Abstract

Now, Romanian tourism is being confronted with problems of infrastructure and image, and this is a reason we consider that the chance of sustainable development of this area is being represented by promoting niche tourism, namely cultural ecotourism. In an age of globalization, the authentic cultural patrimony is that which makes the difference and represents an opportunity for sustainable development of local communities. The essence of sustainable development is represented by the harmonious integration of economic development, by responsible governing, by ensuring the social cohesion and community man - nature. By the attested value cultural ecotourism can become a touristic product, an original and brand like one that can extend at a regional and national level. The results of the paper can be landmarks for new applications in research and represent the basis of identification at a local level of new economic and financial instruments with good social impact on local communities.

Keywords: ecotourism; cultural; touristic product; sustainable development;

1. Introduction

The events staged in Sibiu during 2007, the year in which it was the European Capital of Culture, were truly unique. It was the first European Capital of Culture (ECOC) to be hosted in one of the countries that joined the European Union after 2004, and the organizers faced a major challenge in planning the event just as Romania was joining the EU.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: niculavirgil@yahoo.com (V. Nicula), simona_spanu@yahoo.com (S. Spânú)
The main objectives of the event were: raising the international profile of Sibiu; long-term cultural development; attracting international visitors; enhancing feelings of pride and self-confidence; growing and expanding the local audience for culture; improving social cohesion and creating an economic downstream; improving cultural and non-cultural infrastructure; developing relationships with other European cities/regions and promoting European cultural co-operation; promoting creativity and innovation.

2. Material and methods

Using the experience with Sibiu - European Capital of Culture and Mârginea Sibiului – the most romantic ecotourist destination, the main objective of the paper is to unfold a pattern for promoting cultural ecotourism for local communities regarding Sibiu area. The motivation for the choice comes out of the wish to render profitable in a superior manner the huge cultural and ecotouristic potential of the mentioned region.

Cultural tourism is present in bibliography mostly in the last decade as a sign for preoccupations of the specialists in the field and as consequence of the interest manifested by voyage consumers for this type of tourism. We mention in this respect works such as those of Ivanovici Milena, Cultural Tourism, Iuta Cape Town South Africa Publ. House, 2008, Smith Melanie, Robinson M, Cultural Tourism in a Changing World, British Library, Canada, 2006, Girard L.F(Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Local Development, Italy 2009, Kockel Ullrich (Culture, Tourism and Development - The Case of Ireland, Liverpool University Press, 1994), Berriane M., (Tourism, Culture and Development in the Arab Region. Supporting culture to develop tourism, developing tourism to support culture, UNESCO, 1999) or magazines such as those published by Daralli Fiorella (Almatourism - Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development, Rimini, Italia) and Endresen K., (Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Heritage - A Review of Development Assistance and Its Potential to Promote Sustainability, NWHO, 1999).

Ecotourism represents an updated theme that rise the interest of specialists in the field, reflected in scientific papers, books, treaties that appeared after 2000. With managerial strategies (Butnaru Gina Ionela, Strategii manageriale pentru asigurarea calităţii produselor și serviciilor turistice, Editura Tehnopress, Iaşi, 2009), to agrotouristic marketing (Alecu, I. N., Constantin, M., Agroturism și marketing agroturistic, Ceres Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2006) and ecotourism (Glavan V., Turism rural. Agroturism. Turism durabil. Ecoturism. Ed. Economică, Bucureşti, 2003, Nistoreanu P., Ţigă Gabriela, Popescu Delia, Ecoturism şi turism rural, A.S.E. Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2003), to national strategies and standards of ecotouristic certifying (Ministry of Regional Development for Tourism – Strategia de dezvoltare a ecoturismului, faza I și faza a II - a, 2010, OMT - Technical assistance for the elaboration of the ecotourism strategy of Romania (Final report), 2005, Standardul European de Certificare în Ecoturism (The European Ecotourism Labelling Standard) – EETLS, 2009), there have been tackled different themes but the cultural side was not mentioned or it was registered very briefly. We consider necessary the outlining of such an important aspect because the nature and culture individualizes places and leave the mark, have an impact on local communities. It is through the Guide published in 2012 by the members of the coordinating team for the project that we highlighted the importance of gastronomic culture, the wealthy tradition and popular habits in Sibiu surroundings which distinguishes through an ecotouristic potential as well as the habits, traditions, popular costumes, trades, side by side with multicultural gastronomy (Romanian, German, Hungarian).

