

RESEARCHES INTO THE SPANISH TOURIST POLICY AIMED AT DEVELOPING AGROTOURISM

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Abstract

In this paper, we aimed at analysing and providing a model for the development of agrotourism in our country. We considered that agrotourism in Spain may represent a model for the sustainable development of agrotourism in Romania, due to the geographic, political and economic context in the two countries. In order to achieve a more profound analysis, we selected three representative autonomous communities, namely Castilla and Leon, Castilla - La Mancha, Cataluña. As a result, we noticed that in Spain the concept of agrotourism was introduced based on the diversified tourist development in a small area, called „rural tourist nucleus”. Also, in other areas, the development of rural tourism was initiated, starting from the agrotourism stage. We identified other situations as well in which global rural development strategies were implemented in order to guide the local, regional and national agents through a diversity of supplementary measures. An essential aspect of the Spanish context which our research focused on is that the legislation related to tourism in Spain is normative and it has a sectoral character, namely it regulates various types of accommodation in the rural environment. The autonomous legislation has a general character, at territorial level, so that 15 Autonomous Communities, except for Madrid and Canary Islands have specific rural tourism regulations. In conclusion, agrotourism in Spain provides a complex model for the development of agrotourism at European Union level. The tourist policies of the Spanish Government and of the autonomous communities, may all be absorbed by the Romanian Government and the local public authorities for the sustainable development of agrotourism in our country.

Key words: agrotourism, tourist policy, Spain

The concept of agrotourism was introduced in Spain based on the diversified tourist development in a small area called “rural tourism nucleus”. In other areas, rural tourism development is being stimulated beginning with the agrotourism stage.

In other cases, global rural development strategies were implemented, to the purpose of guiding both the local, regional and national agents through a diversity of additional measures, trying to find synergy among projects.

The geographical and climate conditions in Spain allow for the development of niche tourist experiences such as cynegetics tourism or, in the Teruel case, where agrotourism has increased, as a way of preventing the soil erosion processes. In this sense, because one of the most serious environmental problems in Spain is erosion – the de-fertilisation of vast areas, the maintenance of small rural nuclei should be stimulated, in which the farmer is the best manager of the rural environment, because he is the one who knows it best. Probably the only way of avoiding the rural exodus is the diversification of fundamentally tourist activities.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In this paper, we aimed at analysing and providing an agrotourism development model to our country, starting from the assumption that agrotourism in Spain may represent a model for the sustainable development of agrotourism in Romania, taking into account the geographical, political, and economic conditions in the two countries. The analysis we performed focused on three representative autonomous communities, namely Castilla and Leon, Castilla - La Mancha, and Cataluña. An essential aspect of the Spanish context which our research focused on is that the legislation related to tourism in Spain is normative and it has a sectoral character, namely it regulates various types of accommodation in the rural environment in order to regulate the existing offer. The autonomous legislation has a general character, at territorial level, so that 15 Autonomous Communities, except for Madrid and Canary Islands have specific regulations regarding rural tourism.

According to the Tourism Secretariat (1994), one of the tourist potentials which would diversify the offer and which is very little reflected in granting community funds is the recovery of the

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spa resorts and thermal springs dedicated to health tourism (Spain has an important network of spa resorts and thermal springs, especially in the north) and the setting up of golf courts, as a new offer targeting quality tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Competitiveness Framework Plan of Spanish Tourism, as it was previously mentioned, is an essential strategic tool in the Spanish tourist strategy. One of the central objectives of the FUTURES I programme (1992 - 1996) was to maintain the leader position on the sun and beach market, by means of improving competitiveness, as well as filling a favourable position on other markets – tourist product with an already verified profitability. Thus, we notice that there is no excessive confidence in the new forms of tourism within the competitiveness plans.

On the other hand, among the support destined to pmys in the FUTURES I programme we noticed the one directed to developing new forms of tourism, such as cultural, nature or social tourism. In the Order of 19 August 1992, by granting incentives for the increase in the pmys' competitiveness, according to the FUTURES I plan, it is established that they may subsidise in the line of the new products "the initiation, management and marketing of the unique tourist offer which serves as project-demonstration in spreading new tourist products that recapitalise on the environment, the historic heritage or the natural resources and which may boost the development of the region".

