MARKETING OF RURAL TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN ARGEŞ COUNTY

MARKETINGULUI ACTIVITĂŢILOR DE TURISM RURAL ÎN JUDEŢUL ARGEŞ

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Abstract: *Marketing, as an assembly of actions meant to insure the relation of the company with its clients, a relation that includes the 4 components of the mixing of marketing (product, price, distribution and promotion). The marketing of rural tourism in Argeş County imposes a double reference, both to the macroeconomic level and to the microeconomic level. At the macroeconomic level, the marketing of rural tourism it must be regarded as an exchange process of the products and services at the national, regional and local level.*

Key words: *local brand, marketing plan, interpersonal motivations, marketing mix.*

INTRODUCTION

Like general marketing, the marketing of rural tourism also has a series of instruments that act as a whole and they are interdependent according to the theory of systems. Once a business in the field of rural tourism in Argeş County is formed, the boarding house is authorized, the local brand is identified and the market demands are taken into consideration, the promotion work of the services starts in such a way that to attract a large number of consumers. For this, any holder of boarding houses will need a **marketing plan**[1].

The components of marketing mix – product, price, distribution and promotion – are in a complementarity relation, being reciprocally conditioned and they maintain a balance imposed by a certain marketing

[1] Miu Florentina, *2011, „ Ecotourism and rural tourism”*, University of Piteşti Publishing House, p.182

strategy.

Marketing is a modality of maximization the profit and to satisfy the tourists.[2] Similarly, at the microeconomic level, the marketing represents the process of realization of the profit as a result of the development of certain touring activities specific to each economic agent, of exchange with tourists, of products and services of a company, rural boarding houses etc. This type of activities are developed within the rural communities of Argeş County, and the representatives of these communities adopt measures in regard of the touring products offered on the market and the effects contemplated to be obtained

MATERIALS AND METHODS

By means of the marketing of rural tourism practiced in the rural communities of Argeş County, methods and instruments can be carried out, which can be used on purpose to maximize the profit of the touring company and to increase tourists' satisfaction, as well as the foundation means and the harmonization of the policies that each touring company or rural boarding house adopts through the touring performance. All these aspects have a distinctive influence on the provided services, on the level of accessibility of the destinations and on the value perceived by the client-tourist [3]

The notion of marketing is used in everyday practice in several different contexts:

§ **The marketing process** operates at the level of the marketing channels making the connection between the production of a company and its market.

§ **The concept of marketing** is limited to considering the marketing as a social change process, which involves producers and consumers.

§ **The marketing** as an assembly of actions meant to insure the relation of the company with its clients, a relation that includes the 4 components of the marketing mix (product, price, distribution and promotion).

[2] Bucur-Sabo, 2006, *Touring Marketing*, Irecson Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 15

[3] Firth, T. (2004),„*Marketing foir Sustainable Tourism"* , University of Sydney, p 14-15.

§ **The orientation toward marketing**, which considers both the consumers and the producers, in the same time facilitating the marketing process and concept.

§ **Marketing** as a modality of maximization of the profit.[4]

Rural tourism market refers to the economic field of the touring offer materialized in the touring offer (touring production) and the demand for rural touring services.[5]

Rural tourism market

Unlike the consumer goods market, rural tourism market of Argeş County presents the following specific elements:

§ The place of the offer is the same in which this is consumed, but it may differ from the place where the demand originates;

§ The offer of rural tourism is the result of a mental image that the potential consumer (tourist) forms on the information received directly and indirectly,:

§ The promotion of the product in the rural tourism of Argeş County is based most of the times on mediators (tourism agencies, specialized companies, hosting companies on the Internet, rural boarding houses) or it is directly achieved by means of service catalogues. Under these conditions, the tourist's purchase decision depends exclusively on the image offered on the service by the mediators (the distribution channels), from the quality point of view of rural touring services.

§ The seasonal characteristic of touring products and services caused by natural, social or cultural factors that influences directly the marketing mix. It is the reason for which the promotion activities take place mostly during the extra-season periods, the price and distribution reach the optimal values during the season, and after this period the repairing activities appear and new projects for the future tourists are born.

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The offer of rural touring products

The offer of rural touring products in Argeş County can be presented

[4] Bucur-Sabo, 2006, *Touring Marketing*, Irecson Publishing House, Bucharest, P. 15..

[5] Bucur-Sabo, 2006, *Touring Marketing*, Irecson Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 55-60.

[6] Bucur-Sabo, 2006, *Touring Marketing*, Irecson Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 55 -60.

by a large number of economic agents (rural boarding houses, tourism agencies, authorized persons) who develop activities of transport, accommodation, food, entertaining, excursions, sports activities, all these being elements of the touring product.[7] Also, rural touring offer must take account of: the resources related to nature, history, culture to which a series of services and equipment is added, which allows the tourist to cover his basic needs and to enjoy the attractions of the destination. The components of rural touring offer in Argeş County are presented in the following formula:

Touring resources + Services = Touring product + price, distribution, touring promotion = Touring offer

The offer of rural products and services refers to the production capacity of the company or of the rural boarding house, which will be highlighted by means of the price. This way, the supplier of touring services must choose between a higher price with a lower offer or a better offer with a lower price.

The demand for rural touring products

The demand for rural touring products is formed by a mass of consumers, both internal (local) and external (outside the locality, including foreign tourists). Rural touring demand consists of two large traveling groups.

1. National travels – which are those travels performed by the inhabitants of a country within the limits of their own territory;

2. International travels – which are the travels performed by the inhabitants of a country, having other countries as a destination.

