

RURAL TOURISM - GROWTH FACTOR MOLDOVA'S COMPETITIVENESS

TURISMUL RURAL - FACTOR AL CREȘTERII COMPETITIVITĂȚII REPUBLICII MOLDOVA

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Abstract: The Republic of Moldova has a rich potential for the rural tourism prosperity which, by virtue of the historical traditions of the geographical conditions, is the most dynamic form of the domestic tourism. The Republic of Moldova, as a tourist destination, has a rich potential for its visitors. The tourist product of the country is a complex ensemble of environment, both natural and man-made. After the study done, we noticed that there are some obstacles that obstruct the development, at an appropriate level of the tourism such as: the reduced number of the accommodation structures in rural areas as well as the lack of a legislative framework that would regularize their development, the lack of knowledge about the real value of the rural tourism patrimony and its insufficient valorisation, the lack of investments in the rural infrastructure. All these elements impede and stop the valorisation of the rural tourism in the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: rural tourism, traditional, boarding houses, investments in tourism, tourism potential, tourism resources, professional tourism.

Method and methodology. In the investigation and elaboration of the scientific article as research methods served: the observation method, the abduction and the deduction, logical analysis and synthesis, the analogy and the comparison. The results of the study are presented as graphs and tables.

Introduction

Despite its small area, the Republic of Moldova has a considerable tourism potential represented first of all by the geomorphologic aspect of its territory – an unusual diversity of landscape reservations or natural landscapes and unique geological monuments of European and world value. The Republic of Moldova has valuable natural tourism potential, which imposes itself through the attractions of a special picturesque, being one of the richest tourism resources.

The illustrative elements of the natural potential, which may give a necessary quality of tourism development, are: the country relief, the hydrographic tourism potential, the vegetation and the fauna, the topography and the geology, the natural protected areas, the monuments of nature – the hydrological, the natural reservations, the landscape reservations, the forestry, the cultural patrimonial ones etc. The valorization of these tourist resources is done within the types of tourism such as: the recreation tourism, the religious tourism, the grape growing and the wine-growing tourism, the health tourism, the shopping tourism, the agritourism and the rural tourism.

The rural localities in most European countries, lately, capitalize intensely the tourist dimension of the natural, social and human space in which they are situated. The potential of attraction that they have, transforms the rural areas which are equally requested as the urban destinations on the tourist market. Thus, the rural communities in general and the local entrepreneurs particularly, exploit all their available resources in order to transform the communities in tourist destinations.

Moldova is situated at a crossroads of European roads and is easily accessible from any cardinal point: by railways, by Trans European roads and by air. The relief of the country, comprising plains and hills, is ideal for tourism. Since ancient times, the travelers have seen Moldova as an impressive territory, due to its adornments.

Content

Moldova has a rich potential for the rural tourism prosperity, which, by virtue of historical traditions of geographical conditions, is the most dynamic form of the domestic tourism. The Republic of Moldova, as a tourist destination, has a rich potential for its visitors. The tourist product of the country is a complex ensemble of environment, both natural and created by humans (patrimony, culture, activities and services for visitors).

Agricultural and picturesque communities, our villages may offer various services for tourists wishing to rest in the heart of nature:

- the lodging in traditional houses of rural type;
- the opportunity to involve themselves in country pursuits and activities;
- the familiarization with the folklore, the entertainment and the local traditions;
- the familiarization with the handicrafts practiced in a certain locality and the opportunity to participate, of those interested, in the process of handicrafts.

The rural tourism is a recent phenomenon. In the European countries, the rural tourism is practiced for decades, spontaneously or organized. What is new, however, refers to the dimension of the phenomenon in rural areas. This expansion is determined by the existence of two motivations for the rural tourism; on the one hand, it is the revival and the development of

rural area, but on the other hand, by an alternative form of tourism, mass tourism which is a traditional one.

