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THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY OF THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH AGROTURISM

RELANSAREA ECONOMICĂ A SPAŢIULUI RURAL PRIN AGROTURISM

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Abstract: *Romania's entry on the european coordonates imposes a continue economical development. The achievement of this target implies the use of the existing methods and the capitalization of all opportunities at best parameters. In this way, optimizing the economical results which appeared as a result of the practice of a bio agriculture (the attainment of natural products in enviroments untouched by the destructive effects of pollution) and also the profesionalistic capitalization of the touristic potential, in all its forms, will lead to a certain economical efficiency. Touristic services extent and diversify according to the socio-economical changes and their favourable area of development. The appearance of the „rural tourism" and „agrotourism" terms enriches the whole notion of „tourism" by diversifying it's forms of expression.*

Key words: *long-term development, agriculture, agrotourism, economical relanunch, rural space, tourism*

Humankind started to be more preocupated by vacation destinations, especially after the 60's, when tourism became one of the most important economical activities in the world. Peoples begun to manifest their wish to spend their vacations in the nature, in rural space/environment. They wanted to satisfy their curiosity about the traditional villages world (agrotourism), to enrich their cultural knowledges (cultural/monastic/religious tourism) etc. This intention proved to be a good start for the economical relaunch of the rural space because: are solicited berthing spaces with a reduced confort, supplementary income sources for rural population, refreshing folk traditions, the wish to perpetuate tradional handicrafts, improvement of

living level in the areas utilated as material basis of tourism, releasing the extracrowded touristical areas, valuing the rich rural potential.

So, we are much concerned about the longterm development, defined as the development „that corresponds to the present needs, without affecting the capacity of next generations". Concerns about long-term development are the complex result of problems that constitute the object of whole humankind: environment damaging, uncontrolled extension of urbanisation, poverty etc.

This notion includes two important issues: how long can be achieved an economical increse without negative results for the planet life and environment protection.

Both issues must be solved in order not to affect the life of next generations. Long-term development notion must be approached from three points of view: temporal dimension; equity notion; environment.

Temporal dimension imposes some limits for development, determined especially by ecologycal elements. Are stressed the resources depletion, the irreversibility of some damage processes etc.

Equity notion refers to the interest for next generations without sacrificing the present generation. From this desideratum, the economical development must be achieved without damaging and deploting environment resources.

The *environment* is the most fragile, nevralgic and human power independent problem, this is why long-term development conditions are based on the capacity to care the environment and it`s resources.

From the five agents that influence development (population, environment, food, industrial development and pollution) the long-term development strategy must find out the possibility to optimize the needs-resources rapport.

Long-term development concept starts from the idea that nature is the only life source and this is why it must be protected, both for present and future. Never by now a civilisation have destroyed so much it's life environment, never by now have been threatened with destruction oceans, plants species and animal races, the strate of ozone was never so affected as now and the pollution was never so threatening. When all this are analysed the blame belongs to the powerfull industrialization. This opinion is regarded as a mistake by the specialists: it is not the industrialization which bears the guilt for the ecologycal disaster, it is man's guilt because of it's

greed, inattention, ignorance, neglection, indifference. And it is man's fault because it didn't select and didn't apply corectly science and technique discoveries, because it didn't act in order to lead to nature development and protection and not to nature degradation. The man is the one who should discern and manifest responsability when he acts so he should take into consideration the natural laws and to assure ecologycal equilibrium. From all the actions that determined environment destruction, pollution has the greatest impact both on nature and human. Air, water and soil pollution transformed the bounteous and friendly nature into a more hostile and dangerous one.