In the FUTURES II programme (1996 - 1999), within the plan titled „Promotion, marketing and selling”, it is stated that it is necessary “to consolidate a strategy for the specialisation of these products which is adequate to the specific tourist segments or to certain geographical markets, such as health tourism, plain tourism, holidays for the elderly and natural parks, etc.”. In this basic Spanish tourism document reference is made to the term agrotourism, and the problem is solved by referring to “the need to determine the concepts of nature tourist offer”. This is surprising when we take into account the experience of FUTURES I, an automatic normative making concrete directions and community directives.

General study according to Autonomous Communities

According to the data provided by the Young Farmers' Agrarian Association, in 1997, more than a million Spaniards decided to spend their holidays in the countryside, which made agrotourism generate in Spain a revenue much

higher than €180 m annually, 60 of which result from renting rural houses.

Agrotourism currently accounts for 2842 official locations with 20027 places available. The number of places rises every year, exhibiting an increase of 60% compared to 1994.

The rebirth of rural life does not affect Spain equally. Cataluña, with 19%, is the Autonomous Community at the top of this kind of tourist offer. Close behind it are Aragón, with 16% and Andalusia, with 13%. Madrid, Extremadura and Valencia, with 1%, are the Autonomous Communities which generate less agrotourism.

The Autonomous Communities have taken on, through their Autonomy Statutes, the exclusive competence over tourism. Undoubtedly, the creation of the autonomous tourist legislation concerning rural tourism is very recent, because the first norms appear in 1983 (Cataluña) and 1984 (Cantabria).

The legislation in the field of tourism is normative and it has a sectoral nature as it regulates different types of accommodation in the rural environment in order to regulate the existing offer. Thus, for the moment, the normative tools have not been used yet in order to globally regulate other departments of the Administration such as the Environment, Agriculture or Land Organisation.

The autonomous legislation has a general character, at territorial level, so that the 15 Autonomous Communities, except for Madrid and Canary Islands, have specific regulations regarding rural tourism. This means that this problem is not only targeted by the Communities in *Green Spain*, but it is also related to mountains or nature.

Below we will make a brief study of the state of agrotourism in different Autonomous Communities, in order to draw the general conclusions thereof.

Castilla and Leon

Most of the tourist offer of this Autonomous Community is mainly due to its proximity to Madrid, community from which it gets most of its demand.

The rural accommodation supply is very well defined in Decree 198/93, of 2 December and later in Decree 84/95, of 11 May, concerning rural tourist accommodation regulation.

Main types of accommodation are established:

- Rural houses for rent: they are houses which are rented entirely (rental rural houses) or by rooms (shared rental rural houses). It is necessary to merge the characteristics of the peasant households or rural houses with the traditional

architecture of the county or municipality. They may be rented entirely or shared with the owner (the owner may not have more than two rural houses);

- Inns: they are hotels or inns located in buildings with architectural, historic, cultural or ethnographic value;
- Rural tourism centres: they are folk architecture buildings, mainly, although they may also be new constructions. They provide leisure, sports and cultural activities and, in addition, catering and accommodation activities.

The three types of accommodation must be located in communities with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants and on non-urbanisable lands.

The Culture and Tourism Council set up a public company, Castilla and Leon Tourism Promotion Company (SOTURSA), which deals with promoting tourism and mostly rural tourism and agrotourism.

The Council of Castilla and Leon publishes a very fine quality guidebook of the inns and a rural tourism guidebook listing all the accommodation facilities classified according to their type: rural house, inn or rural tourism centre, with a map for the location and the characteristics of the area. In addition, various associations publish region or province guidebooks, such as the Leon rural accommodation guidebook. In order to help market them, a Rural Tourism Information Centre was established.

Castilla - La Mancha

This region was based until recently on a cultural tourism offer. Now the Industry and Tourism Council tries to provide a tourism offer based on rural, ecological, cynegetics, sports tourism and agrotourism.

Among the actions taken by the regional government in order to attract the tourist offer from abroad, there is the recovery of historic buildings that will serve as tourist accommodation facilities. The inns are one of the main offers proposed by region for the following year.