In the study of the demand, tourists' motivations must be considered, these being:

§ **physical motivations** – tourism contributes to physical and mental balance;

§ **cultural motivations** – the desire to know other customs or the broadening of the knowledge about rural environment;

§ **interpersonal motivations –** because tourism is an emotional development instrument, new relations are established, visits to relatives or friends;

[7] idem, p. 95

§ **social motivations –** tourism allows the knowledge of the individual's social accomplishments by entering a specific social class.

The present trends of touring demand are:

§ The growing awareness toward the environmental problems;

§ The growing importance, in the assembly of demands, of the category of adults over 55;

§ A more demanding growth in relation to quality;

§ A more segmented rural touring market;

§ The changeover from passive holidays to the participative ones;

§ The growth of independent journeys;

The price

As an element of the marketing mix, the price represents the amount of money which the purchaser (the tourist) is willing and able to pay to the producer in exchange of the touring services and products the latter is able to offer. The price is the least controllable element for the supplier of rural touring products and services, because his effectual level is established on the market under the influence of certain objectives and of certain subjective factors he cannot determine, but only influence through the quantity of offered touring products and the obtained level of the production costs. However, even if it is the least flexible element from point of view of the intervention capacity on the part of the supplier of touring services, the price can be influenced more easily on a short period of time.[8]

Being the least controllable element at the internal level, the price generates the fastest effects, as a matter of fact instantaneous compared to other elements of the marketing mix.

In conclusion, both the demand of rural touring products and services in Argeş County and especially the competition on rural touring market react more easily to the variation of the prices than to the image changes or the distribution of touring products.

The promotion

For the promotional mix, the complementary use of promotion instruments and techniques is decisive for reaching the proposed purposes.

The promotion of the fourth element of the marketing mix, according to many theorists, is also the most important for the success of a business in rural tourism. The promotion refers to the assembly of activities, informational means and the modalities of captivating the potential clients'

[8] Bucur-Sabo, 2006 *"Touring Marketing"*, IRECSON Publishing House, Bucharest, p 199

attention, on purpose to satisfy their needs and desires and implicitly to grow the economic efficiency of the supplied touring products and services.

Analyzing from the point of view of the particularities of rural touring activities, it can be said that of all the elements of the promotional mix the most efficient one is the publicity..

The efficiency of the promotion activities of rural touring services can be increased if the whole promotion process is observed at the following levels:

§ **At the level of rural boarding houses:** in this case it is recommended to execute some leaflets or brochures that present the accommodation facilities, transport conditions, information on the culinary menu, information on the handicrafts that are practiced.

§ **At the level of rural community,** the promotion of the touring area can be achieved by using written promotional materials (tourist guides), video tapes. All these materials must classify all the boarding houses existing in the region which are prepared for agro-tourism, also including the information on the entire territory in the interest points.

§ **At the regional level,** a more extensive material which presents the characteristics of the entire area must be produced (for example, Piatra Craiului with the surroundings, Muscel Area, Arefu from the hydrological basin of Argeş.)

§ **At the national level,** an agro-touring guide which presents the touring potential of the geographic area must be published.

Also, a well-structured offer for available cultural and leisure activities is still at the beginning. The touring products centered on a certain theme, in which there is a connection between accommodation with various touring activities and the area in which the touring market is growing, are still in the assembling stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

When the price policy for the offered touring products and services is elaborated, the supplier of rural tourism (the agro-touring boarding house or the tourism operator) must be based both on the internal factors and on the external factors.

The internal factors are:

§ **Production costs** – they represent the assembly of expenses effectuated by a supplier of rural touring services in order to carry out a specific product or service.

§ **The stage of lifecycle** of the product/service is a factor that must be considered because usually high prices are rather used in the initial phase, in the middle phase moderate prices are used, and in the maturity phase the price starts to rise and wanes, also influenced by other factors..

§ **The promotion strategy –** is correlated with the price, which becomes a promotion instrument

§ **The demand** for touring products and services, quantified in the number of tourists who purchase rural touring products and services on a definite period of time. Usually there is an inverse proportionality between the price of rural touring products and services and market demand.

§ **The competition** points out the structure of the local, regional and national market, from the area in which the boarding house offers its services. In the matter of market competition, the differentiation between the nature of the competition and the adjustment of the price strategy for the offered products and services is important.

CONCLUSIONS

- Rural tourism in Argeş County is strongly influenced by seasonality. Although rural tourism confronts with a crisis, tour-operators register diminutions of the number of tourists who head for traditional tourism centers. In this case, tour-operators will maintain and even increase their market share only by offering new services or by re-launching the old ones.

- The accommodation in rural family holiday villages In Argeş County, as a touring accommodation structure, the holiday village has a different significance vis-à-vis to the villages in the European Union, developed near the rural settlement. These differ with regard to certain factors, namely: the differentiation, as a socio-economic

evolution during the last dozens of years (in Belgium, France), when social tourism had a greater extent.

- The nutrition structures are found under diversified forms and they create the conditions for insuring a partial or complete menu to the tourists who are in transit or on holiday. The economic activity consists of the production of a varied range of ready-to-serve products, culinary pastry, based on practical application of some agricultural or purchased raw materials, which are offered to the tourists together with some alcoholic beverages, as well as other food products. Also, all the ready-to-serve products can be valorized by the beverages with which they are associated par excellence, with wines from the referred to or neighboring area. Often, if there is a sufficient space, a bar can be arranged, a bar that places at tourists' disposal a varied range of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, both simple and mixed also associated with a limited assortment of cold snacks and pastry, ice-cream etc.

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