areas' level), such as: involving the unemployed population in tourism activities, stimulating some economic activities related to tourism, improving the living standards, especially in the rural areas, by increasing the income obtained from tourism, etc. The North-East area should *follow the example of other EU countries, regarding the*

¹⁵ Monica Iorio, Andrea Corsale, *op. cit.*, p.161

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p.154

stimulation of the little farmhouses. The authorities' involvement and the use of European Funds are important in this respect, as well as for the sustaining of the infrastructure development.

Taking into account the positive evolution of the rural tourism in the EU Eastern countries and the numerous similarities with Romania, in terms of potential and context, we consider that the *priorities* considered in this field by the Union, can be taken as directions to follow in our country, too:

- developing and diversifying the tourism product, according to the tourists' needs and an increasing of satisfaction of their necessities;
- promoting the main destinations (especially abroad), with the purpose of informing, building tourism brands (for instance, Bukovina) and acceding on new markets (especially in EU adhesion context);
- forming / Training the human resources, as a premise to the improvement of the quality of services;
- developing infrastructure;
- institutional support and assistance for the entrepreneurs, including the one for accessing the EU funds and loans.

Besides these directions mentioned above, inspired by the evolutions of the rural tourism in Eastern EU, there is also a set of measures leading to its future development, specific to the North-East region; these can be initiated by the central, local authorities and by the organisms in charge with the implementation of the regional development policy, and they refer to some aspects, such as:

- arranging and capitalizing the tourism resources;
- encouraging the private households for developing tourist activities;
- training at regional and local levels to form specialists in the field;
- assisting entrepreneurs for obtaining certificates of acknowledgement for their tourist units and for receiving licenses and professional certificates in the field;
- elaborating regional tourism products, based on the specific of that area;
- improving the quality of services;
- creating and distributing publicity and promotion materials;
- extending the regional tourism information points and creating new ones.

We need to mention, however, that the state of nature and villages will affect the future of tourism. That is why the plans associated to tourism management should not neglect the qualitative dimension in favor of the quantitative one, as an overcrowding of a destination can lead to the loss of its tourist attractiveness¹⁷.

Some Ways of Putting into Practice the Improvement Measures of Tourism Activity

In many EU member countries, the social-economic policies contain a regional tourism policy, too, which refers mainly to an efficient use of the tourism resources, by carrying out activities meant to increase the benefits of the region, taking care, in the same time, to avoid spreading the negative effects. Although less coherent, in Romania, the measures for stimulating the rural tourism include some tax reductions for the rural accommodation capacities¹⁸. It is necessary to stimulate the *investments in public infrastructure* and to improve the *entrepreneurial climate*.

¹⁷ German MAB National Committee, *Full of Life UNESCO Biosphere Reserves — Model Regions for Sustainable Development*, Springer, 2003, p.69

¹⁸ *Boarding houses and farmhouses*, with no more than 10 rooms and 30 beds, classified 1-4 daisies, the last ones offering also a part of the meals.

The instruments used can be both fiscal and non-fiscal, including: tax and social contribution reductions, access to loans and EU funds.

The approach at the regional level of the tourism activity can become a premise to a durable planning. More to the point, it is very important to *involve community* in the planning and development process, as well as in the development of those forms of tourism advantageous for the local people. By obtaining benefits as a result of tourism development, they will show a greater interest in sustaining the tourism development of a particular area, as well as in preserving the tourism resources. The assistance of the tourism entrepreneurs in accessing EU funds should be intensified, now that a low rate of absorption is registered.

In the North-East region, the number of pensions has increased significantly, which suggests that the rural tourism is an increasingly important form of tourism. Together with the local initiatives, *the involvement of the central level* is absolutely necessary, by elaborating the rural, regional and tourism development policies, as well as by including tourism in the strategic documents, with the purpose of receiving national and community financial support. The State can also get involved in big projects, including investments in tourism and promotion of tourism product.

