Heritage as an Alternative Driver for Sustainable Development and Economic Recovery in South East Europe

Tourism opportunities for valorising the authentic traditional rural space-study case: Ampoi and Mures Valleys microregion, Alba County, Romania

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Abstract

Click here and insert your abstract text. This article is presenting a local initiative in Romania, Alba County, representing an association consisting of one town and ten villages, which tries to valorise the microregion potential in the framework of Leader approach. Analyze conducted in this article is focused on the touristic activity seen as an opportunity of stimulating economic development that offers an alternative to the agricultural dependence of the community. Rural tourism is an opportunity for valorising the natural framework, cosy accommodation and personalized touristic experiences. Leader approach is offering limited support for rural area in order to encourage cultural activities, architecture rehabilitation, valorising natural landscape and rural tourism. Rural tourism is an opportunity for valorising the natural landscape, history and culture of the Ampoi and Mureş Valleys Microregion, generating working places especially for women and making rural area more attractive for young people.

1. Introduction

Rural areas in Europe are not in their original natural situation, these areas have been modified during centuries of agriculture practice. Agriculture has created the diversified environment in which communities are living. So, agricultures are administrating the rural areas in the benefit of entire community. Through their activity, agricultures
are contributing to preservation of the soil, landscape and biodiversity of these areas. Unfortunately the economies
are not offering rewards for these activities. So, their challenge is to produce food protecting the environment and
biodiversity. Sustainable agriculture supposes to use carefully the natural resources in order to produce food and to
assure the increase of the quality of life for the present and future generations. Thus, the agriculture is a seasonal
activity that has to be completed with other economic activities that are generating incomes for rural areas
inhabitants during the entire year. Such an opportunity is to combine the touristic activity with the agriculture
specific of the rural areas and to offer a diversity of activities that tourists can do in these areas.

Thirty years ago, rural tourism was a new tendency with small impact in the entire touristic activity. However,
nowadays this kind of tourism has a more significant role in its development. The rate of growth of tourist demand
in rural areas, in the last 20 years, is deployed by region as follows: Europe 52%, Africa 8.1%, 4.1% Middle East,
South Asia 9.4%, South East Asia and Pacific 10.8%, 5.4% North America and other parts of the world 4.3%.
Everything points to the exceptional direction of European population towards these destinations (Stefanović, 2010,
p.48). The market trends worldwide are in favor of rural tourism, which is also affirmed by the World Tourist
Organization. Findings in the last 20 years show clear growth, and the biggest growth rate was registered in some
Southern and Eastern countries, almost 25%. In Europe there are over 200.000 registered service providers and about
2.000.000 beds available. Number of people who are directly or indirectly employed in rural tourism is
approximately 500.000. The annual tourist consumption in rural tourism is about 65 billion Euros. Almost 98% of all
registered accommodation is in European Union countries (Radmilo Nikolić, Vidoje Stefanović, Nedžad Azemović,
2012).

2. Presenting a local initiative in Alba County, Romania: the Association representing the community of
Ampoi and Mureș Valleys

In the last years, increased the efforts in valorizing the rural areas, expressed in a modification of relationship
between country side and city, which can be appreciated in substitution of concepts as: old for antique, primitive for
traditional. To have an interest for cultural heritage must be based on the three determinants: the conservation of
authenticity, the defense of public goods and the value of patrimony as a factor of cultural rural development
(Gabriela Antošová, 2013). Romania is considered by both, Romanian and foreign specialists a country with tourist
potential, which could compete with any other country in the world in what concerns the wealth of tourist resources
(Nedelea, 2007; Gina-Ionela Butnaru, Florina-Iuliana Timu, 2011). According to the tourism development strategy,

a quarter of Romania’s surface is considered a true touristic heaven. A study realized by the Tourism Research
Institute shows that more than half of Romania’s surface has touristic potential. Romania is divided into three areas:
the area of great value, with touristic potential; the area with high touristic potential, and the area with low touristic
attractiveness. Consequently, 24% of the surface of the country is of high and great value of touristic potential. This
category includes: the mountain and sub-mountain area from Carpathians and Apuseni Mountains, Maramureș, the
Danube Delta and the coastal area. Thus, 34% of Romania’s surface has an average touristic potential, including spa
resources, museums, memorial houses and other historical areas, Someș Plateau, Târnave, Central Moldavia Plateau,
or Dobrogea Plateau (Bedrule – Grigoruță and Corodeanu, 2007). The area of Ampoi and Mureș Valleys represents a
physical-geographical sub-unit of the Alba County, which overlaps two Romanian development regions (Center and
West Regions). The area is a traditional rural space which includes Zlatna City, but its economic influence is
reduced and surpassed by the influence of Alba Iulia and Sebeș Municipalities. The area benefits of natural touristic
heritage (natural reservations, beautiful rural landscape) and anthropogenic touristic heritage (ecclesiastic
architecture monuments such as monasteries and wooden churches, museums and memorial houses, various periodic
events, festivals, local fairs). The association created as a partnership between public and private agents from the
eleven localities which tries to valorize the area potential in the framework of Leader approach. This partnership
aims to stimulate the entire community to cooperate and to valorize the local potential of the area (economic, social
and touristic). The Leader approach is based on the involvement of the community in the development territory
activities. Thus, the partners, that were not used to cooperate before, have to collaborate and to develop common
projects and to support these projects in the future.

Leader approach offers a new opportunity for the development of rural communities through the organization of
the Local Action Groups, which must consider the problems the territory faces, to define strategy, prioritize
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