



Original Contribution

SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL TOURISM IN THE SMOLYAN MUNICIPALITY OF BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

We describe rural tourism based on sustainability. We select parameters for developing a model of sustainable rural tourism. Thus the following indicators of sustainability in rural tourism are: tourist planning, number of visitors (tourists) in a given destination, natural and cultural attractions, involvement of local population, number of jobs opened by rural tourism, contribution of rural tourism to local economy, environmental factors, training and qualification of labour force, satisfaction from the development of rural tourism, security for tourists. Our conclusions include the following: 1. Rural tourism has not reached the expected level of development in the studied region; 2. Marketing approach is needed in developing complex tourist products according to the needs of various segments on the tourist market; 3. Natural, geographic, human, physical and economic factors of development are available in the studied region; 4. Sheep- and horse-breeding are a prerequisite for using the existing natural resources, creating traditional local products; 5. A problem that needs to be overcome is the distinction of people from their rural identity.

Key words: sustainability, development, rural tourism.

INTRODUCTION

In Western Europe rural tourism is one of the growing tourist segments. More and more Western Europeans prefer to spend their holiday in countryside places (Swarbook, 1996)

In Bulgaria rural tourism gained popularity comparatively recently – only at the end of last century. The development of rural tourism as a priority in the diversification of rural economy is a prerequisite for the revival of the Bulgarian village and for sustainable development of rural areas. Diversification of economic activities, including the development of tourism, is one of the priority spheres of financial support for Bulgaria by EU funds.

BULGARIA – DESTINATION FOR RURAL TOURISM

The objective of the present paper is to characterize rural tourism in one of the main destinations for rural tourism in our country,

from the point of view of its sustainability by selecting parameters on the basis of which to develop a model for sustainable rural tourism.

According to data of BAAT (Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism) (1), nearly three hundred and forty thousand Bulgarians and 220 thousand foreigners have chosen rural tourism in our country in 2007. The total income from rural tourism is 65 million Euro for 2007 and turnover from alternative tourism - 130 million leva. And total turnover in tourism in our country is 2.5 billion leva. People who have chosen the alternative were for recreation and comprise 0.5% of the total number of visitors in the country for last year (2). As a whole the number of tour operators offering alternative tourism both for foreigners and for Bulgarians has increased. According to Francesko Frandjali, Secretary General of the World Tourist Organization, Bulgarian tourist agencies have to put greater effort on cultural, rural and ecological tourism (3).

The advantages of Bulgaria in rural tourism are determined by: the clean nature, the varied landscape, the availability of numerous natural and other places of interest, the unique culture, hospitable population motivated to offer tourist services. According to survey made by Spanish and Bulgarian specialists in 2005 the position of Bulgaria as

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an international rural tourism destination is based on local culture, natural environment and national cuisine (4).

In 2004 there are around 300 rural households in our country that develop rural tourism (0.3 per cent of rural households). Over 70% of them are on protected territories or near them, in national parks, natural and cultural places of interest (5). Although the overall assessment is that rural tourism is in a growing phase in its life cycle, the above study points out the obstacles for its faster development: lack of sufficient young and vital people in rural areas, low educational level of people, social and public conditions that do not comply with contemporary requirements; bad state of social and technical infrastructure in villages (roads, communications, tourist paths); significant part of the people directly employed in the tourist business do not have the relevant qualification; poor knowledge of foreign languages, unawareness of the basic business mechanisms, no culture in providing service; inertia in the behaviour of people concerning their preferences for spending the holiday, including holiday at the seaside are some of the most attractive; still poor development of advertising activity – books, brochures, albums, films advertising that type of tourism.

Some conclusions about the significance of rural tourism in our country can be made on the basis of the results of an inquiry held in 2004 by a team of the Institute on Agricultural Economics led by senior scientific researcher Maria Atanasova, PhD. (5) According to its results there is desire for practicing that type of business, but that motivation is not sufficiently supported by real practical results and in its turn that demotivates the initial ambition. Basic cause about it is that some of the inquired people are entrepreneurs for whom tourism is main business and that business has offered so far poor opportunity to provide support for the family. For the other inquired persons (64%) this business is additional to their agricultural business and it is formed as agricultural tourism but still an increase in the level of satisfying the needs for support of the village household is expected.