The most dangerous form of pollution is probably the one provoked by practising an intensive and industrialized agriculture. This happens because agiculture pollution supposes first of all, soil damaging. On soil can not be practically applyed no epuration treatment, it's depolluation being possible only by slow action of natural agents. Agriculture includes, in distinction of industry, large areas, which makes the consequences be more severe. Agriculture pollution attains directly the man by nourishment; man cannot protect himself and so the action develops directly on the human body. It seems a paradox that as far as he develops and proudly takes credit for the epocal discoveries, the man becomes practically more destructiv and even autodestructiv. This is why the issues of economical development and increase cannot be sepparated in the present by the ecologycal issues.

Propelling the ecologycal issue in the plan of universal concerns from last decades resulted into an unprecedent mobilisation of public opinion regarding this problem. Public opinion sensibility proved that humankind was already counscient of the negative impact of development on its own lives and especially on the near future. As a result of this concerns the concept of long-term development was imposed. It was recommended by the UNO General Assembly by the Resolution no. 42/187 as the main principle of national strategies in economical development domain and environment protection.

In the following years took place two universal conferences with a theme regarding economical development in the conditions of environment protection. First conference took place at Stockholm and the second at Rio de Janeiro, both in 1992. Both conferences had a strong echo in what public opinion is concerned. Favourable opinions begin to show up regarding environment protection which materialized in „green parties" appereance

which sustain development in the conditions of environment protection, including fauna and flora. In the last decade, in developed countries were setted up administrative structures specialised in environment protection. In the same time, public opinion forced the setting up of some nonguvernamental institutions that follow the way in which responsable agents accomplish their prerogatives, supervising this activity's evolution. Western Europe developed countries adopted some conventions by which they follow to improve simultaneously the activity in some more sensitive activity domains. This is how was adopted „The frame convention regarding climateric changes that cares for reducing the carbon dioxyd from the atmosphere and also to improve considerably the quality of the atmospherical air above Europe" and „The frame convention regarding biodiversity" which proposes protecting life on the european areal, assuring an ecologycal equilibrium and keeping it so that the natural european potential be saved for the use of this generation and also for the next one. Another adopted document is „Agenda 21" which includes a vast programm of actions that must be applyed to preserve and exploit the environment in the 21 century perspective. An ultimate adopted document is „The declaration of priciples regarding ecologycal administration, preservation and viable exploitation of all kind of forests".

Western Europe plans a series of actions in order to improve the ecologycal equilibrium and to impose the concept of long-term development on the continent. Other states from Central Europe and East Europe are willing to adhere at this actions also:

- for environment protection in big cities and to improve life conditions of people, who are the first that endure the consequences of air and noise pollution is taken into consideration that public transport in Europe becomes preponderant, especially on long distances. Public transport must be organised in a way that totally assure the increasing needs in this domain and also it's adequate development at the end of 22 century. There is an intense and frequent publicity for using the bike on short distances, which is considered to be the most ecologycal and efficient way of transportation. In the same time with making the publicity, European Union assures conditions for practising this kind of transportation, by setting up bike tracks on the streets, special parking spaces for bikes, rest places in ascendent areas etc. Whole european system made efforts for adapting traffic at the unmotorized systems and the intense use of public transport. For the

beginning was imposed the interdiction of circulating with motorized ways in the ecologycal vulnerable areas (parcs, reservations, mountains, stations, other recreation spaces). Those who still use autovehicles are obliged to pay some subtantial taxes as a compensation for the damages brought to the environment by practising this action.

