

## THE LOCALS' OPINIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN RODNA COMMUNE

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**ABSTRACT.** This study refers to sustainability, a much debated concept at global level. Because of the high levels of pollution and limited resources, sustainability has become an international goal. Furthermore, one of the engines for development in emerging economies is, of course, the tourism industry, which is also Romania's case. Combining these two elements, the authors find that sustainable tourism development is both a long-term goal and a dynamic concept. This concept is represented by three pillars: growing the local economy, protecting and promoting the cultural heritage, and increasing the social well-being.

The present paper consists of a case study that focuses on Rodna commune, a beautiful Transylvanian rural settlement, located in Bistrița-Năsăud County. The research methods used are secondary data analysis (based on the study of different statistics, guides, and specialized sites), comparisons, analogies and syntheses, primary qualitative research (based on face-to-face interviews with the locals), and induction and deduction methods, which all aim at identifying: the current position of Rodna commune from the socio-economic point of view, the locals' opinion related to the sustainable development of the destination's tourism industry, and also the ways in which this objective can be achieved. The subjects interviewed were selected in order to relevantly

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cover most of the local population: honor citizens, teachers, priests, doctors and students, each of them representing stakeholders in the development of the tourism industry.

The research results show that the locals are aware of the strong connection between the development of tourism and the economic well-being of the commune, they helped identifying the major problems that need to be addressed and solved in order for this process to be efficient but also the fact that they are not yet aware of their role and do not acknowledge the ways in which they can make a difference for themselves and for the commune.

The conclusions reveal the current situation of Rodna commune from the subjects' points of view and their proposals for achieving better living standards. Also, the interviews show the lack of implication caused by the fact that the subjects are neither aware of their stakes, nor of their possibilities to help developing the local tourism.

**Key words:** Rodna commune, locals, sustainable development, tourism, interviews.

**JEL Classification:** L83, Q01, Z32.

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## **Introduction and Literature Review**

Rodna is one of the two villages that constitute the commune with the same name, which used to be called Rodna Veche or Rogna Veche. It is located in Bistrița-Năsăud County and it is very close to Rodna Mountains National Park, the second largest protected area in Romania, being in fact one of the access points of the Park. The two villages in Rodna commune are Rodna and Valea Vinului, covering an area of 224 km<sup>2</sup> and being home

for more than 6,000 inhabitants. The local population is mainly Romanian; at the 2011 census the main minorities were Hungarian and Roma citizens. From the religious point of view, most of the inhabitants are Orthodox, the minorities being Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Jehovah's Witnesses (according to the same census). Politically, the commune is managed by the Mayor Valentin Iosif Grapini, who is part of the Social Democratic Party since 2016; the Local Council consists of 15 councilors, 8 from the Social Democratic Party, 5 from the National Liberal Party and 2 from the Alliance Party Liberals and Democrats (according to the results of the 2016 local elections).

Among the tourist attractions, the most relevant man-made one is the ruins of St. Mary's Church, a Romanesque basilica dating back to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the Orthodox Church, the Museum of Ethnography and Mining in the village of Rodna, as well as the House of Writers from the village of Valea Vinului. Natural resources and attractions provide several highly attractive and valuable tourist resources, such as: the Rodna Mountains National Park, the Poiana cu Narcise Nature Reserve, the mountain trails to Lala Mare and Lala Mic lakes, and the Ineu Peak in the Rodna Mountains.

Regarding Rodna's economic activity over time, mining played a very important role. It is not known precisely when this activity started, but a gold ring found by archaeologists is proof of the fact that mining is practiced in the commune's territory since the Bronze Age. Păiuș (2013) explores various documents and historical writings in his work and states: "It is very likely that there was a metallurgical city of the Dacians".