Rural tourism in our country in its individual form is offered in village rooms or guest houses, family or other small hotels, villas and an area of summer houses. The collective form of offering is in complexes that conform to the main characteristics of villages in Bulgaria (compactness, regional self-containment). According to a study by

Atanasova /2004/ the greatest is the concentration of individual sites in the South central region – the Rhodopes.

RURAL TOURISM IN THE RHODOPE /SMOLYAN MUNICIPALITY/²

Some basic characteristics of geographical features, historical and cultural heritage, population, and economics have been studied. Basic parameters related to sustainable development of tourism have been outlined.

The analysis of sites in the Rhodopes reveals that along with the North central region and especially the Central Balkan, the Rhodopes stand out as a region with best developed rural tourism. That accelerated development is due in addition to the natural features of the region, the interesting cultural, architectural, historical and other sights of interest, and also to the people in the Rhodopes. The harsh conditions of life, the change in agricultural specialization, high level of unemployment and lack of alternatives for employment resulted in mobilization of the population, using the best qualities and entrepreneurship of a great part of the active population in the Rhodopes. On the other part, the suitable conditions for rural and other types of tourism attracted the attention of people of enterprise from other regions in the country who establish rural tourism sites in the Rhodopes. These cases when the owners are not local people are also important for the economic and social development of the region – condition for employment of some of the Rhodope people are created, some of the produced agricultural products are marketed under better conditions, the value of existing natural and other types of resources increase (6). Subsequent development shows, for example, how in the county of Smolyan for one year only rapid increase has been observed: a) the means of accommodation – by 59%; b) the number of beds – by 18.6%; increase of the number of stays overnight – by 9.3%. The increased volume of the tourist product is explained by the availability of the internationally renowned resort Pamporovo, but one can also seek connection with the development of rural

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tourism in the villages in the region. Conditions for rural tourism in the Rhodopes improve through the participation of some municipalities in project 2003-2004 "Sustainable development of rural areas" /SDRA/, which is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, UN Programme for development of eleven pilot municipalities. Three of the participating municipalities from the Rhodope region develop pilot projects related to "Sustainable tourism – the future of Ardino", "Let's jointly make a dream! Creating integrated tourist products" – municipality of Ivaylovgrad, "Ecotourism – new opportunities" – municipality of Kirkovo (7). In 2008 a project started for the first eco route in the region³, the 160-kilometer route starts from the village of Hvoyna in the Central Rhodopes and will reach the Greek village of Paranesti. It will be achievable within 7-9 days.

The manifested potential for development of rural tourism in that region gives us reason to begin a study for developing a model of sustainable tourism the bases of which are laid by the present paper. In practice tourism more than other activities is closely related to nature and the heritage created in the regions, the existing places of interest. That is why it is important that its future corresponds with the harmonious and sustainable development of the territory and society. This is one of the reasons when projects are developed for tourism to implement full and competent diagnostics of the territory (8).

Because of that we have organized direct interviews in Smolyan municipality. The inquiries have involved: households – 40 pcs.; population - 74 people, tourists - 23 (20 Bulgarians and 3 Englishmen), business units (3) and local authorities in villages in Smolyan municipality. The population in studied villages is from 30 to 200 people.

CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN THE STUDIED REGION

Economics

The most significant for the economics of the villages is forestry and sheep-breeding.

Households own 3-4 decares (0.3-0.4 ha) of land on average. Currently the basic problem is that over 80% of the land is not used. On 5% of the land used they grow

potatoes, beans, onions, etc., and about 15 % are used as pastures that are mowed for hay. The available land is cultivated manually or with animals.

From archive materials (9) it is evident that the main occupation of people is tobacco growing, masonry and rough processing of timber (cutting and carving). Sheep breeding is one of the oldest occupations in these villages. As early as the 17th and 18th century sheep and the products made from them (skins, wool, cheese, butter, meat) were exported for the big international market - Istanbul. In the 18th century shepherds from the Rhodopes started breeding goats of which the famous Rhodope goat hair fleecy rugs are woven. The final close down of that occupation took place with the collectivization of mountainous agriculture at the end of the 1950s.