In this region, the rural tourism locations are the hotels and inns in the rural environment and, in the past few years, a large number of rural houses and households has been added, taking advantage of the various European Union programmes, especially the LEADER programme. Despite the increase, Castilla - La Mancha is one of the communities with the lowest offer, due to its area.

According to Decree 43/94 there are three types of tourist rural houses:

- Rural houses with shared accommodation, in which the owner shares the use of his own house;
- Rural houses for rent, in which the owner hands the house over and the tourist enjoys the house entirely;
- Peasant households, in which the owner, as manager of an agricultural business or animal farm, provides hosting services as a supplementary activity.

In order to meet the rural house requirement, it must be located in a municipality with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants or outside the urban hearth of the community. These rural houses must operate at least 8 months per year (compulsorily from April to September) and they must rely on a minimum of two to six rooms.

The Castilla - La Mancha Government grants funding for the development of rural houses, specified in the Order from 13 January 1995 of the Industry and Tourism Council, through which it regulates the lease of support in adapting and improving tourist accommodation in rural houses. In February 1998, a new decree appears for the regulation of this support in improving and preparing the hygienic services and in adapting, expanding and modernising the buildings.

In 1995, the Castilla - La Mancha Communities Assembly published the Rural Houses and Peasant Households Guidebook, including the refurbished traditional houses, both as shared and as entire accommodation. Yet, this guidebook stopped being published because various mistakes were discovered in terms of the houses characteristics and prices, as it also included certain house which had not obtained the operation certificate from the Tourism Inspectorate in various provinces.

The new image of the information offices in Castilla - La Mancha is INFOTUR. This network appears as a response to the ever higher tourist demand in region coming from a stricter public. All the tourism offices already in place in this Community were integrated in this network.

In reshaping the tourism offices, they considered the need to merge the criteria in elaborating the promotional materials, among which we identify fliers, plans, postcards, etc. also, in accommodation facilities, handicraft and tourist objects representative for the region are marketed.

Most offices in the INFOTUR network are equipped with information terminals through which the tourist may obtain the information about the vacancies in hotels and the tourist services available in every municipality. The terminals are interconnected in order to supply information from any location.

Cataluña

It is considered that Catalan agrotourism is the one that has the highest number of common characteristics with the European one. Cataluña was the first Community that regulated the first type of accommodation outside the hotel in Spain by means of Decree 365/83 of 8 August, through which the type of tourist accommodation called “residences-casa de pages” is regulated.

These residences must be located in places that do not exceed 1,000 inhabitants, and the owner must reside in the rural environment (Decrees 365/83 of 4 August and 42/89 of 24 February).

Cataluña is one of the communities with largest number of offers, half of which are located in the Pyrenees area.

In the context of the increase in supply, there appears a new decree, aimed at redefining the accommodation types. Decree 214/95 of 27 June. A better integration of accommodation in the rural environment is required and three groups of “residences-casa de pages” are defined, according to the relationship between the beneficiary and the inhabitants of the rural environment.

Farm: it must be located in the rural environment, outside the population nucleus and observe the architectural typology of the area. The building must be erected before 1950 and it must be located in the middle of an agricultural business, a cattle farm or a forest, these activities co-existing with the tourist activity.

Country house: it must be located in the nucleus of a population smaller than 1,000 inhabitants and observe the architecture of the area. The construction year must be prior to 1950. It is required that the owner should live on his own farm and obtain, as in the previous case, a part of his revenues from the farming, animal husbandry or forestry activity.

Independent rural accommodation: it is a unit integrated in an already existing building. It must be located in the rural environment and observe the architecture of the area. The

construction year must be prior to 1950, and the owner must live in the same region.

There are various organisations with area and regional character. The Turinvest and Gîtes de Cataluña associations are responsible for marketing. These associations have a backup system and provide the associations with project feasibility studies.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, agrotourism in Spain provides a complex model for the development of agrotourism at European Union level. The tourist policies of the Spanish Government, as well as those of the Autonomous Communities, have made significant contributions to the development of agrotourism in Spain and all these may be taken over by the Romanian Government and local public authorities in order to develop a sustainable agrotourism in our country.

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