In the whole of the global economy of the tourism, the rural tourism is defined as being the tourist capitalization of rustic areas, of the natural resources, of cultural heritage, of cultural buildings, of village traditions, of agricultural products, through branded products (established) illustrative of the regional identity that covers the customers' needs in terms of lodging, food, recreation activities, entertainment and various services, for a local and sustainable development and for an adequate response to the needs of recreation in the modern society, in a new social vision town-village.[16]

The rural tourism has a permanent character and dispose of a heterogeneous structure of reception, represented not only by the peasant households, but also by camping and the peasant villages. In this case, the basic activity of the persons involved is the provision of tourist services and the realized incomes are permanent.

The rural tourism has several features that differentiate it from the traditional tourism by:

- the tourism consumption occurs in the rural areas where are essential: the quality of the boarding houses and of the reception services;
- the tourist offer is authentic and it is led by the local people;
- it is a complementary activity to agricultural activity and not its alternative;
- it offers to people with low incomes the possibility to rest, to recreate in holidays, in week-ends, in the rural landscape with cultural educative values and with a specific hospitality;
- it does not require huge investments for arrangements of the infrastructure or superstructure of the tourism;
- it avoids the large tourist agglomerations at the seaside, in the balneal or mountain resorts;
- it is a diffuse system through the specifics of its diverse offer and the vast dissemination in space;
- it does not harm too much to natural or built environment, but it should take into account a particular plan, ecological and physical;
- it is not compatible with the mass tourism. [Reniță, 2002, p.18-54]

The rural tourism is beneficial remedy to escape the urban stress and to enjoy the offered facilities. The rural areas in the Republic of Moldova, with its agricultural communities and its picturesque villages, are an important source for: the provision of services of traditional lodging of rural type; opportunities for visitors to get involved in country pursuits and activities; the

familiarization with the folklore, the entertainment and the local traditions; with the handicrafts practiced in a certain locality with the opportunity to participate, of those interested, in the process of handicrafts; opportunities to purchase handicrafts. In the rural areas of the Republic of Moldova there are many buildings built in traditional style, which, after an eventual reconstruction could be used for tourists' lodging.

The rural environment with its communities, with a rich culture and folk traditions carrying on specific agricultural activities, are the essential elements for the development of rural tourism. In the Republic of Moldova, the practice of this form of tourism can bring direct benefits to the rural communities, where the salaries of the population are below the medium level, creating new jobs and additional incomes for the farmers. The villagers can provide services of lodging in their households. It is worth mentioning, however, that they do not register these structures of lodging and there is no legal framework necessary to encourage the development of the rural tourism.[17]

Among the types of tourism that can be practiced in the rural areas are: holiday tourism, health and beauty tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, business tourism, and other forms depending on the wishes and demands of the tourists.

Holiday tourism is a great opportunity to spend time for vacation in a quiet environment of recreation and urban stress reliever. This form of tourism is motivated by the desire to return to nature, to life and traditional customs and it supposes the stay in the peasant's household.

Health and beauty tourism in Moldova works by spas and rest resorts which offers services in the framework of health and beauty tourism. They are located in picturesque attractive places, offering various services of treatment. In these spas rests native population and a small number of permanent customers from abroad. The most important resorts are:

- a) Spas: "Nufarul Alb" (Cahul); "Codru" (Ungheni, Hirjauca); "Bucuria-Sind"; "Nistru" (Vadul lui Voda) etc.
- b) Rest and recreation: "Victoria" (Soroca); "Albinuța" (Ungheni); "Codru"(Ungheni, Bahmut); "Dumbrava Alba" (Balti); "Albasadorf" (Taraclia, Albota) etc.[16]

The Republic of Moldova has in its ownership a number of spas and recreation resorts located in Ukraine (Truskaveț, Sergheevka, Odesa, Koblevo, Zatoka etc.). The favourable climatic peculiarities of Moldova allow the use of different methods of treatment in the spas: the heliotherapy, the aerotherapy, the thalassotherapy, the balneotherapy, etc. The springs with mineral waters from Moldova (over 47), has strong healing qualities, and it is a determining factor for the development of health tourism.