The revival of sheep breeding 3 years ago not only creates prerequisites for opening jobs, but also for using neglected pastures and meadows. Processing sheep milk into specific high-quality dairy products can also provide jobs for unemployed people and use some of the abandoned solid buildings. Wool can be used for revival of local craftsmanship (weaving, knitting), which will be one of the tourist attractions.

There is a possibility for developing equine tourism in the region (mountain riding) as part of a specific tourist product of rural tourism.

There are private hotels in the villages ("Manolykovska house", "Kokovi" villa) and several taverns for its guests. However, they are not constantly open and are used only with preliminary bookings. Land has been purchased in the villages by a Spanish company, planning to build 40 houses for its fellow-countrymen. An architectural design for construction of another holiday village with 40 houses is also ready, for Spanish tourists. The construction of Cassiopea holiday village of 15 houses has started. In the Raykovski livadi /2-3 km from Pamporovo/ there is a holiday village with 20 family houses and it is planned to build a new village with the same capacity.

Craftsmanship

Historically, as early as 14-15 century and throughout the entire Turkish rule the region has been famous for crafts (packsaddling, cooperage, homespun trade, masonry) and trade (groceries). After 1912, and especially after World War I occupational conditions in the Rhodopes changed radically, crafts began

³ which is at the amount of 285 000 leva. and is basically funded by PHARE

to decline, and the need of education increased.

All households inquired during the study declared skills in various crafts: 95% of the women can knit, some can spin (70%) and others can weave (60%). Men declare skills in initial processing of stone and wood, masonry and other building works. A greater part (69%) of the inquired does not show any interest and readiness to practice them due to disease, old age or non-assuredness that this would bring some income. Some of the inquired households declare skills in the sphere of folk medicine. A considerable part of men are interested in hunting and fishing.

Infrastructure

An important prerequisite for stimulation of rural tourism is the state of infrastructure which makes villages easily accessible. The first, most important and obligatory condition of rural tourism is the existence of a well-developed technical and social infrastructure. Currently not more than 30% replacement of the old water supply pipes had been done with PVC. However, some of the inquired (42%) complained of poor quality of water. Some of them (40%) had concerns about the sufficient water supply in the future after holiday villages are built in the region.

After the privatization of the Power Distribution Company in Smolyan people complain of unstable electricity supply system when the weather deteriorates and repair works are delayed.

Roads connecting the bigger road networks with villages currently require serious repair due to the devastating natural elements in recent years. Within the village borders there are still unfinished streets, which mayors account for by the need first to complete sewerage network but lack funds for that. Important for the village people are some internal road problems.

The sewerage system is not completely finished in all places, but a waste water treatment plant also need to be built, which would meet both important public utility requirements and would expand the opportunities for building small processing and craftsman workshops and plants.

Some of the houses have been declared architectural monuments by the National institute on cultural monuments (State Gazette, issue 35, 1974), and some for historical houses, as well. Some churches and chapels have also been declared architectural monuments.

Villages have some solid buildings currently

not in use and are victims of self-destruction.

Solid waste is collected in beaver type containers of the Municipal cleaning company in Smolyan, and done twice a month. The assessment of the population according to the inquiry is that this is not sufficient due to piling up and overflowing of waste out of containers.

Transportation services

Transportation services (to the municipal town) are twice daily (morning and evening), which is not enough according to some people in the villages (62% of the inquired). However, the rest of the inquired (38%) think that due to existing tradition to travel in a car that accidentally goes to town and the ever rising prices of transportation services, and also due to the limited number of travellers, it is pointless to have an extra run of the public bus.

Trade

Trade in villages is organized in one grocer's shop of the Regional wide-range cooperative, Smolyan, kiosks and free fruit and vegetable trade (in wagons). Both, according to local people and the conducted study, indicate increased prices of basic commodities by 15% over those in Smolyan on average.

The greatest is the dissatisfaction of people from health services. Villages are visited once in fortnight by a general practitioner seeing patients for two hours. An improvement of health and prevention service will not only meet the needs of local people, but will also guarantee greater security of tourists.