- regarding the same aspect, all citizens who want to adapt to this life style made considerable efforts and a great propaganda with the inauguration of a bike highway in 1994, between Zurich and Vienna. A second portion of highway, continouing the first one, will be finished soon, from Vienna to Budapest. Following the events and appropriating them, Bulgaria expressed it's will to be included at the european plan network that will be build.
- incresead the interest of big metropolas for setting up green spaces, parcs, gardens, lakes, reservations by which is tryed to set up for the habitants some areas of quiet, calm, relaxation and rest.
- industrial areas are supervised, the investitions that are done for preventing pollution being rather expensive. Are taken into consideration both aspects regarding air and water pollution, present legislation being extremely severe and efficient.
- increased the interest for practising green tourism, rural tourism and agrotourism, urban environment habitants manifesting tendence to spent their free time in nature. This interest for nature released the appereance of „durable tourism" notion that follows to preserve natural environment and to develop touristical activiy without damaging and endanger touristical areas. From all modernization strategies of agricultural structures, agrotourism is on the first places in Austrich, Switzerland, France, Germany, Spain. Rural european space is in the attention of European Union being considered an important force of the entire continental area, it's development being used by the union. This environment is on the specialist attention as the strong campaign for environment protection showed the indestructible conexion between them. To achieve armony and equilibrium for the rural environment means also an adequate protection of all environment. Now, the rural environment is thought to be the most important reserve of human life and culture.

Chance of becoming active partners of European Union is found also, among others, in the material and human potential of the rural environment, in the big unevaluated reserves that are on the romanian ground. At the beginning of this new millenium this environment seems to be long behind

urban environment, with serious differences between the life style of the inhabitants from the two environments. Organized extension of agrotourism, which is the most efficient way for a superior value of human and material resources it's an opportunity for rural environment development.

First of all it assures working places and obtaining some resonable incomes for the people in rural areas which now is in a difficult financiary situation because of the recul registered in the economical activity.

Then, it allows refreshment of all complementary activities that may extend proportionaly with agrotourism development, becoming a source of incomes for other categories from the active population: guides, instructors, small artisans, tradesmen.

Agrotourism assures superior valorification of surplus from the farms, that most of the time degrades by non-usage. This is very important especially because the alimentary products are natural, made without using pesticides, so they are of best quality. Taking into consideration that Romania's western area has the adowns flora of such an extraordinary value, unique in the country, competing with that from Bucovina's Obcine (Vatra Dornei), alimentary product taste very good and are very appreciated abroad. This increases products quality and implicitly the demands for such products.

Ethnical componence of Banat population formed by svabs, serbians, hungarians, czecks, bulgarians, allowed the devolopment of a cult for alimentations and habits specific for their origin areas.

The practice of agrotourism is beneffical also for autochtounous population who wants to spend the vacations in different places than in the usual ones, but who doesn't afford expensive trips. High prices in agrotourism are more accesible than those from the classic tourism, favorising development of a mass tourism.

This activity development could allow the knowledge of the country's western area, agrotourism could become in this conditions an invisible ambasador, facilitating investors attraction for tourism industry, integrated torurism, interethnical tourism or other economy branches.

Extremely divers rural landscape, largelly well preserved, life at the country with it's traditional components, agricultural and forest potential of Romania and specifical architecture for rural environment are agents that encourage rural tourism. Rural tourism must be „difuse", imperceptible from the point of view of habitual componency. It must be based on natural,

folk, architectural and gastronomical patrimonium specifical to agrotouristic areas. Today, although there are positive signals of agrotourism extension, there are a few restrictive agents that block rural tourism enlargement at tha capacity offered by the landscape and traditional culture.

Restrictive agents are: substructure (roadways, railways, fast and sure banking, postal and telephonical services), modest living conditions or even unacceptable conditions even for modest tourists, offered by most of peasant houses, insufficient instruction of farmers (minimal knowledges in tourism domain, not knowing a foreign language) and security (tourists personal security etc).