The cultural tourism is growing in Moldova because the country has a various cultural potential which, by its value, is of interest for the tourist activity and can attract tourist flows. The cultural-tourist potential of Moldova, besides its vestiges and historical monuments, more than 15 000, is supplemented with the institutions of culture and arts, with ethnographic creation and folklore collectives, with folk architecture and handicrafts centres. Currently, there are over 10 thousands of potential craftsmen, among which 250 are members of the Craftsmen Union. The musical folklore has a special value, being presented by 270 ethno ensembles of adults and 320 ethno ensembles of children, by over 880 orchestras of folk music. The creative collectives meet at various festivals. All these, on the whole, can be successfully valorised in tourism.[16]

The adventure tourism is a kind of tourism in the rural areas whose characteristic is the spontaneity of the stay, without a specific plan of stay, place of lodging, etc. More often it occurs among people who like entertainment and especially young people.

The professional (business) tourism is practiced in business purposes or personal interest by the businessmen who develop economic and social activities. In the rural areas it is practiced in order to organize and to plan a business or to inform themselves with some techniques of business development in the rural areas.

All the actions achieved by the Tourism Agency and the efforts of the state undertaken in order to integrate the Republic of Moldova in the European Union, as well as the activity of the economic agents in the tourism industry had a positive effect on the tourism field. According to the data of National Bureau of Statistics, in 2011 the travel agencies and the tour-operators have provided tourist services to 184 600 tourists and excursionists, with 14, 2% more than in 2010. The number of the tourists and excursionists participants in inbound, outbound and domestic tourism, in 2011 increased respectively with 20, 5% 16, 1% and 6, 1% than the previous year. The most significant weights in the total number of foreign tourists and excursionists arrived in Moldova, have returned to citizens of Romania (14, 8%), Russia (13, 0%), Ukraine (11, 0%), Germany (9, 3%), USA (5, 2%), Turkey (4, 4%), Italy (4, 1%), Poland (3, 4%), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (3, 3%), Sweden (3, 1%), Bulgaria (2, 7%), Japan (2, 4%), France (2, 3%) and Netherlands (2, 0%). Regarding the outbound tourism, we note that the Moldavian citizens preferred to travel mainly in Turkey (37, 3%), Bulgaria (31, 9%), Romania (9, 4%), Ukraine (8, 6%), Egypt (3, 4%) and Greece (3, 0%).[17]

Referring to the collective structures of tourist lodging, we mention that in 2011 they were visited by 248 300 tourists, including 173 300 Moldavian tourists (69, 8% of total number) and 75 000 foreign tourists (30, 2%). Compared to 2010, the number of tourists accommodated in collective tourist accommodation establishments increased by 8, 0% due to their growth in

tourist villas, holiday villages and other structures of rest (40, 5%), hotels and motels (+10, 5%), recovery structures (+8, 4%), hostels for visitors (+6, 5%).

The volume of the receipts from tourism activity in 2011 is 860 026 300 lei, registering a growth of 21, 4% than the previous year. [17]

In the period 2000 – 2001, agreements were concluded on a clear platform of cooperation with several countries. It should note the first special agreements in tourism, representing the special interest which Moldova has in 3 countries, where the Moldavians actively go: Turkey, Bulgaria, and Hungary. However it should be noted that tourist balance is disproportionate in favor of these countries.

Other agreements on cooperation in tourism were concluded between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the governments of 14 countries (the Republic of Latvia - 06.11.2003, the Republic of Azerbaijan - 06.05.2004, the Republic of Albania - 11.06.2004, Belarus - 06.2004, Israel - 29.11.2004, the Slovak Republic - 21.12.2004, Romania - 16.11.2005, Ukraine - 09.02.2006, the Hellenic Republic - 18.10.2006, the Republic of Croatia - 21.10.2006, the Republic of Italy - 07.12.2006, Russia - 19.03.2007, Cyprus - 13.09.2007, the Portuguese Republic - 11.02.2009).[18]

