Perception of the Representatives of the Public Administration on the Development of Rural Tourism in the Mountain Area of Suceava County

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Abstract

The mountain area of Suceava county has many unique and well-preserved tourist resources that give personality to this space through age, originality, traditional rural households and a generous number of accommodation places. The data of the National Institute of Statistics from 2018 on the capacity of tourist accommodation, places Suceava county on the third place, after Constanța and Brașov counties. The present study follows the perception of the representatives of the public administration vis-à-vis rural tourism and its development in the mountain area of Suceava county. The research highlights the role of local authorities in the development of rural tourism and its promotion from the point of view of those in local management. The methodology is based on the survey conducted on the basis of the questionnaire by the method of face-to-face interview, between September 1 and November 30, 2019 in the mountain area of Suceava county. It is found that in all the localities in the mountain area, the interviewees are aware of the existing tourism potential and have responded to the requests made by the tour operators in the 36 studied communes. In conclusion, following the analysis of the results, it is found that rural tourism is an economic alternative for the inhabitants of the rural area of Suceava, with real possibilities of development, benefiting from the support of the local authorities.

Keywords: tourism rural; mountain area; development; Public Administration.

JEL classification: L83, Z32

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1. Introduction

Rural tourism is a concept that includes all tourist activities that take place in rural areas [9]. Rural tourism is a form of tourism that emphasizes destinations in rural areas [13] or is the tourist activity carried out by the local population and based on the local natural and anthropic potential ”[4] is the interaction of tourists with household activities [10]. Given that 87.1% of Romania's land area is rural and 43.59% of the country's population lives in the village, rural tourism involves the following aspects: the existence of rural areas, preserving rural functionality, preserving rural infrastructure, preserving the traditional way of life, preserving specific cultural identity [9].

2. Problem Statement

The village is approached as having a special human significance, identified with the traditions of the place, religious holidays much more present in comparison with the urban environment [1]. The Romanian village offers a mythological tourism potential, especially its mountain pastoral form [12]. In other words, the village becomes host to complex activities, which promote tradition, the return to origins, the discovery of nature and beauty. Rural tourism is one of the "solutions for the development of the whole rural area" [5]. Its appearance and arrangement within the mountain village offers new sources of income to the population, especially when the area has a great potential, high quality human resources, and modernized infrastructure that allows access to the study region. The path to success is paved by a global development of the rural environment [5], the preservation of local values, it can bring incomes in the declining areas, it can reactivate the politico-social life in the areas that have lost hope [8]. An aspect that should not be ignored is the preparation of the local population both from a social and professional point of view [11] for the tourist activities in the mountain areas of Suceava county, and through feasible market studies, the production should be organized. of foods adapted to demand, as well as by tourist motivation. Thus, rural tourism can be included in all tourism activities in the region, as well as in the context of regional policy. We can say that the Romanian village has successfully gone through less favorable periods of history, largely preserving the purity of its authentic culture. The development of rural tourism aims to increase the standard of living, to stabilize the population, to maintain the cultural identity [6], to increase the economic power at local and national level [13] in what concerns the maintenance of the ecological balance and the protection of the natural environment.
3. Research Questions

This study aims at the perception of public administration representatives regarding rural tourism and its development in the mountainous area of Suceava County. The research highlights the role of local authorities in the development of rural tourism and its promotion from the point of view of those in local management.

Study area

Figure no.1 Map of the mountain area in Suceava county

The mountain area of Suceava County occupies 53% of the total area of the county and is an integral part of the mountains of the Eastern Carpathians. The study area overlaps the mountain region, is composed of 36 communes and includes massive and complex peaks, separated by deep valleys [2], [3] or depressive areas: Suhard and Călimani massifs, Giumentău - Rare massif, Bistriţa Mountains, Stanisorea, Obedeul Feredeului and Mestecăniş.
4. Research Methods

The methodology is based on the survey conducted on the basis of the questionnaire [7] applied to a number of 216 persons from the local administrations of the 36 communes in the mountain area of Suceava county. The survey was anonymous to ensure the highest degree of sincerity of responses and was conducted during September 1-November 30, 2019. The questionnaire consisted of 12 relevant questions regarding the perception of representatives of local administrations on rural tourism. The first questions concern the way in which the public administration perceives the tourism activity, supports and supports it in the 36 suceven communes. The following questions refer to the benefits brought by the tourist activity to the communes and to the local administration. The last questions concern the perception of the interviewees vis-à-vis the way in which the institution that represents it was involved in making the markings and tourist arrangements in the sucevean mountain area. The first question of the questionnaire refers to the importance of rural tourism for the local councils of the 36 communes studied.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of answers to question no. 1