In this area, just like in many other Romanian destinations, mining has experienced ups and downs due to macroeconomic factors over the years, but has for a long time been a very important source of income for the commune. In 1992, E.M. Rodna was transformed into a trading company by decision no. 184/1992 of the Autonomous Administration of Lead and Zinc Baia Mare, being subordinated to the Gura Humorului Mining Branch. In 1997 the National Company of Precious and Non-ferrous Metals

“REMIN” S.A. Baia Mare, E.M. Rodna transforming itself into the Rodna Mining Branch, which at that time counted 812 employees. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2006, mining processing operations ceased to be carried out for two reasons: the activity was no longer profitable, the costs becoming very high, and in order to reduce them, polluting and toxic substances were supposed to be used in the ordinary activities, which would have led to population illness and environmental pollution in the medium term. Between 2007 and 2010 the necessary activities were performed in order to close the galleries, and from 2011 the existing objectives in the patrimony of the unit are preserved.

Thus, after the closure of the mine, the unemployment rate has grown enormously, in the absence of other industries developed in the area. People who have been able to leave the area or even the country in search of a job have taken advantage of those opportunities, but the number of people without jobs is still high today.

The current economic situation of the commune can be analyzed considering the number of companies that have their registered office and operate within the commune. Their structure according to the sector of activity is presented in Table No 1.

**Table 1.** Companies in Rodna village grouped by activity sector

<b>Forestry companies</b>	<b>Accommodation units</b>	<b>Breeding animals</b>	<b>Bars</b>	<b>Restaurants</b>	<b>Car services</b>
14	6	5	4	2	4
<b>Supermarkets</b>	<b>Mixed shops</b>	<b>Gas stations</b>	<b>Bakeries</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>
4	20	1	1	59	120

Source: Primăria Comunei Rodna, 2018.

Thus, there is a preference for the forestry sector, as the forest resources of the area are still hardly negligible for the entrepreneurs, but not for the hospitality industry, the potential of which will be outlined throughout this paper.

Furthermore, according to the National Institute of Statistics (INS), in the Rodna village, arrivals amount to a little more than 1,000 tourists per year (see Table No 2).

**Table 2.** Tourism activity in Rodna Commune

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Arrivals	25	517	620	654	1,300	1,343
Overnights	43	597	664	701	3,243	2,316
Average length of stay	1.72	1.15	1.07	1.07	2.49	1.72

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2019.

The indicator of the average length of stay shows a rather low attractiveness of the tourist offer at the commune level and a poor capitalization of the park's tourist potential; the values of the length of stay suggesting transit tourism and some business tourism. However, perhaps partly due to the promotion of tourism at national level lately and partly due to local action, the current trend is on the rise, which confirms a better capitalization on the destination's great natural resources and nature-based tourism potential.

As previously mentioned, Rodna commune is part of the nearby areas of the Rodna Mountains National Park. The conservation for the area where the park is today began in 1932, when the 183 hectares of alpine pit in the Pietrosu Mare Peak were recognized as a scientific reserve, this area becoming the first such reservation in Romania.

Obviously, the Rodna Mountains National Park is an important protected area that contributes to the preservation of the Carpathian biodiversity, a highly valuable resource both at European and global levels. This great value is proven by the Carpathian Convention, a convention signed in 2007, which includes Romania, together with other 6 Carpathian countries (Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary). This partnership aims to facilitate the collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations, specialized institutes, international experts and financiers. The goal of the partnership is, of course, to protect the Carpathian biodiversity and to facilitate the durable and sustainable development of the area.

From the point of view of destination management, the Administration of the Rodna Mountains National Park (APNMR) was established in May 2004, when the Ministry of the Environment and Water Management, the current Ministry of the Environment and Forests, has entrusted the National Forestry Directorate of Romsilva, through the Bistrița Forestry Directorate, on the basis of the management contract Nr. 734/22 May 2004, the responsibility of the park management attributions and of financing its proper functioning and activity. Thus, the Rodna Mountains National Park Administration has its headquarters in Rodna – Bistrita-Năsăud County, and in Borșa – Maramureș County, a working point has been set up. Some of the main objectives of the park's administration include:

- “to implement the actions foreseen in the management plan,
- to make project proposals,
- to access various sources of financing,
- to start attractive tourist programs,
- to generate revenue for the park administration and the neighboring local communities, facilities for tourists (refuges, stops with banks, parking lots, information boards), maintenance and renovation of

existing ones, carrying out scientific and diverse volunteer activities within the park, mapping of habitats and species of community interest by digitizing satellite imagery or aerial photography on the park range and their verification in the field, the calculation of the population optimum for a number of key species of flora and fauna, steps to include the park within international networks that promote ecological tourism and harmonious communion of man with nature (PAN Park, MAB UNESCO),

- the establishment of management lines for a number of conservation priority habitats, exchanges of experience with other protected areas in the country and abroad, and
- the development of adequate infrastructure for the park, by setting up sightseeing centers, information points, mountain hikes, offering visitors and tourists the opportunity to enjoy information and safety during the visit of the park” (Jauca, 2013).

This brief presentation of the current situation of Rodna commune, based on secondary data, reveals that tourism represents a viable alternative to stimulate the local economy, to increase the living standards, and to support the local well-being. It can easily be shown that Rodna offers a very large concentration of natural and tourist resources, but also has serious tourism infrastructure problems. Of course, having a mountain relief and being close to protected natural areas represent an opportunity for mountain and rural tourism. In this context, a question may be raised: What about sustainable development? Through the joint work of IUNC (International Union for Nature Conservation), WWF (World Federation for Nature Conservation), EFNNP (European Federation of National and Natural Parks), sustainable tourism has been defined as “the development of all forms of tourism, tourism management and marketing respecting the natural, social and economic integrity of the environment,

ensuring the exploitation of natural and cultural resources both in the present and for the future generations". Therefore, any form of tourism must respect the principles of sustainable development.

Regarding the development of sustainable tourism, Cucculelli and Goffi (2016) state in their paper that although it is very hard to come up with a definition which applies to most cases, and since each destination has its specific attributes, what can be said without being wrong is that the development of sustainable tourism is a long-term goal and a dynamic concept. The unique characteristics of sustainability are to minimize negative impacts on the environment, to protect cultural heritage, and at the same time to contribute to the social well-being.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is part of a larger and more complex study which aimed at analyzing the impact of the development of a sustainable tourism offer in the neighboring areas of the Rodna Mountains National Park. Another research paper, entitled *The Development of Tourism in Rodna Mountains National Park: Public Administration, Central Actor*, was published by the same authors in 2017; it aimed at analyzing the key role played by the public sector in stimulating the growth of the local tourism industry, but also the entrepreneurs' point of view and their response to the public sector's actions and opinions.

The present paper aims at establishing the current position of Rodna commune from the socio-economic point of view and at identifying the locals' opinion relative to the sustainable development of the tourism industry, and also at uncovering certain measures that can be adopted in order for this objective to be achieved.

The following research methods were used for this purpose:

- the analysis of secondary data by processing different statistics, guides, specialized sites, comparisons, analogies and syntheses;
- qualitative research based on interviewing certain representative locals of Rodna commune (honor citizens, teachers, priests, doctors and students); the interview was considered appropriate for the current research due of the fact that by the way of its application, the opinions of locals could be properly captured and not restrained by almost any communication barrier;
- quantitative research, based on questionnaires (for tourists); and
- induction and deduction, which are interdependent and contribute to the interpretation of the current situation of the commune and to the identification of the possible future situation if the tourism industry will rise.

Besides the entrepreneurs and the public administration representatives, other persons were considered relevant and representative for the destination's population. They are presented in Table no 3.