Agrotourism has the function of economical strenghtening of farms capacities due to it's specificity of intern agroalimentar consum in the farm. In what foreign tourists are concerned, agrotourism represents a form of „internal" export of agroalimentary products. The fact that most of the aliments consumed in agrotouristical activity come from personal production determines the increase of the rentability resulted from the agrotouristical activity. It also determines the fact that the prices for agrotouristical services be under the level of organized tourism. From the calculations made by the specialized touristical services it comes out that the price of an agrotouristic meal is lower with 40-50% everytime, comparing with a meal served in a restaurant from the touristic hotels network. The explanation for this price difference is very simple. The price of the agricultural product consumed in the agrotouristic farm has no comercial addition, VAT (value added tax), excise taxes, transportation, storage, etc, expenses. The meat, the eggs, the cheese, the milk, the butter are brought directly on the consumers tables. Also, touristical services (berthing, services etc) don't come with additional, indirect expenses, or management and comissions etc which keeps the price of the agrotouristic product incomparable smaller. In this conditions, agrotouristic policies must protect rural tourism advantages. This means remission of taxes, reducing the fiscal pressure that would lead to prices equalisation and the lost of traditional clients (townsmen with modest incomes, foreigners willing to know rural areas traditions, citizens who comeback to their homeland to remember the pleasent times in their lives – childhood, or children from the urban areas etc).

Services evolution in developed countries has a strong, ascendent and constant past. The so called invisible activity gain a lot, in USA, only

one person from 15 works now in a pure material activity. Services share in the total amount of some national economies overcomes 2/3 in some states and it's in a continuous increase.

In USA, Canada, Netherlands over 73% of the working population works in services, in the other developed countries the share of this services being comprised between 55% (Portugal) and 72% (Great Britain).

Analysing the evolution of the third sector at the universal scale we see the continuous and constant movement of work force to the branches of this activity. This means permanent development of agrotourism. Economists analyse in this way a country development level also according to how much the services share participates at the increase of GDP (gross domestic product (USA 73,2%, Denmark 72,9%, Netherkands 67,6%, Canada 65,9%, Great Britain 64%). Only in underdeveloped or insufficiently developed economies and in the underdeveloped or going to development countries, services shares in work and GDP are smaller. Necesity to increase the carrying out of agrotouristical services, complementary to tourism amd promoting the interethnical tourism may lead to increasing the services share in GDP.

From all activities that complete services sphera, tourism has an important percentage that increases as long as population free time increases too. It's tought that is more developed as it's paying more attention to it's individuals, to the increase of their spiritual and material wealth; this is how reduction of working time (on behalf of working productivity) became a slogan in the electoral campaigns, and free time is an indicator that reflects the level living of a population increase. In the countries that are going to develop, this sector development is necessary too. In this way, the third sector development is asked to counterwork some underdevelopment phenomenas. First of all is emphasized the issue of surviving services regarding subnutrition and covering the minimum life necessities, alimentary services, assuring working places and minimum incomes for subsistence. In this context tourism diversified and grown enclosing both spatially and temporaly the entire world. This development was also favourised by it's benefical effects, because it's an extremely rentable activity representing an important source of incomes for some countries. Emphasizing a region's natural, social and especially cultural particularities in a constant and sustained activity, tourism may contribue to it's development and modernization, representing an extremely attractive

alternative for valuing the existent resources. This is how the tourism share increased in the last decade from 28,3% to 31,3%, being strongly stressed the internal tourism, where the annual returns average is of 7,4%. Torurism registered increasing numbers both at universal and regions level. Every country tries, with an adequate policy, to increase it's turnover in tourism, which comes to constitute an important source of incomes for equilibrating the balance of payments.

Agrotouristic and interethnical regional activities lead to balancing mass torurism and implicitly at the increase of services share.

Terminologycal specifications:

In the international tourism is observed a constant increase both of the tourists number and also of the returns that come from touristical activity. Although the percentages show little increses, those are constant, proving continuous diversification and development of this economical sector.

On the areas, the most intense toruristical activity is registered in Europe, followed by North America and Asia. Interethnical euro-agrotourism lead to increase of the universal tourism share services.

In Europe, we discover that most of the tourist are from the continent, so they prefere to go rather in bordering or close countries. Between 1985-1991, tourism average rithm of annual increase in Europe was 12,09% in Belgium and 10,92% in Spain. Annual average increase of american tourists visiting Europe is 8,49%.