Cultural life

The region becomes a cultural centre of the renowned Ilinden convocation (20 July) in the village of Levochevo. It is the reason for revival of a number of historical sites and buildings and for building new sites related to style of life and history. For the period 2002-2004 the convocation became a centre of a competition for young folk singers and dancers and talents from whole of Bulgaria. The competition is held under the auspices of the Folk singer Nadezhda Hvoyneva, presided by Professor Dora Hristova, conductor of "The Mystery of Bulgarian voices".

Peculiarities of recreations related to the rural region

Some of the people living in the nearby city

have relatives in the villages, so that visits there have always been an active form of rural tourism. But incentives here are different (to visit the relatives) from those of rural tourism proper (getting acquainted with farmer's way of life, learning more about local traditions and crafts). That is why for this group of visitors to the villages there is no demand of an organized form of rural tourism. These tourists do not contribute considerably for the economic development of the villages visited by them. Moreover, the opportunity to visit that destination restricts their seeking a similar form of recreation in other regions. Their need of contact with rural surrounding is satisfied with staying with their relatives without any costs at all (except for travel expenses). That is why in most cases they are not ready to spend money for similar recreations in other rural areas.

Part of the Bulgarian families have small summer houses where they spend their weekends and some of their summer holidays. The main incentive is relaxation and production of fruit and vegetables for their own consumption. Of course, that type of tourism contributes to the development of infrastructure and services (retail trade) in the given regions. The problem is that owners of summer houses have different infrastructure and social needs from local people.

Sustainability of rural tourism

The basis of sustainable tourism is the concept of reconciliation, non-defiance, combining requirements of ecology, economics and society. This concept is very topical with regard to tourism and in particular relating to rural and agricultural tourism. These are its basic resource. For its successful development tourism needs people as labour resource and as consumers of the tourist services. It is necessary to establish dialogue between proponents and economic agents of the three main values: economic development and progress, preserving inherited resources and local population (8).

Sustainability as a notion comprising economic, ecological and social and cultural factors requires when studying sustainability of rural tourism to include the determination of a whole system of parameters. When reviewing the sustainable future development of rural tourism in Bulgaria we have to take into account the interests of all figures on that market, because a prerequisite for sustainable development of rural tourism is the simultaneous consideration on one hand, the interests of local people in a long-term period

(improvement of infrastructure, development of agriculture and promotion of the standard of living as a whole) and on the other hand, the interests of tourists (providing traditional rural atmosphere, which involves a number of components). The questions in the inquiry closely related to rural tourism aim at finding: the intensity of the tourist flow, planning the tourist activity, the satisfaction from rural tourism in the region of the various groups of participants in the inquiry, qualification of employees in the tourist branch, including in the tourist business the latest trends in using alternative energy sources. Therefore the indicators of sustainability we suggest for studying the sustainability of rural tourism involve:

Tourist planning

It is inherent in the municipal plan of development of Smolyan municipality, but is in an initial stage of its development. In the tourist destinations themselves (according to information supplied by local authorities). One of the reasons for that is the lack of administrative capacity and also lack of financial resources. The cooperation practice among the various rural tourism destinations is not fully developed yet.

Typical about the Programme for development of tourism on a municipal level is that it is focused on the economic aspects of development, disregarding future ecological or social and cultural consequences of the development, which is important in adhering to the sustainability requirements.

Number of visitors (tourists) in a given destination

The objective is to determine the existence of stress for the local communities. Of the respondents to the question about the assessment of the number of tourists 72% think that the number of tourists is still less than the optimum. Typical is seasonal orientation of the demand, without additional social stress. That is a positive factor but since the demand for the rural tourist product in the region is still low, the above parameters cannot be regarded as a favourable sustainability parameter.

Natural and cultural attractions

The geographical characteristics of the studied villages reveal that the northern mountainous highlands keep the villages from cold winds and the low southern uplands give an access of the warm Mediterranean influence. Hence

the climate here is mild and moderate, with comparatively warm winter and cool summer. The average altitude is 900-1000 metres. In a historical reference at the State archive in Smolyan (10), about the Silicon-tuberculosis sanatorium /village of Levochevo/, the results of a study are quoted according to which there is negative ionization in the region (6000 negative ions/cu.cm.), humidity 60-70%, as well as a number of favourable temperature conditions. These natural and climatic conditions make the villages in the region especially suitable for balneological and resort-tourist business. The region is famous for clean natural environment; hospitality of local people; specific cuisine; typical rural way of life; preserved traditions and heritage.