**Table no 3.** Details regarding the interviewed locals

<b>Initials</b>	<b>Profession, qualifications, titles</b>
L.P.	Honor citizen, teacher and man of culture
M.L.M.	Higher education professor and manager
L.C.	Sports teacher at Rodna School
L.N.	Priest in the Romanian Orthodox Parish
D.U.	Doctor General Practitioner
D.A.G.	Student
M.H.	Student

## **Results and Discussions**

The previous research paper (Cozma & Coroș, 2017) revealed an incomplete development of Rodna Commune “a very high unemployment rate, low living standards, a poorly developed infrastructure and a poor valorization of tourist areas, but also an improvement in progress of this situation”. One of the interviewed entrepreneurs suggested that “the encouragement and intensification of tourism in the winter season, the development of a sustainable infrastructure, the implementation of some more strict rules, the establishment of visiting fees for certain areas, and the marking mountain trails” would be appropriate actions for the public sector to take in order to stimulate the growth of the local tourism industry. It is also shown that the City Hall created a development strategy with high potential for job growth, adequate capitalization of tourist areas and places to visit, improvement of infrastructure and attraction of new investors in the area. One of the final conclusions of the first study pointed out that because foreign tourists tend to be mainly oriented towards active mountain tourism in the Rodna Mountains National Park area, it is obvious that the encouragement and the support towards the development of this form of tourism within the Rodna commune is necessary.

Apart from the business owners and the local authorities, in order to have a complete picture of the manner in which the commune is presented in terms of tourism, it is also necessary to analyze the opinions of the locals, which have an influence either in relation to the tourists or from the labor force perspective in this industry or even as potential investors.

The following paragraphs present the opinions of the local population related to the further development of Rodna Commune. Most of those interviewed have lived in Rodna since they were born. Only the priest and the sports teacher were not born in the village. The priest arrived here in 1990, as did the teacher in 1997. The students attend faculties in Cluj-Napoca and come home on weekends and during the

holidays. In fact, a very small part of the locals come from other parts of the country, while many of the young people study either in Bistrița, Cluj-Napoca or Târgu Mureș, and only a few of them return. The elderlies say that they did not leave the village, because there is a habit of one of the children taking care of the elderly and not leaving the parental home, while the middle-aged people say they have faced certain administrative barriers specific to communism when they tried to leave the village in their youth, and then they stayed because they have made a family here.

Asked if they have relatives who have gone abroad to work, 6 of the 7 local respondents sadly answered that yes, some of their relatives have gone abroad for a better living and for higher wages. More than that, L.P. believes that: "The possibility of exploiting agricultural land has never been sufficient to support the lives of people in the commune. This is the only and most painful problem that caused people to move away from their original home. Even if one or two locals come and develop a small business, this is still an exception".

Another perspective is presented by M.L.M.: "Freedom of movement is a good thing, especially for young people. Going over deserted customs, crossing borders that turned into simple drawings is the greatest gain that young people can have today. The youth often do not come back because they feel that during the last 27 years there has been done very little work for them. Jobs are now in the parish of the private environment, but if this private environment is not supported by governmental and specific political factors, then, instead of dealing with a multiplication of small and medium enterprises that could create new jobs, we are dealing daily with their massive falling, unfortunately, because they are not encouraged. And then, implicitly, some young people who have a place and a purpose under the sun in some other country and do not what to go back". In fact, many of the respondents argue that the major fault for the significant emigration of the population lies with the national authorities. It is obvious that the issue of jobs and the opportunities offered to the workforce is as real as possible, at least locally.

The cultural activities undertaken over time or attended by the interviewees are indeed numerous. L.P. managed to publish 15 printed works, 8 edited works, and claims that “Rodna’s Monography” is the result of a 60-year work that has over 520 bibliographic sources and over 1,000 A4 pages. Also, M.L.M. was involved in Rodna’s past research, publishing a series of articles and studies about the destination, including research papers in ISI indexed journals. L.C. managed to form a team of students who perform traditional dances, and organized for 15 years in a row camps for children at the seaside and in the mountains, in the home-country and abroad. Together with the town hall and the fanfare, the church annually commemorates the heroes of the nation on the occasion of the Ascension Day. D.U. participated in various volunteer campaigns to treat patients and conducted various donations for needy children. The young people were very pleased with the events organized by the City Hall on The Days of Rodna Commune. One can therefore see an attempt to preserve the past of the commune, but also to educate young people by involving them in various cultural activities organized for them.