In what is concerned the number of foreign visitors fron the European Union countries, the biggest share in 2003 is that of german tourists, whose number grew up from 203.000 in 1994 to 380.000 in 2003 with a continuous increase. We also see an increase of the number of tourists from Europe, as those from Hungary and Moldavian Republic and we can observe a decrease of the number of tourists who come in Romania from Russian Federation. The total increase was in 1994 of 43.0000 and in 2003 of 85.0000.

Also, we can notice that most of the tourists come from Europe which means that they limit to spend their vacations in Romania just because it's a close country or their homeland.

At the same time with touristical activity development and it's explosive extension was also emphasized a tourism diversification, according to tourists wishes, relief particularities, services complexity.

There are two important generical tourism categories: sun tourism (motivated by natural agents) also called „sunlust" and knowledge tourism, called „wunderlust".

In the knowledge tourism there are many characteristical types. This are: business tourism, cultural-scientific tourism, medical tourism, recovery tourism, opening or tranzit tourism, tourism of TIR type, rural tourism, agrotourism, interethnical agrotourism.

A huge breacking up from this complexe branch of tourism that took place two decades ago is represented by the rural tourism. Special atention of political and administratives agents for this area (rural), that is ought to be protected and also modernized, imposed as a real development posibility for this rural tourism activity. On the other hand, urban population tendency to spend it's free time in nature, in quiet, far from all that urban means, including pollution, it's a guarantee of the development possibility of this activity in the interethnical environment and agrotourism. Often, it's made an identification of this terms, between if it's true that there are many common points, overlappings, but certainly there are some differences that differentiate the terms and implicitly, the activities.

In this way, the most frequent confusion it's made between rural tourism and green tourism. At a more complete analysis we can distinguish that green tourism supposes some routes in nature, geographycal border being extremely important in touristic decision. For instance, a trip to Niagara falls, climbing a mountain etc, are different from rural tourism which assumes a touristical activity in a rural area. It's true that, in most of the cases, this area belongs to an exceptional natural place, which fullfills and completes tourists feelings, giving them complete satisfaction. Still, there is, at least theoretically, the possibility of doing such an activity without this criterion of natural. For instance, to visit a farm in a didactical purpose, with preschool children.

Analysing phenomena's evolution, any approach must answer to a series of issues, such as: if agrotourism can assure enough working places, incomes and capital flux in order to contribue to a long-term rural development; whether all rural areas can be adjusted; if there are certain risks by country development and by what is distinguished rural tourism from other forms of tourism. Nowadays are many people who see agrotourism as an important element of the local/regional development strategy going from the economical advantages which it generates: creating

national income, valutary contributions at payments balance, developing working market, local use of work force disponibilities, developing some rural areas etc.

Beyond the positive effects that agrotourism generates, we must carry out that it is more than an economical activity; actually it's an interaction of population masses which needs a large range of services, facilities and inputs that transform themselves in opportunities and challenges for the host economical agents. Radu Rey thought that „agrotourism is not only an agent of economical equilibrium that engages a lot of adjacent agents and reproductible resources. It also becomes a cultural-educational ambassador, a constant instrument and not very expensive, of social progress", shortly paraphrasing this we can say that this is were the notion of interethnical tourism fits in. The notion of interethnical tourism it's understood as a continuous message of peace and understanding between ethnicities, nations and peoples.

Multilateral character of tourism, in generally and agrotourism in particular, doesn't allow to be described as „an industry" in a technical sense because this sector doesn't have just one characteristic production or well defined operational parameters. It's economical dimension can not be known without the intervention of some exogenetic/endogenetic economical, social, cultural and ambiental agents. So, we deal with a large, varied and complex character of the touristic phenomena which requires a much attentive analysis. From the agrotourism issues that come out by their negative impact, we enumerate:

- the threaten against the environment, touristical circulation intensity in certain cases can be a social and ecologycal problem for the rural area;
- socio-cultural threaten, natural world perturbation de-balances the small socio-cultural universe of rural community;
- problems about planning, local control, public participation and possible partnerships.