On the territories of the villages there are archaeological sites of Thracian-Roman, Byzantium and Slavonic-Bulgarian origin, a witness to human life since very ancient times (11). The strongest evidence are the roads that pass through it: the great Thracian road, called Yantaren, over ten meridional roads connecting the Maritsa lowland with the Mediterranean plain, some secondary roads providing the inner life in the mountain.

In present-day Smolyan municipality there are remains of ancient fortresses – Aetos, Turluka, Podvis, and Sakarka. Especially interesting is the Sakarka fortress (Stone mountain), located on the eponymous peak. On its northern part there is a small chapel “Saint Nicholas”, where in slave times the shepherds and men from Levochevo, Sokolovo and Momchilovtsi used to slaughter a sacrificial animal for their successful return from the Mediterranean lands.

Supporters of the spiritual culture of people in the course of many centuries are the mediaeval Christian monastery “Saint Nicholas” on Sakarka peak and the church “Saints Peter and Paul, The Apostles”.

However the share of old architectural style decreases more and more in the studied places, which is related to the interest of local people to build and maintain houses with urban comfort.

The availability of the registered protected areas gives more chance to attract visitors. Areas protected in the locality are the bases for development of rural tourism in the adjacent villages. The greater the share of protected areas means a greater prerequisite for sustainability in all aspects – ecological, economic and social.

Involvement of local people

The threatening depopulation of villages

towards the end of the 1950s, after cooperation of mountainous agriculture and the subsequent industrialization and urbanization of life in Bulgaria resulted in decline of cultural and economic life in the region. Along with these main reasons, an important factor for outgoing migration are the delayed public works (road and transport connections, telephone services, sewerage, etc.), implemented after the depopulation process.

A favourable phenomenon is that in recent years (after 2000) a reverse process of settlement started in the villages – citizens from Smolyan and other places in the region settled, as well as families from other parts of Bulgaria bought houses for recreation; Englishmen bought houses with the intention to settle down with their families.

Of all inquired households, 61% consisted of one member (mainly widows, widowers and single, 38% are of two members (mainly an old couple), 10% are of three members. But villages become very lively on holiday occasions and in the summer when people come back for recreation in the home places. Population doubles from tourists coming for recreation and owners of old houses who had migrated.

The greater part of households dwells in detached houses. The reluctance of some elderly people to leave their houses and to go to live with relatives of theirs in the town can be a reason for more and more frequent return of their relatives to the village. The active population in the studied villages is under 40%.

With the described situation the preference of some local people to sell their houses to people from towns seeking an opportunity for recreation in natural environment or who had decided to protect dying villages is quite natural. Although these people are not local people by their origin, they take part in the development of rural tourist business and help the survival and development of the place. They have to be accepted as local people when this parameter is reported since their goals, intentions and involvement are similar to these of the local inhabitants.

Number of jobs created by rural tourism

Since demand on the rural tourism market is not big, currently it does not create many jobs. In the studied villages 7 people are employed in rural tourism. This parameter can be improved through diversification of attractions and services. One of the inquired

companies offers mountain horse riding with marches (3-5 days) with “Rhodope barbecue” provided. About 1/5 of the inquired local people get extra income by offering beds for staying of tourists overnight, but in 60% of the cases these stays are occasional and not regulated. Inquired companies with houses offered specially for rural tourism have weekly booked weekend places and almost 60-day full bookings of beds, which in our opinion is a sign of unfavourable level of occupancy of the established long-term assets in rural tourism.

Contribution of rural tourism to local economy

It is comparatively low for the studied rural destination with regard to the registered financial income. That is partially accounted for by the available grey economy (very often rural tourism is practiced as an unofficial business). There are no data about actual income from rural tourism and that prevents the collection of sufficient information about the economic diversification in a given region. At this stage the development of rural tourism improves the quality of life mainly by providing wider personal contacts, motivating people to take better care of their environment, by purchasing local food and souvenirs, creating prerequisites for including the region in national development projects. In order to achieve that goal, it is compulsory to be familiar with the real problems of each zone of the studied territory in order to substantiate integrated strategies for the future development of the local community. That definition engages local managing bodies to create opportunities for prosperity on their territory by preserving and further sustainable development of the adjoining environment, culture, crafts, history, etc.