Another aspect examined concerns how the locals relate to the current state of the commune. Among the positive aspects listed by the interviewees there are the natural resources (the “Terrarium Paradise sequence” of M.L.M., the relief, the beauty of the area, the tranquility, the landscapes, the clean air) and the proximity to the Rodna Mountains National Park. Negative aspects are represented by economic decline, lack of an adequate education system, state of road infrastructure and the small number of restaurants and places of entertainment for young people.

Locals say Rodna is distinguished mainly by landscapes and relief. A truly impressive description of the commune is made by M.L.M.: “Without any doubt, the landscape has elements of uniqueness, of a certain personality, but also when it comes to the anthropic touristic potential, Rodna has certain values to show to tourists because it has one of the most tumultuous histories on the Upper Someş Valley. Rodna has long been the portrayal of the interests of all the upstream and downstream settlements

of the Someş Valley human habitat. Rodna has been a center of local polarization since the early Middle Ages, because mining activities were very present here and gold-silver cubes have been exploited before the year 1,000. There is clear evidence in this regard. Rodna was formed in a geo-demographic diffusion basin where inhabitants climbed upstream, and downstream, over the water hills, whenever the geo-demographic pressure appeared on the restriction of agricultural space. Most of the localities upstream and downstream of Rodna and over the hills are based on Rodna's core. Another beautiful thing that the village has is a series of extremely interesting historic vestiges. Here we can talk about a stratification of medieval civilizations. Here are the ruins of a Dominican basilica of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, demolished during the Mongol-Tatar invasion of 1241-1242, but it seems that under this basilica there are the remains of a basilica that was originally Benedictine. There have been some religious orders that have built elements of civilization and ecclesiastical culture at Rodna, so here we can talk about a stratification of civilization. Keeping the proportions accurate, we can talk about a formidable stratification of urban civilization in Cluj-Napoca, there is medieval Roman and Daco-Roman Napoca, then medieval Cluj and contemporary Cluj-Napoca. Rodna has the same miniature stratification". Besides these aspects, other locals list elements of tourism potential through historical and natural aspects. The locals' love for their commune is obvious, but so is the awareness of the cultural and tourist resources it has.

Desiring to identify the local people's vision related to how the state of the commune can evolve and how this can be accomplished, they were asked to describe how they think their way of living can be improved.

While L.P. argues that "the standard of living can only be improved by developing an industry and, in particular, the mining and logging industry", M.L.M. says that none of these industries provide a viable solution in the future; he identifies tourism as a solution and explains how the community can further develop "if the authorities would come to the force to support large projects for this purpose". He also states that "tourism

could represent the day after today for the youth” and believes that only Rodna “can heal its own wounds from which it suffers now”. Furthermore, L.C. considers that the rehabilitation of the road infrastructure and thus the increase in the capitalization of the destination’s tourism potential can lead to a better standard of living, as “there would be more people interested in opening their own accommodation units, and surely they will bring revenues to this village”.

Thus, the link between the development of tourism and the economic situation of the commune is acknowledged by the locals. Another aspect highlighted by them, besides the rehabilitation of the road infrastructure and the development of the hospitality industry, is the creation of more jobs, a problem to which the development of the tourist supply can respond successfully. Thus, L.C. states that “the current mayor has vision and openness to creating as many jobs as possible and should find a solution to inform and educate citizens about agro-tourism”.