Expressly indivual answers given to agrotouristical problems are not a policy for this sector; this kind of answers can only give short time solutions for long-term problems.

Agrotourism success depends especially of the region capacity to be an appropriate host for rural tourism, of it's capacity to plann and put into practice development projects with all the changes that are brought by this form of tourism in the region, in general, and in farm, in particular. It also

depends of the existence of a contest field of ethnical representation between different agrotouristical units on ethnogeographyc areas, leading to a european finality in the spirit of colaboration and interethnical understanding.

Economical science is concerned by achieving an optimal utilisation of limitated resources, many of them being rare or unique. This principle functions for an individual request that aims psichologycal benefits from a journey or a business that proposes as a purpose to cash profit, by providing substantial goods and services for the tourists. It also functions for a host community which regards tourism in the terms of economical benefit and the represented area's prosperity.

According to it's content and in correlation with the whole national economy, tourism acts like stimulative agent of the global economical system. Touristic journey development suppose a request and a consume of specific goods and services, which leads to an increase of their production. At the same time, touristical request determines an offert adaptation seen in the development of this sector technical-material basis and, indirectly, in the stimulation of producing the branches that participate at the construction and equipment of berthing and alimentation spaces, in roads network modernization and getting conveyance and agremental instalations.

By tourism development it's achieved a significant production rise. Still, tourism contribution to GDP it's very different in world's states according to development and structure of those countries economy.

Tourism is not only a GDP creator, but it also has an important contribution in achieving value added taxes. By it's specific – services activity, large consum of living work, inteligence and creativity – tourism takes part at creating the value added tax in a share superior to close branches from the point of view of development level.

Tourism also has an important pulling in effect of stimulating the production in other domain, a result of it's branch of interference and syntesis character. Elaborated studies shown that some branches activity is largely determined by tourism needs.

Connected with development and economy modernization of a country, tourism acts as a method to diversify the economy. This way, the adaptation at tourist requests favorises, on one hand, the appearence of specific branches (activities) : leisure industry, wire transport, travel agencies, artcraft production and, on the other hand, it gives new

dimensions to some of already existent branches : agriculture, food industry, constructions, transport, cultural services.

Tourism also represents a way of valuing all resources categories and especially the natural ones, other than the traditional and/or those of small dimensions. Elements like landscape's beauty, mineral or thermal water curative qualities, climateric conditions, cultural-artistical events, art monuments, historycal vestiges, folk tradition find in tourism their best valorification, even the only one in some situations.

Natural consequence of this effects, tourism can induce shiftings in teritorial developments; from this angle, it is seen as an attenuation arm of interregional disequilibriums regarded at national or universal scale as « a solution for defavorized areas development, a remedy for de-industrializated places ».

Tourism economical effects have also other forms of manifestation ; from all this we have to mention it's contribution to assuring an equilibrated money circulation realised by the inter and international tourism.

Tourism became one of the major socio-economical sectors. It registered a constant expansion in time, with an anual increasing rate of 4-5 percentages in the last half of the 22 century. Joyning intern and international tourism is understood now as the largest universal industry. International tourism is one of the major components of international economical activities.

According to World Tourism Organization (WTO) the number of tourists, at the universal scale will double in 2010 comparing to 1990. The main touristical destination is Europe, wich is registered with the smallest rithm of increase.

Tourism doesn't mean just an increase of tourists number. It has shown that it transforms itself in a divers and complex economical activity. Although mass torurism is predominant, came out other activities linked to culture, environment, affairs, education, health, religion etc. This forms of tourism reflect, among other things, preferences for environment quality and a much more energic form of recreation. Sky, hike, cyclism, are more pleasent than anytime, satisfying the need of being closer to nature, moving, exploring and learning. This new activities have also a great responsability to environment management because those who practise this activities are seldom scattered in areas without any adequate developed substructure or without the capacity to administrate touristical activities.

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