Environmental factors

They are often neglected in the plans for development of rural tourism. Even when attempts are made for optimizing waste management, it is aimed at the most visited tourist destinations with most urgent ecological issues. The inclusion of renewable power sources is not a component of the development of rural tourism. The strict ecological policy of the European Union influences the processes of economic development in our country which will favour the ecological balance in rural tourism.

Training and qualification of the labour force

Since with rural tourism many local people are involved without tourist education, a significant part of people directly employed in the tourist business do not have the relevant qualification. They have poor knowledge of foreign languages, are not aware of the basic business mechanisms, there is not a culture of service, etc.

Rural mountainous regions, as is the studied one, have extremely poor demographic parameters (over 50% of the people are aged over 60), lack of sufficient number of young and vital people, low population in educational culture, etc. (12). BAAT reports that the poor age structure of population in the mountainous tourism regions deteriorates sharply the quality of the offered service. The diversity of services is still poor and many owners of well furnished houses think that showing a sheep, a cow and offering cheese on a tile exhausts rural lifestyle.

Satisfaction from the development of rural areas

For the inquired business units one could say that there is not sufficient satisfaction (they give a good mark) from the development of rural tourism. Main reasons about that are: great differences between expected and actual profit; poor growth of the sector; bureaucracy; insufficient support from the government; insufficient marketing and business skills of the local people; lack of national demand of the rural tourist product. Local people themselves also give a good assessment for the development of rural tourism in their villages, but only from the point of view of the number of visitors on the occasion of specific attractive events in the region.

On the other hand inquiries show that usually tourists are satisfied with their tourist experience. There is relatively high share of tourists who have visited rural tourism destinations more than once. The problem is related to the overall low level of demand: regardless of how much consumers are satisfied (at least within a short period), their demand at this stage cannot provide sustainability for the visited regions. Some of tourists (40%) define the product as unvaried and divided.

The opinion of inquired foreign tourists is unanimous that proposals for trips and village houses offered on international tourist fairs and on the Internet, are very attractive and the greater part of hosts are extremely hospitable; the food that guest houses offer has excellent taste. However, tourists cannot

participate a lot in the life of visited villages. The best idea would be to learn more about the renowned Bulgarian folk songs and their performance. The unique character of certain aspects of rural life is not sufficiently advertised and promoted. For certain niches in rural tourism it is good to develop international market – such as bird watching, ecological or luxury stay at rehabilitation centres.

It turns out that foreign tourists are mostly interested in two types of rural tourism in Bulgaria: a) staying in regions of popular tourist destinations (motivated by the considerably lower prices); b) in regions of famous folk fairs. The development of other forms of rural tourism (active recreation in natural surrounding or participation in farming activities) is still in an early stage of development.

According to Menno Juastra (programme coordinator of projects for ecological and rural tourism) foreign tourists have to be convinced to stay longer in Bulgaria by maintaining low prices of stays and offering secondary services as well – such as one-day walking trips, meals on the farm ("Table d'Hotel"), fishing day or other trips, singing and crafts classes (13).

CONCLUSIONS

1. Although rural tourism in the studied region has a potential for being one of the most efficient tools for regional development, it hasn't reached the expected level of development. Main reasons for that are: underdeveloped institutional framework; unfavourable financial situation; backwardness in the development of these regions; poor interest on behalf of professional tourist organizations (rural tourism does not promise great profits); aging of rural population; no business experience of rural population; not fairly good image of village holidays among Bulgarian population, i.e. comparatively cheap, but not so attractive.
2. Some attractions of rural tourism such as participation in farmer's activities and involvement in housewife's family life are not so well developed yet. This means that there is a need of a marketing approach in developing complicated tourist products according to the needs of various segments of the tourist market. Moreover, the diversification of all these activities will preserve the vitality of the region and will reduce the risk of

depopulation (14).