The turnover in the tourism sector exceeds 2367, 6 million lei (up to approx. 20% than the previous year). The sales registered by hotels records 61% of this number, and to travel agencies it returns 39%. The great majority of the investments costs are for construction and assembly. Thus, despite the economic crisis and stagnation in the sector, the entrepreneurs invest sustained in business development. [18]

Table 1

The main indicators of investment in tourism 2011, thousands lei

	Hotels	Travel Agencies	Total	2011/2010
Turnover	1450150	917447	2367597	119,78
Consumptions and operational costs	1337780	897097	2234877	121,44
Investments in material assets long-term	86906	20277	107183	124,83
Means of conveyance	4753	2926	7679	77,66
Lands	3053	628	3681	488,20

The source: www.turism.gov.md

The Moldavian tourism industry stands are present continuously or sporadically at important regional exhibitions. Therefore, continuous participation is ensured in tourism fairs in Romania, Russia, Great Britain and Germany. However Moldova's participation in exhibitions in

target markets (Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria, and Italy) is provided sporadically and without messages/promotional materials for these markets. The participations in exhibitions in the third countries (Poland, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Japan), although they have a relatively high development potential, are expensive and an unprepared presence (conceptual and logistical) with national stand it is hardly justified.

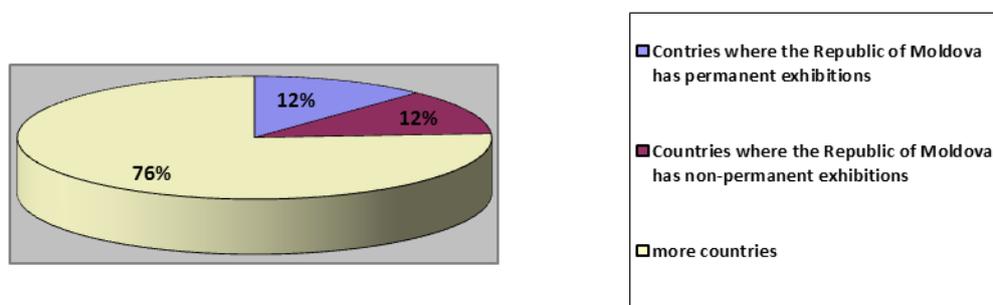


Fig. 1 National Exhibitions with national stand

The source: adapted by the author following the research performed.

The average length of stay in Moldova is 2-4 days for foreign visitors, 6-8 days for domestic tourist and 13-17 days for sanatorium treatment. Practically it reduces the length of stay in Moldova regardless of motivation journey.[17]

For outbound trips (mainly the EU countries) of Moldavian tourists are set a series of obstacles (discouraging visa system, the need for security, children’s journey with their own passport), despite the fact that Moldavians are important segments of the tourist market of some countries in the region. However, returning home, they influence the quality of services in the local tourist destinations, boosting the local tourism market and reorganizing the routes in the area.

The structure of the offer in the Republic of Moldova consists of: accommodation fund houses (8716 places, 30, 7% of the total), rooms with 1 place (3, 6%), 2 places (12, 9%) and more places (12, 6%), the fund accommodation in apartments (0, 5%).

Only 25, 2% of accommodation units, of rest in Chisinau have restaurants and similar establishments. Of all accommodation structures, 98 accommodation units (39, 2%) are steady, have restaurants and similar establishments, only 18 structures of rest (7, 2%) have permanent restaurants and similar establishments. Only 25, 2% of accommodation units, of rest in Chisinau have restaurants and similar establishments: 68 pools/saunas, 94 sports fields and 82 fields for children in the accommodation units in the country.[18]

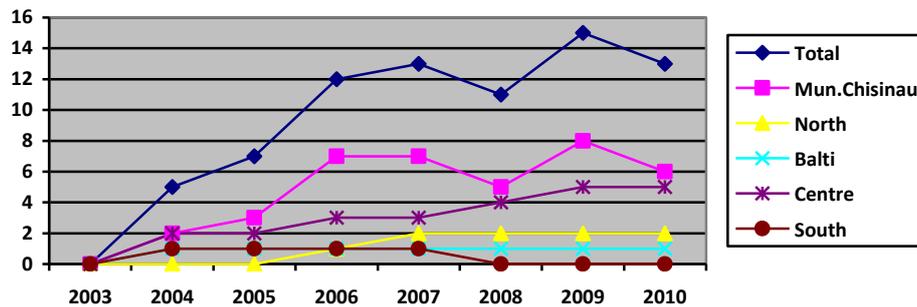


Fig.2: Boarding houses in Moldova.