3. Results and discussions

Ecotourism is a tourism which directly or indirectly promotes and supports sustainable economic development. The cultural side of Romanian ecotourism can determine on a local plan a good turning into account of the natural and cultural potential, in this way having a contribution to increasing the places for work both in the touristic area and auxiliary sectors of services and managing local resources; it diversifies the local economy mostly of rural adjacent areas where agriculture has few possibilities to develop; it stimulates the rural economy through an additional demand of agricultural products and more financial capital; it contributes to the improvement of local infrastructure; it favours the intercultural understanding and free communication among inhabitants and tourists; the touristic activities diversified, can entail the increase of the interest for environment protection, by convincing the tourism consumers and responsibility factors on the importance of natural protected areas.
Ways of promoting cultural ecotourism for local communities outlines scientific solutions that back the social development and contribute to the improvement of its human condition. The tourists’ guidance towards cultural circuits is more and more evident (according to studies made by Euromonitor). As a result for this phenomenon in order to attract visitors it is at a world level that the promotion of cultural and natural trumps is made. With an original offer, a unique one Sibiu county can be successful in tourism and mostly in cultural ecotourism. By using the experience gained in the project “Sibiu Cultural European Capital” we consider that cultural ecotourism is an opportunity for Sibiu to become ecotouristic and cultural destinations on the European touristic map, not only for foreign visitors, but for Romanians too, with benefits on local communities within the rural environment and will contribute to the increase of rendering visible Sibiu county that can become landmark in intercultural and multicultural tourism. Backing culture can be done by developing ecotourism and mutually too, the ecotouristic potential can be turned into account through culture.

This research includes regular surveys of visitors, analysis of tourism flows and other statistics for Sibiu County, between 2009 and 2013. The evaluation report showed that the programme had successfully met many of its short-term objectives, attracting large numbers of visitors, increasing cultural participation, and improving the image of the city in Romania and abroad. Since 2007, it is clear that visitors to the city have been visiting an even wider range of attractions. As Sibiu has developed its tourism and cultural product, the visitor experience has improved as well. The ECOC in 2007 did not in itself produce an increase in the quality of the experience, but it seems that the legacy of the event is a notably increased visit quality. The image of Sibiu has remained fairly positive since 2007. The strength of its image as a city with a rich history, culture, and art has increased slightly, as has its image as a European city.

Sibiu is seeing as a friendly, historic city of culture and art, which shows the positive image impacts of the ECOC and other recent developments. The image of Sibiu in relation to other cultural destinations in Europe has also improved, reflecting the increased quality of the tourism offer. The relatively high scores for Sibiu as a cultural destination are of course caused mainly by Romanian respondents – Sibiu tends to score lower among foreign visitors than other European cities.

Sibiu has been chosen as location for this project because it has an old tradition (before 1989) and, more recently, holds the “Golden Apple” trophy for the hospitality of the people and the well-established agro-tourism.

Statistical data on the evolution of tourism indicators in Sibiu County, in 2009-2013, shows increasing interest manifested both among tourists from Romania and abroad.

### Table 1. Tourist arrivals in units with functions of tourists' accommodation guesthouses and agro type

| Units with functions of tourists' accommodation | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| **2009**                                      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Guesthouses                                   | 698  | 619  | 1150 | 1153 | 1562| 1604 | 1535 | 1571 | 1227 | 1062 | 917  | 903  |
| Agritouristic guesthouses                     | 991  | 1085 | 739  | 1496 | 1778| 2001 | 2835 | 3222 | 1963 | 1392 | 964  | 1062 |
| **2010**                                      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Guesthouses                                   | 420  | 296  | 293  | 376  | 685 | 509  | 238  | 531  | 464  | 463  | 456  | 506  |
| Agritouristic guesthouses                     | 445  | 493  | 531  | 414  | 992 | 938  | 1340 | 1387 | 945  | 689  | 364  | 865  |
| **2011**                                      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Guesthouses                                   | 73   | 42   | 65   | 520  | 682 | 365  | 498  | 586  | 426  | 189  | 133  | 497  |
| Agritouristic guesthouses                     | 250  | 309  | 342  | 452  | 926 | 602  | 946  | 1203 | 1008 | 526  | 441  | 809  |
| **2012**                                      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Guesthouses                                   | 51   | 202  | 355  | 416  | 855 | 746  | 1014 | 1226 | 747  | 536  | 345  | 422  |
| Agritouristic guesthouses                     | 222  | 473  | 476  | 1055 | 1594| 2500 | 1577 | 2984 | 1878 | 759  | 507  | 1024 |
| **2013**                                      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Guesthouses                                   | 662  | 481  | 914  | 936  | 829 | 1586 | 1162 | 1560 | 1191 | 1214 | 1188 |
| Agritouristic guesthouses                     | 1650 | 1538 | 1878 | 2382 | 2221| 2449 | 1695 | 2418 | 1759 | 1824 | 1785 |

Source: NIS, 2014
From the analysis of this data, it is obvious that tourists are increasing demands for tourism products in the Sibiu County, especially in summer (Table 1 and 2), but in 2013 it is evident that the tourist came almost constantly each month of the year (Fig. 1). That means that the environment, gastronomy, traditional festivals and the unpolluted environment represent serious motives for the tourist to choose Sibiu County as holiday destination. This reality is reflected for the reflected of the growing up of the Net use index of accommodation places (Table 3).

