

Managerial Strategies for the Conservation of Rurality in Rural Tourism

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Abstract

If we admit that rurality designates small densities, open areas, small settlements below 1,000 inhabitants, and land reserved mainly to agricultural and forestry practices, and as natural area, if we admit that society tends to be traditional and that government al policies tend to conserve rather than to make rapid or radical changes, then we should admit that rural tourism should be an activity generating new incomes in the area. Rurality also means preserving a continuum in the approach of different types of areas with different characteristics, a concept that can also be of use in the identification of activities specific to rural tourism. Be they activities specific to the rural environment or activities common to the rural area, they need to aim at the conservation of rurality as a main tourism resource. Managerial strategies in rural tourism contribute effectively to rural development, provided they are sustainable and that rural tourism be not the only solution for rural development.

Keywords: conservation, managerial strategies, rural tourism, sustainable rural tourism

1. Introduction

Specialists in the field of tourism and specialists from different world organisations with most diverse scientific activities are working to find the best solutions to preserve human existence. Most of these solutions are related to the recovery of the human resource through vacations and travels, which asks for major changes of the human behaviour [1-4].

The last years of the 20th century brought to the specialists' attention a new field of aspects related to holidays: rural tourism or ecotourism. This new form of tourism has stirred up the interest of ever more groups of experts in the field through the new philosophy based on sustainability, preservability, continuity and, last but not least, on a higher concern for environmental issues [5].

This acknowledgement of the global importance of rural tourism – ecotourism – has been developed by the Commission for sustainable development which asked international organisms and governments to support it. World Tourism Organisation (W.T.O.) and United Nations Environmental Programme (U.N.E.P.) have united their forces to:

- raise public authority, civil society, and consumers' awareness concerning the capacity of rural tourism (ecotourism) to contribute to the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in rural areas and to the improvement of living standards of these areas [6];
- implement methods and techniques of planning destinations and management to ensure long-term sustainability;
- promote exchanges of expertise in the field;
- increase the number of opportunities through marketing programmes and efficient promotion of rural tourism products;

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-publish guides concerning sustainable development and rural tourism management in natural parks and protected areas.

No matter the area in which rural tourism is practiced, this form of tourism addresses small groups of medium-income visitors that need to minimise the negative impact on the natural and social and cultural environment through the raising of awareness of both the natives and of visitors related to the need to conserve natural and cultural assets through the promotion of sustainability. Sustainable tourism is considered a promoter of the management of all the resources so that economic, social, and aesthetic needs be satisfied by maintaining cultural integrity, main ecological processes, biological diversity, and life maintenance systems [7].

2. Materials and methods

Experience in the field shows that tourism strategies can really contribute to rural development provided tourism management strategies are sustainable and that rural tourism is not the only instrument of rural development, which made us develop a few managerial strategies that contribute to the conservation of rurality.

3. Results and discussion

Rural tourism should be characterised by several distinct features: be practiced in rural areas and be rural from a functional point of view, i.e. built on the characteristics specific to the rural world (open areas, contact with the nature and the natural world, social heritage, and traditional practices). It should have a traditional character, grow slowly and organically, represent a complex model of the environment, economy, and rural history.

Managerial strategies in rural tourism should take into account four elements:

- tourists are more and more demanding and they are looking for a quality environment, thoroughly managed;
- managers should bear in mind the fact that they have long-term environmental responsibilities and that technologies and managerial strategies can help them face these responsibilities;
- rural tourism is practiced in a sensible and physically fragile human environment: this is why it is essential that managerial strategies be not

focused on area-adapted development without stressing the area;

- the managerial strategy should unify small enterprises involved in rural tourism to obtain public financing on the ground of wide strategic plans;

- rural tourism is more and more flexible and oriented towards enterprises, hence the need for a management and management strategies in rural tourism that contribute to the conservation of rurality.

The management of rural tourism has been approached in three different ways:

- the management of recreation, that aims at controlling the visitors and vehicles, the area policies, the management of flora and fauna, the design and maintenance of the roads, the assessment of transport capacities, and the policies of interpretation: though many of these are also common to tourism, they cannot answer all the questions specific to the rural area since approaching the management of recreation is, in its essence, non-commercial;

- the concept of sustainable tourism or alternative tourism is a system of long-term tourism planning: though it is an attractive concept for the manager in the rural tourism, it is more and more tested despite the size of its general goal, of the utopia of its particular goals and of its newness;

- the management of rural tourism project, viable from the point of view of its goal and quality, is practiced by communitarian social workers, by economic development agencies, by marketers, by specialists in the field of education, by historians and experts in the field of interpreting, by planners in the field of land use, and by agricultural councillors.

In our opinion, any managerial strategy project in rural tourism should combine both knowledge and expertise of all these sources, no matter the three forms of approach, the most important issue being how to develop a form of sustainable rural tourism that meets these two criteria we consider essential:

- preserving intrinsic values of the rural environment in parallel with supporting economic life of the rural environment;
- contributing to long-term profitability of interests in the tourism industry involved in the transfer of the visitors at both interregional and international levels.

There are a few elements on which we should convene when they develop managerial strategies

and we really know to successfully promote this form of tourism:

- the necessity of accepting the following elements that define rural tourism: natural environment, agricultural processes, crops, communities, lifestyle, identity, and relationship with land and nature;
- the necessity of adopting special measures to develop tourism management in rural areas;
- the need to identify and reconsider periodically the goals of rural development of rural tourism;
- the need of partnerships between companies and community to help rural areas.

In practice, there are numerous issues that need to be dealt with within what is called the project management in rural tourism: the development of a friendly relationship between the entrepreneur and the environment, the need of managers, the need to ensure and manage infrastructure. We need to develop strategies that allow the understanding the necessity of establishing a relationship with the tourism market to carry out research in the field of development and management of rural tourism (public / private sector), the development and monitoring of accommodation facilities, the need to ensure and manage infrastructure through transport facilities and services, through information facilities, through the interpretation of the landscape and of the heritage, through the protection and recovery of an environment stressed by rural tourism activities.

We need to develop legislation for the planning and conservation of rurality through the development of strategic plans of sustainable regional and local rural tourism in order to assess:

- strong points;
- weak points;
- opportunities;
- threats;

For a better guidance of the public or private investment management with a view to assessing requirements concerning environmental management.

We also need to ensure consultancy in rural tourism business through training in the field and through the development of a monitoring and assessment process of the tourism industry and the development of a mechanism meant to meet environmental and communitarian interest needs (public sector → private sector).

4. Conclusions

In order to preserve rurality, rural tourism should be practiced at rural scale without altering the environment; it should also have a traditional character, increase slowly and organically at local level through managerial strategies that contribute long-term to the welfare and prosperity of the area. Through these strategies there will be sustainability in rural tourism, i.e. tourism development will have to support the rural character specific to the area with sustainable development from the point of view of resource use. Through managerial strategies, rural tourism becomes a potential instrument in the preservation of rurality and sustainability rather than a tool of urbanisation and development.

Managerial strategies in rural tourism aim mainly at preserving rurality as a main tourism source through the preservation of values intrinsic to the rural environment thus contributing to long-term profitability of the tourism industry interests involved in the transfer of visitors at regional and local levels.

Managerial strategies should combine, no matter the rural tourism management, both knowledge concerning project management in rural tourism and expertise of other sources for the development and improvement of tourist attractions and the development of a friendly, flexible partnership with the environment, hence the need for management and for performing management strategies in rural tourism that ensure the preservation of rurality.

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