If, in general in Romania, almost all the strategies and plans consider tourism a priority, these do not contain a thorough analysis of the necessary framework and resources. A step forward, yet, was taken when the *Master Plan for National Tourism of Romania in 2007-2026* was elaborated. Although there was some tourism increases, this has a long way to go until it reaches a satisfactory level of potential capitalization.

The local administrations should initiate actions in the line of the strategies and programs, by using their own resources and by attracting new ones for supporting tourism. A successful example is the *Christmas in Bukovina* and *Easter in Bukovina* projects, which promote local potential and strengthen the Bukovina brand in the consumer's mind.

The inhabitants of the rural area should understand that the existence of an *authentic and archaic rurality is an advantage, and that the preservation of the cultural heritage and the traditional way of living* is the premise to the sale of the rural tourism product. Without being or becoming a mass tourism, the rural tourism and agritourism can offer wellness to those involved in such activities, especially if they are promoted to foreign tourists. The development of the tourism product can take place by diversifying the entertainment activities (trips, sports activities, cultural visits).

The elaboration of the *offers* and the *promotion* process has to follow the essential *motivations* of the tourist's demands: nature, history, culture, tourist capacities and access ways. The attractiveness of an offer can increase when there are proposals of promotional discounts on special occasions (for instance on holidays). The possibility to combine different motivations can generate interactions between rural tourism and natural and cultural one, this intensifying the tourism activity, a beneficial thing for a particular region.

It is obvious that, neither in Romania, nor in the North-East region, the contribution of tourism to economy is not very high, but tourism can play an important role in some areas by means of its positive results concerning the occupational level, the obtained income, the involvement of some unused resources and by stimulating some related economic fields.

Conclusions

Rural tourism has experienced an upward trend in many European countries, due to a growing demand for this form of tourism. In the North-East region of Romania, rural tourism has also increased in those areas with tourism potential. Among the factors that hinder the development of rural tourism, the most important are: poor infrastructure, lack of capital and of human

resources' training. The solutions to these problems can come through the development and implementation of some measures taken by both local and central authorities, such as stimulation of private initiatives, assistance in accessing EU funds or facilitation of the access to credits. Our proposals for the improvement of tourism activity in the North-East region, take into account the specific situation of our country, but also consider other experiences from EU, and refer to a growing capitalization of its potential by preserving the cultural potential, the traditions and the authentic rurality, stimulating the initiation of tourist activities in rural areas, promoting the tourist destinations, training the human resources.

Even if, on the whole, both in Romania and North-East region, the share of tourism in economy is not great, there are areas, such as some rural ones, where tourism may have an increasing importance due to the positive results it can produce: higher incomes, lower unemployment, development of some related activities.

If in other countries, following the adhesion to the EU, the number of foreign tourists has increased significantly, in Romania, this did not happen due to the poor quality of services and insufficient promotion. Together with the improvement of these aspects, Romanian tourism is likely to record substantial progress, and rural tourism has a competitive advantage, through its authentic rurality, very appreciated by the Western Europe tourists.

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Aspecte privind turismul rural și perspectivele acestuia în regiunea Nord-Est a României

Rezumat

În acest articol ne propunem să observăm aspectele care au legătură cu turismul rural în regiunea Nord-Est a României. Avem în vedere identificarea zonelor cu potențial turistic și evidențierea importanței turismului rural. Analiza situației actuale a turismului rural în regiune se continuă cu trasarea unor posibilități de valorificare a potențialului existent. Problemele cu care această formă de turism se confruntă, cum ar fi insuficiența capitalului și a formării, își pot găsi rezolvarea printr-o mai intensă implicare a autorităților prin mai multe măsuri, ca de exemplu asistarea în accesarea de fonduri U.E. Totodată, încercăm să propunem și unele măsuri și modalități de îmbunătățire a activității turistice din regiunea Nord-Est, considerând specificul situației din țara noastră, dar luând în considerare și alte experiențe din U.E.