Table 2. Establishments of tourists’ facilities with functions of tourist accommodation, such as guesthouses and agro type

| Units with functions of tourists’ accommodation | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Guesthouses 2009                              | 1296 | 1172 | 1900 | 2075 | 3770| 3055| 2939| 2575| 2827| 1675| 1805| 1686|
| Agritouristic guesthouses 2009                | 2527 | 2110 | 1906 | 3656 | 3582| 4455| 5718| 6289| 4732| 2780| 2320| 3137|
| Guesthouses 2010                              | 828  | 603  | 625  | 679  | 1945| 987 | 424 | 1249| 743 | 832 | 808 | 1145|
| Agritouristic guesthouses 2010                | 1167 | 1303 | 1257 | 1025 | 2574| 2471| 3593| 4309| 1920| 1229| 639 | 2130|
| Guesthouses 2011                              | 139  | 85   | 100  | 513  | 1605| 1103| 875 | 1183| 775 | 301 | 600 | 1300|
| Agritouristic guesthouses 2011                | 478  | 655  | 762  | 849  | 1913| 1413| 3748| 2150| 1910| 1068| 265 | 1895|
| Guesthouses 2012                              | 98   | 426  | 1079 | 914  | 1486| 1709| 2475| 2352| 1673| 936 | 491 | 827 |
| Agritouristic guesthouses 2012                | 797  | 639  | 1482 | 2024 | 4008| 4230| 3641| 5357| 3575| 1924| 718 | 1928|
| Guesthouses 2013                              | 1370 | 627  | 1109 | 1169 | 1048| 1816| 2737| 2184| 1506| 1660| 1537|
| Agritouristic guesthouses 2013                | 3412 | 1937 | 2548 | 3534 | 3010| 3459| 2865| 4370| 2835| 2782| 3083|

Source: NIS, 2014

Table 3. Net use index of accommodation places

| Units with functions of tourists’ accommodation | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Total county 2009                             | 16,5 | 16,6 | 19,0 | 19,7 | 26,8| 28,0| 31,3| 32,1| 26,2| 23,7| 21,7| 20,0|
| Total county 2010                             | 15,8 | 15,4 | 15,0 | 18,1 | 23,2| 21,2| 24,9| 27,9| 25,2| 20,8| 16,0| 16,6|
| Total county 2011                             | 17,3 | 17,4 | 22,9 | 20,8 | 34,7| 39,0| 38,0| 36,6| 26,4| 24,0| 22,5| 28,8|

Source: NIS, 2014
The cultural ecotourism sector’s development and prosperity will lead simultaneously to increases in other sectors of the economy: food, trade, transport etc. As the demand for ecotourism is permanent and on a steady global growth, and as a continuing trend that influences the tourism market and local communities, it is the interest of local communities to promote the creation of sustainable development models.

Using the experience with Sibiu - European Capital of Culture and Mărginimea Sibiului – the most romantic ecotourist destination, the main objective of the paper is to unfold a pattern for promoting cultural ecotourism for local communities regarding Sibiu area. The motivation for the choice comes out of the wish to render profitable in a superior manner the huge cultural and ecotouristic potential of the mentioned region.

4. Conclusions

The cultural ecotourism represents an important step in education on eco-economic and bio-economic principles for the population in order to be aware of the value regarding the cultural and ecotouristic patrimony: cultural events and the ethno folklore activities, traditional products, other creative activities. Cultural ecotourism will represent a possibility to a better knowledge of Romanian realities with impact on local development, to be a catalyst at a local level to implement coherently and synergically the decisions regarding the Romanian rural area where a strategy can be developed to promote and implement the concept of cultural ecotourism.