Regarding the local people's openness towards future tourism prospects, the issue of tourism development has been discussed in more detail. When asked about the impact that tourism development could have on the commune, except for L.P. who considers this process to be difficult and lacking potential, the interviewees mainly highlighted the financial benefits, in terms of developing the commune's economic condition by creating jobs, adding revenues to the local budget, and developing related activities such as crafts, public catering and guidance services tourism. Moreover, the aspect of the cultural enrichment of the commune's inhabitants as a result of the interaction with the tourists was also brought up by some respondents during the interviews. Asked about the agro-tourist potential of the area, which combines the preservation of cultural heritage and the improvement of the local economy, all interviewed locals stated that this potential exists, but there is no education in this direction. M.L.M. provides more details related to this aspect: “In 2012 I [M.L.M.] participated in an investigation, where I found enough households willing to practice agro-tourism specific activities, but they said that until their

grandchildren or relatives who know a foreign language come home, they are not willing to receive strangers, but only Romanians, because they could only communicate with the foreigners by the means of gestures and signs. There is, therefore, this barrier of language skills, the cultural differences and, last but not least, they are not convinced that whatever they can provide will eventually be appreciated by the tourists, especially in terms of comfort”.

The main argument that supports the touristic potential of this destination is represented by the cultural and natural resources that Rodna manages to conserve better, compared to the rest of the communes in the area, which are even better represented and more generous in this commune.

When approaching the aspect related to the proximity of the commune to the Rodna Mountains National Park and the advantage it presents for the development of tourism, apart from L.P. who believes that this is not an advantage because, he says, “the park has no other role but to preserve the richness of the fauna and flora of Rodna Mountains”, the rest of the locals see it as: “the most suitable playground for practicing and promoting eco-tourism” (M.L.M.), “the administration definitely tries to capitalize on this potential” (L.C.), “the specific flora and fauna are highly valuable, especially mountain peonies, but also tourist attractions such as Lake Lala and Ineu Peak” (L.N.).

An equally important role in this process is played by the Administration of the Rodna Mountains National Park, which is why the director of the park administration, Mrs. Doina Jauca, was also interviewed. She states that 30,000 tourists arrive annually in the park, 20% of them being foreign tourists, mainly from Hungary, the Czech Republic, France and the United Kingdom. The park visitors arrive especially during the spring and summer period. There is also a concordance regarding the dissatisfaction of the visitors with the tourist infrastructure, which is intended to be improved by “creating paths and thematic routes, creating tourist information points and visiting centers. Up to now, five thematic

routes have been created in the areas most frequently visited by tourists and we [the park administration] will continue to place such facilities in other areas of the park". In terms of awareness related to the tourist potential of the area, the director says: "the influx of tourists in Rodna would bring a number of material benefits to the locals. For this, it would be necessary to modernize and rehabilitate the road infrastructure and to involve local and county authorities, together with the park administration, to access financial resources". Thus, it can be noticed that the park administration sees a close link between the development of tourism and the development of the local economy as long as all stakeholders cooperate in this respect.

Another aspect revealed by the responses offered to the questionnaire for tourists is related to the activities for which tourists opt during a mountain holiday. Among their preferences the following are most commonly mentioned: hiking, tourist orientation, barbeque and skiing on the slopes. These responses are in line with the conclusions of the interviews with the entrepreneurs and the park administration, which identify mountain hiking as an activity preferred by the great mass of visitors and tourists, and moreover, their ski preference supports the project of opening the slopes in the village of Valea Vinului, which represents a viable solution to the problem of local tourism development, eventually contributing to the diminishing of the impact of seasonality.

It has been observed, however, that locals consider it absolutely necessary to develop and improve the way in which the promotion of the area and of the park is being carried out, but also to organize a larger number of tourism-related events and build a closer cooperation between local authorities. In terms of the barriers that underlie insufficient promotion, besides the lack of an efficient and large enough budget, due to the subordination of the National Forest Administration – Romsilva, which in turn is further subordinated to the Ministry of Waters and Forests, and which is anyway a problem at the national level, there also is a lack of open labor-positions in the administration to cover these responsibilities;

furthermore, the staff of the organization is made up of the park manager, the park manager assistant, the community relations environmental education provider, the information technology specialist, an economist, a biologist and 12 field agents (rangers). Thus, the problem of budgeting more extensive promotional activities has the solution at a higher level than that of the local administration. Regarding the ability of the locals to receive larger numbers of tourists, the interviewees say that its level is low, but there are various programs which focus on the exchange of professional experience and camps for training the beneficiaries in order to develop the much needed skills. Locals also proposed that local authorities organize free English courses aiming at overcoming the well-known linguistic barriers at local level.