3. For villages in the studied region there are natural climatic, geographic, human, physical and economic factors for development of tourism, including rural tourism: the Rhodope mountain has had and will have effect on the economic, social, ecological and cultural development of villages; the proximity of the Pamporovo resort and its development will put fresh life into villages as resort holiday centres; there is a potential of unemployed who can be employed for the future development of rural tourism; some of inhabitants in retirement age can also be attracted for the cause of tourism by enriching the tourism product through their involvement in various demo attractions of crafts.
4. The development of sheep and horse breeding is a prerequisite for using existing natural resources, for creating traditional local products, for development of specific tourist products and attractions.
5. One can expect the issue of sustainability if the region gets densely populated due to the intensive development of the complex form of rural tourism, which may result in negative effects of tourism.
6. A problem that needs to be overcome is the distinction of people from their rural identity. It is hard for people to find their place in the new economic and social order. The spirit of cooperation and mutual trust dies away and the role of households as an environment for social communication subsides.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The establishment and maintenance of ecohotels and the offering of meals cooked from ecological products is also among the most fashionable and expensive natural experiences. The tourist product that includes getting acquainted with local flora and fauna, development of social and youth tourism, looking at local craft activities, participation in the local convention held, participation in preparing local dishes and using the experience of local people in hunting, fishing, collecting herbs and preparing folk medicine remedies in enriching the local tourist product.
2. The perspective for development of tourism necessitates the establishing of commercial sites complying with the needs of the expanding market, improving

- and increasing sites for hotel- and restaurant-keeping. That is related to turning local companies into beneficiaries on programmes for development of rural areas.
3. The development of traditional sheep-breeding has to be integrated in various forms of rural tourism. That means production of ecological and delicious dairy and meat products; production of hand-made and crafts articles from wool and skins – clothes, souvenirs, etc.;
 4. The development of horse-breeding has to be based on the idea for expanding equine tourism in the region as a component in rural tourism activities.
 5. Developing information consultancy, educational and promotion work by establishment of a computer information centre with internet access. On one hand this is a condition for efficient implementation of the strategy for development of rural tourism, and on the other hand this activity will serve as training specialists on site needed for the branch.
 6. Motivating the population for restoring and preserving their rural identity by maintaining rural lifestyle and way of life (architectural and interior look of houses, crafts, family-type farming and animal-breeding, culinary traditions, style of clothing and speaking, church holidays and traditions, etc.). This will place the rich Rhodope culture in the basis of living and that will inevitably provoke the attractiveness of the region.
 1. Acquiring special knowledge by local people. The requirements of clients interested in rural tourism raise the need of acquiring more skills to communicate, to tell interesting facts about processes related to agricultural production, the lifestyle and traditions of the place, natural sights of interest and also cultural and other monuments (15).
 7. Employees in rural tourism need to know the laws and other legal regulatory documents that regulate the tourist activity and to some extent of rural tourism. The good knowledge of legal regulations is an important factor for the development of successful business. For rural tourism, as well as for the mass type, there are business contacts with many spheres /transport, communications, food stuffs suppliers, construction, etc./. The good knowledge of regulatory documents requires a lot of efforts and qualification and is extremely important as a factor for successful functioning (15).
 2. Acquiring language skills for improving contacts with foreign tourists.
 8. Increasing the capacity of local management for self-organization and participation in programmes and projects for funding local sustainable regional development and participation in organizing local traditional and new events – conventions, festivals, fairs, etc.
 9. Creating expedient forms of national and international cooperation and exchange of good practices for development of rural tourism. In that respect we have to use all possible means for approachment of adjacent villages to provide better and equal conditions for living and recreation.
 10. Integrating rural tourism into development of other forms of alternative tourism, including voluntary tourism ('voluntourism').
 11. Facilitating the access of entrepreneurs in rural and agricultural tourism, especially as far as bank guarantees are concerned, grace period and interest rates (16).
 12. Intensification and improvement of the forms of advertising and enhancing the image of the region as a reliable and secure destination by using Internet advertisement, one can even expect greater interest from tourists from abroad.
 13. Organizing research and profound assessment on the basis of sustainability indicators defined. Better information and understanding of these problems will facilitate planning and development of rural tourism to satisfy the needs of stakeholders (local people, tourists, businessmen, ecologists).

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