Source: adapted by the author following the analysis carried out.

As far as we can see from the Fig. 4, the number of bordering houses in Moldova, it registers a downward trend in all the regions of the country and this fact is an alarming one because in the country they reduce the number of visitors and so the country is not known on the world stage.

Thus, we should point out the deficiencies of the practice of the rural tourism: the reduced number of accommodation structures in the rural areas and the lack of a legal framework that would regulate their development; the low level of awareness of the rural population and of the authorities of the territory on the need of development of rural tourism and its advantages for our country; the lack of an adequate training of the rural population in order to receive visitors from our country and abroad; the lack of knowledge about the real value of rural tourism heritage and its insufficient valorization; the lack of investments in the rural infrastructure, the insufficiency of technical equipment of utilities (sewer, water, electricity, gas, etc.) in the rural areas necessary for the rural tourism and the problem of waste burial; the absence of traced rural routes (routes for motorists, cyclists, hikers etc.); the lack of information about different cultural events in the rural areas (the patron of the village celebrations, festivals etc.); the lack of tourist facilities in the close proximity to rural sights (guide and interpreter services, food and souvenir trade, healthcare groups, etc.); the indifference sometimes evident of the local communities towards the degradation of the rural heritage; the unsatisfactory state of access roads to tourist attractions located in rural areas.

Conclusions:

At present the contribution of the rural tourism in the national economy is relatively insignificant. The low quality level of accommodation capacities and the income from tourist

activity places Moldova among the countries where the tourism is underdeveloped. In the last 10 years, the evolution of the tourist circulation in Moldova shows a relative tendency to reduce the number of visitors, as a result of the negative effects of socio-economic sphere of the country. One reason for reducing the number of visitors arriving in Moldova was generated by the cyclical changes in tourist markets and the lack of investment in the tourism infrastructure of the country.

The marketing was also neglected; the Republic of Moldova being thus effectively promoted on the international tourism markets. The growth rate of rural tourism development requires to be raised with state tourism development programs, implementation of some strategies and important investments in this area.

Due to these investments, we will obtain a new kind of tourism. This form of tourism is motivated by the desire to return to nature, to life and traditional customs and implies the stay in peasant's farm (farm or rural locations) or a pension. The tourist can be involved more or less in the traditional activities of that area or households. Thus he can participate in harvesting fruit, milking sheep, fishing, etc.

In order to be favorable to the rural tourism, the rural areas must be located in an environment without pollutants, holding folk values, cultural and rural traditions, with a rich history or other tourist resources that enable the implementation of some diversified and personalized offers, satisfying tourists' motivation (recreation, therapy, sports, hunting, fishing, crafts, museums and memorials, archaeological sites, traditional occupations, grazing, viticulture, fruit growing, beekeeping, etc.) which, besides their own cultural, economic and administrative functions, provide services to national and international tourists.

Regarding the idea of a tourist development of the rural communities, the tourist village is defined as rural settlement, picturesque situated in unpolluted nature, preserving the traditions and a rich history that serves as reception and hosting of tourists for a stay of indefinite duration. According to the geographic features of areas, the tourist villages are grouped in: ethno-folk, of artistic creation and craftsmen, sightseeing and climatic, of viticulture, fishery and hunting interest, pastoral, of winter sports.

All these activities that the tourists can carry in the rural tourism will procure an advantage for the country of economic point of view and will lead to the efficient use of the tourist heritage of the country.

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