The need for proper marking of tourist trails, more intense promotion of protected areas and improvement of access infrastructure were mentioned both in the interviews with the entrepreneurs and the locals, but also in the results of the questionnaire addressed the destination's tourists. The awareness of these issues and their stage of solving were discovered in the interviews with local authorities, but the social education of the tourists has not been discussed so far. Thus, in order to observe the civic responsibility of the tourists, they were asked if they took part in one of the most extensive forest waste collection programs, namely "Let's do it, Romania!". But also the reasons why they had participated or not. The results show that the vast majority of respondents did not participate due to the poor promotion of the event at local level (I do not know the program) and the respondents' lack of spare time (loaded program); however, among the reasons that prompted them to participate in the cases of those who had attended "Let's do it, Romania!", they remind them of the desire to actively participate in promoting change and reducing the level of pollution.

In order to be able to understand whether locals are optimistic or pessimistic about how the commune will develop in the future, they have been asked how they think the commune will evolve in the next five years.

The separation was very clear in two equal sides. On one hand, there are those who believe in the vision and the determination of the local authorities to take advantage of the current and future opportunities, and, on the other hand, those who believe that political instability, corruption, and how public issues are managed at national level will not allow Rodna commune to evolve, and even have a major negative impact. It has already become obvious that locals believe that both local and national authorities are primarily responsible for solving the current local problems and for improving the level of the living standards.

The last aspect discussed with the locals aimed at highlighting their general perception of tourism development in Rodna Commune. With the exception of L.P., which considers tourism to be a positive aspect only if the commune is to become a strong industrial area, the rest of them see in this development several positive aspects, once again conditioned by solving the same shortcomings previously listed: improving road infrastructure, greater involvement of the authorities, and more intense promotion of the area.

M.L.M. recalls that: “an example for this is the small tourist objective in the Măria Valley, where there was the Poiana Zânelor, a mini-mountain resort conceived and realized through private initiative. But credits were taken excessively and without coverage, and the beautiful initiative fell. Poiana Zânelor was in vogue at one point. My colleagues from Cluj County were asking me about this place. In Ilva Valley there was equestrian tourism, staged by the Englishman Julian Ross, who had a horse stud at Lunca Ilvei on a piece of land he had bought, which passed through the Lunca Ilvei and descended on the Măria Valley and wandered to Poiana Zânelor. There were American, English, Spanish tourists. Eighty percent of tourists were foreign tourists and many came from overseas. An efficient marketing mix created by the former owner was the key means by which he managed to attract and keep a clientele of at least 100 Americans who came each summer. So things can move, but some appropriate and efficient formulas must be found, more challenging than what is

happening now". In addition to these examples, which give hope to the tourism development outlook, D.U. enumerates an impressive series of positive effects this development might have: "tourism can generate a positive development for Rodna as it leads to job creation, increasing demand for local products (vegetables, fruit, meat or dairy ), development on a horizontal basis, development of services and the emergence of new services, capital influx due to the (higher) spending of the tourists, stimulating new investments such as multiplying or renovating holiday homes, pensions, tourist routes, ski slopes and the rowing activities on Someș river, but also the increase of the City Hall's income".

It can easily be observed that the locals are aware of the commune's touristic potential, they have beautiful ideas for developing this industry, but they lack direct involvement and initiative. Moreover, most of them, as the interviewees pointed out, are not educated enough in order to have the necessary skills to support the growth of the tourism industry. This is a problem that can be solved both by the cooperation of the public or private actors interested in improving the destination's attractiveness by organizing English classes and basic management and leadership trainings.