As shown in Figure 2, respondents consider tourism important and very important for the commune. The responses of the target group are also supported by the fact that the number of tourists staying in Suceava county has been increasing in recent years, as shown by the statistical data. (Figure no.3)
The second question refers to the growth rate of activities associated with tourism in the Suceava mountain area, and the respondents consider 92% this increase significantly (Figure 4). As has been shown in numerous studies, Suceava County has a high potential for tourism, both natural and anthropic. It should be mentioned that the growth rate of tourist activities is high due to the fact that important religious monuments are located in Suceava mountain area, which attract a large number of tourists every year. At the same time, an increasing number of tourists have arrived in the Suceava mountain area, including in the communes that do not have a tradition in rural tourism. To highlight the number of tourists arriving in the communes in the mountain area, we selected 8 communes in this area, out of which the communes Cacica Poiana Ștampei and Pojorâta are recognized as tourist resorts of local interest, and the rest of the communes chosen do not meet the minimum criteria to receive the status of a tourist resort of local or national interest.
It can be seen from Figure 5 that in all selected communes the number of tourists arriving is increasing which shows that rural tourism has come to the attention of nature lovers and authentic, which encourages tourism operators to invest in this sector.

Another element of interest for our study is the perception of the representatives of the public administration on the way in which they supported the tour operators in the commune. In this regard, it is found that the representatives of the public administration answered 99% affirmatively (figure 6). At the question: Did your institution allocate funds for the communal tourism area? The distribution of responses can be seen in Figure 7.
Although representatives of local councils support tourism operators, it is found that not all municipalities allocate funds for the tourism field, despite the fact that the entire area taken for the study, has a special natural tourism potential, which is worth highlighting and exploiting. Question number 6 refers to investments from European funds in the field of tourism in the communes of the Suceava mountain area. The answers are distributed in the figure no. 8. There is a significant percentage of 59% who replied that in their commune there are investments with European funds in the field of tourism, which means that tourism in this area is growing. It should be noted that rural tourism in Romania is recent, developing especially after the 1990s. We believe that in the coming years, rural tourism will increase especially that the year 2020 is full of restrictions and rural space offers freedom, fresh air and multiple leisure opportunities.
It should be noted that 92% of the representatives of the local councils answered that the institution they represent is involved in the tourist promotion of the area (figure 8). To question no. 11 (Figure 10) *Was the mayor’s office involved in making the tourist markings in your commune?*

81% of the respondents were of the opinion that the institution representing it was sufficiently involved in making the markings. Given that the target group was made up of staff working in the local administration of the communes, we consider that the percentage of 19% of those who answered that they were not involved enough is quite high and is a weak point in the promotion strategy of local tourism.

**Figure 9.** Distribution of answers to question no. 11

**Conclusions**

Through this study we aimed to find out if the local institutions in the Suceava mountain area consider the development of rural tourism one of the main priorities of the communes they represent and the way in which they view the development of rural tourism as an economic alternative. This study shows that representatives of local councils support tourism operators, however, it is found that not all municipalities allocate funds for tourism, despite the fact that the entire area studied, has a special natural tourism potential that deserves to be highlighted and exploited. It is also noted that investments with European funds in the tourism sector are 59%, which means that European funds are not completely absorbed in this area, but given that rural tourism in Romania is recent, it leads us to conclusions that it is growing. The possibility of a better life is the imperative solution needed in the mountain area, and the rural entrepreneurs need specialized support to create tourist experiences. Regarding the presence of markings and
tourism promotion at the level of mountain communes, respondents believe that the institutions have been sufficiently involved, although the reality on the ground tends to be different. There is an increase of tourist activities in the mountainous area of Suceava, motivated by the fact that important religious monuments are located here which attract a large number of tourists every year. At the same time, in recent years there has been an increasing number of tourists arriving in the Suceava mountain area, including in communes that do not have a tradition in rural tourism. The study also shows that the total number of tourist arrivals is increasing and more and more localities in Suceava are hosting those who want to escape the crowds of cities or enthusiasts who want to return to the traditions and customs that are preserved in holiness.

We believe that in the coming years, the rural tourism will increase especially that the year 2020 is one full of restrictions, and the rural area offers freedom, clean air and multiple possibilities for spending free time.

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