The cultural ecotouristic activity have a contribution to preserve the natural and cultural inheritance and includes local communities in planning processes, in development and snapshots like workings, in this way making a contribution to their welfare. At the same time this idea in enlisted in the European politics (Europe 2000) as one that aims at green economy. The essence of the sustainable development is given by preserving the patrimony in favour of the welfare for the present and future generations comprising not only the capital produced by people and scientific knowledge, technological too, but the natural capital as well. The touristic products like cultural ecotourism represent the best alternatives among economy, culture and environment protection and are meant to be adequate financial economic instruments for a permanent promotion of touristic actions, of turning into account the cultural patrimony in the ecotouristic areas.

The implementation of diverse touristic products in ecotourism operators shall coordinate work, towards higher performance and therefore obtaining a sustainable competitive advantage.

By promoting cultural ecotouristic products including the cultural events we contribute to the welfare of local communities referred to through the increase of the number of touristic arrivals in the area but within the limits of bearing the natural capital. The diversification of non-agricultural economic activities within rural areas and the encouraging of the entrepreneurs will determine the creation, the improvement and diversification of facilities and touristic attractions.

Rural tourism and ecotourism represent an alternative for employment for labour force in the countryside, a way to diversify rural economy and bring income source for the inhabitants within the rural area. The way of life for rural population is connected with a rich material and immaterial patrimony that confers specific identity for the village. These elements of originality must be preserved and turned into account in a superior manner.

We consider that is important to amplify the efforts to improve the natural and social environment, services, and activities for a better marketing of specific traditional products. As priority, it is the protection and preserving the cultural and natural patrimony by creating, improving and by the diversification of touristic attractions.

Cultural ecotourism product quality requires the application of flexible strategies, diversification of tourism benefits and differentiation of the tourism product offered compared to competitive offerings. The role of the product differentiation strategy in cultural ecotourism versus competitive offerings related to other forms of tourism is to enable the development of ecotourism product originality through creative ways of living space and tourism with spiritual meanings and country specific characteristic applied to regions or localities.
The development of cultural ecotourism in the Sibiu County calls for special attention to be paid to environmental demands, representing the "raw material" scope and conduct of business travel.

Sibiu area has all the ingredients necessary for the development of cultural ecotourism, but the essential condition for the sustainability of the tourism phenomenon is the existence of quality certification of ecotourism services.

References

Bowen, D. și Clarke, J. (2009) - Contemporary Tourist Behavior. London: Cabi Publishing.
Cosmescu, I., Nicula, V. (2004), Diversitatea și calitatea serviciilor turistice în bazinul Mării Negre-“, Ed. Constant, Sibiu
Honey, M. (2002), Ecotourism and Certification: Setting standards in practice, Island Press, Washington D.C., 2002
Hornoiu Remus, Nistoreanu Puiu, Tanase Mihai Ovidiu -ECOROM – propunere de sistem de indicatori pentru certificarea calității în ecoturism, Vol XI,Nr. 26, 2009
Hornoiu, R.I.: Ecoturismul – orientare priorităță în dezvoltarea durabilă a comunităților locale, Ed. ASE, București, 2009
Ionciță M., “Economia serviciilor”, Ed. Uranus, București, 2006
Minciu Rodica, Păduceană Mihaela, Popescu Delia, Hornoiu Remus (2012) - Cererea pentru vacanță/călătoria în ariile protejate - dimensiunea aer de comportamentului ecologic al turistilor, Revista Amfiteatru Economic, Vol. XIV, Nr. 31,
Minciu, R. et al., (2010) - Comercialization of Holidays in the Protected Natural Areas – Form of the Sustainable Development in Tourism. Amfiteatru Economic, X(27),
Nicula, V., Spanu Simona , Ciocetea G., (2012), Ghidul ecoturismului agroturistice, Ed. ULB Sibiu,
Richards, G. and Wilson, J. (2006) -Developing creativity in tourist experiences: a solution to the serial reproduction of culture?, Tourism Management, No. 27.
Sepe Marichela, Di Trapani G., (2010)-Cultural tourism and creative regeneration, International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research, Vol. 4 no.3,
Tuclea, C., Păduceanu, M. Hornoiu, R., (2008), A certification system for ecotourism services in Romania, Encuentros 2nd Days of Touristica, Portoroz, New Europe- New Tourist Destination, Turstica Colegge of Tourism, Slovenia, 2008
INCDT (2009) - Strategia națională de dezvoltare a ecoturismului în România, Faza I, Experiența ecoturistică la nivel național și internațional, București,
INCDT(2009) - Strategia națională de dezvoltare a ecoturismului în România, Faza a II-a , Planul strategic de dezvoltare a ecoturismului în România, București
International Standards Office, 2008. ISO 9001- Quality management systems. Requirements. Geneva: ISO.
International Standards Office, 2009. ISO 9004 - Managing for the sustained success of an organization. A quality management approach. Geneva: ISO.