Moreover, as revealed by the questionnaire responses, tourists report a problem of major importance for nature protection, namely the problem of waste-management, as observed by the majority of the survey respondents. However, their level of involvement in solving this problem is very low, inferred from the very low participation in the events "Let's do it, Romania!"; this situation's main motivation is the people's lack of interest. It is, therefore, the issue of the clandestine passenger in the sense that they want others to strive and enjoy together the result and common benefits in the sense that the involvement in conservation activities is reduced due to the fact that the power of the example is not properly understood. A lack of tourism education results from the fact that activities such as the observation of fauna and flora are preferred, but at the same time, the overwhelming majority of respondents do not address tourist guides. One

positive aspect is related to the fact that the Rodna Mountains National Park is one of the most popular tourists. Furthermore, the questionnaire respondents revealed: a good general impression about the interaction with the mountain and the protected areas, their preference for internal destinations compared to the foreign ones regardless of the season, the budgets they allocate per night, per stay and annually for mountaineering activities are quite high, so the purchasing power seems to be great. Consequently this provides a solid foundation for the decisions taken for the future tourist development of the area. The need for holidays and the savings that tourists make throughout the year in order to be able to go on holidays, regardless of their income level, lead this opportunity to viability.

Both tourists and locals are dissatisfied with the level of information and promotion of the park and propose raising this level as a solution for the development of tourism demand. However, mass promotion of these areas may jeopardize their protection, since mass tourism does not allow for sustainable development and is not in line with the area protection measures. However, an appropriate and balanced promotion, midway between the current promotion and mass promotion, can lead to the desired results and a development that respects the principles of sustainability.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions of the interviews taken with the locals led to the identification of the major problems faced by the area: poor infrastructure, insufficient promotion, high unemployment rate, reduced professional opportunities. The link between the development of tourism and the socio-economic development of the commune is well known in the minds of the locals. A big contribution from the interviewees is represented by

the proposal of various methods through which this development can be achieved, in particular with the support of the local authorities: the rehabilitation of the roads, an intensive promotion of the area, the creation of jobs by attracting investors, especially in the hospitality industry, and the development and implementation of programs to educate locals and to overcome language barriers.

Some proposals of the local people refer to increasing their engagement in organizing local events, in promoting them online (given the indisputable advantages of online marketing activities), in proposing new events that have the potential to attract many tourists, and, why not, the locals' involvement in the organization, conservation and protection of cultural heritage and natural resources. Some forms of a proactive attitude can be identified in disseminating pieces of information related to the benefits of agro-tourism activities and how local people can provide such services or in the establishment of non-profit organizations to help families and disadvantaged people by selling handicraft items. Of course, it is compulsory that the locals show support to the local authorities by involving as many people as possible in their activities. A big positive impact in promoting the destination can achieve by the creation of an online platform and by the opening of a travel agency that focuses especially on this issue. Basically, the establishment of a Tourism Destination Management Organization can provide the institutional solution for sustainable tourism development in Rodna.

Furthermore, the reactive attitudes among tourists, locals and administrators of the accommodation units, the concordance in pointing out problems (such as the poor condition of the road infrastructure, the inadequate marking of routes, the lack of adequate marketing and promotion activities), the lack of involvement and support from national administrative bodies and an attempt of the local authorities to start actions and think about projects for tourism development represent the highlights of this research. Locals, local authorities and entrepreneurs are fully aware of the benefits of such a development, both in economic

and financial terms, as well as in terms of culture and education. Civic responsibility and the strength of one's own example are still issues that need to be solved. Some macro-economic factors, especially political instability, are seen by those involved as threats for the goals they have proposed. However, the optimism, the beliefs and the clear evidence of thorough attempts to achieve these goals cannot be overlooked.

In the end, the more categories of actors act in a common framework and take proactive attitudes, the more exponentially the results will grow. It is well-known that the power of one's own example and the question "why me?" are well-rooted in the national mentality, but it does not mean that change is not possible. The acknowledgement of all these aspects is the first step towards change and this is the true purpose and the true meaning of this work. This first step will eventually lead as many other subjects as possible to the common end goal, namely the improvement of the living conditions and capitalizing on natural resources, and the further development of Rodna Commune as a sustainable destination.

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