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# THE ECO-ECONOMICAL PRINCIPLES – ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN THE DECISIONAL PROCESS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE AGRO-TOURIST PENSION INTO AN ECO-TOURIST PENSION

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**Abstract:**

*The development of the output during the last decades and the same time with growing population namely energy, raw material demands for industry and food have highlighted the conflict between man and nature, between the processes of social-economic development and natural resources with troubling consequences on the ecologic balance of the planet. If the models were taken into consideration before the beginning of the present economic-financial global crisis in present we can say that we match the second model: stopping the rhythm of economic development, even if the best model should represent the sustainable development.*

*Of course that elaborating a new development model of the human society means changing the old concepts, particularly the economic ones and aligning them to the specific of the environment management and the conditions of the actual crisis. In this respect, we analyzed to of the basic components of the sustainable development concept: on the one hand, the economy and on the other environmental protection. These components are also starting points for the eco-economy domain, which has to elaborate mechanisms, criteria, instruments, models that can be taken in consideration in an economic-ecologic vision of development of the society.*

**Keywords:** *eco-economy, agro-tourist pension, eco-tourist pension, sustainable development, tourism*

The global spreading of the environmental problems which the human society of the present is confronting with placed the specialists and the decision-makers in front of a series of evolution models for the next years: the *sequel* in the same rhythm, direction and style, can be justified of the capacity (verified in the course of history) that

humanity will find the solutions to get out crisis at the right moment, but are not immediate and the irreversible effects are already felt; *stopping the rhythm* of economic development at the minimum level of the material insurance and of the growth of population is an unrealistic solution; *the control* of population is rejected by religion or tradition (the evolution of the population in China will change many rules of the global economy), and restricting the access of the population to welfare is against the human nature; enforcing to all members of society of an ecological attitude through dictatorial methods is not feasible the history proving that the nondemocratic solutions have no viability; *sustainable development* – the only solution unanimously accepted which leads to the promoting of the market economy elements in a democratic background through keeping the high demands and ecological criteria.

It is important to underline that finding optimal alternatives between economy and environmental protection depends on the decision-makers' ability to choose and use the financial-economic instrument adequately to an effective promotion of the actions for environmental protection. The financial instruments that can be used, whose efficiency has been verified in other countries are: taxes that can be promoted as tax differentiation; subsidies to encourage the change of attitude and to grant funds for stopping pollution, deposit redemption.

Of course, it is the results' problem and the economic consequences of sustainable development. From this point of view there is no long term experience in the enforcement of the concept. Such consequences can be understood without having a certain level of certainty and without being finished: improvement service quality, evolution of large sectors of consumer energy and resources towards “cleaner” technologies and less resource users; the development of new types of approaches, jobs, activities; cutting down the resources and environment emergencies and mostly of their outcomes (see Bran Florina, 2002).

Regarding the types of economic growths which predominated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries we can state that there is a large consensus which has been reached. The concept of sustainable development represents a small bridge between the development which has been taken into account for four decades having no satisfactory results and a movement towards saving nature and environment. This is an alliance of two contemporary trends, both coming into being during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The notion of sustainable development supposes the accomplishment of interdependence between the three main ways of reaching this: education, scientific research, political activity. The Finnish economist Malaska explains widely: “The human development if interventions and the outcomes enforced by the human activities even economical, technological, social or cultural, do not alter the changing rate of nature and ecosystems in an uncontrollable way by nature or in an irreversible form from the future generations' point of view.” The economic domain limits the social aspects through production and distribution of goods and services, meeting the human populations' needs. The authorities are called to ensure a policy where man and his rights are taken into account.

Underlining the fact that most of present problems regarding the environment are determined by the individuals way of life and solutions are found both by transforming the social conditions and the changing the way of each persons life.

Most important are economical and political structures responsible fro the determination of the so-called inequity, intra-generations that of the major difference between lower and higher strata which have been emphasized starting from development of the actual global crisis.

Due to the fact that the sustainable development takes as a basis the ecologic ethics, its merit belong to it but its weak points too; more than this the criticism of G D Pindex is present – measuring the degree of economic development. UI Hak came with the idea of a larger index to measure wealth too and life hope, education, welfare, all being incorporated in the Ratios on Human Development 1990.

Malaska introduced the term of 'welfare' concerning the capital a way to measure the GDP ability; this was the only objective criterion to observe the increase 'the offer' of civilization.

Until 2050 the population of the world now estimated to 6 billion will be situated between 7.7 billion and 10.9 billion (see Fig. 1). The last average projection is about 10 billion. The population growth is the main pressure on the environment and the imperative of survival is being translated through the obligation to satisfy the need of this huge population. (Bogdan A. T., 2010)



**Figure 1. World population according to the medium scenario - Population development 2100**

(Correlation calculates using UN, 2007. World Population Prospects)

(Source: Bogdan A. T. et. al., *Ecoeconomic and Bioeconomic Impact of Food Safety and Security in Perspective Increased Consumption of Food and Feed During 2030-2100*, International Symposium Oradea, Romania)

Until two years ago we could state that the sustainable development was meant to be economic growth (not zero or negative growth) tallying the demand of the ecologic balance and the whole human development.

Under the present conditions of the world economic recession we must rethink such notions and try to find adequate solutions to continue the sustainable development even under the conditions of diminishing financial results. The new development depends on the previous experience of people and governments of the ability to interpret the present, of the multiple difficulties our present peoples confront with.

The technical substantial base of this development will be a new technical way of production. One of its fundamental characteristic is the tallying on the so called 'soft' technologies – biotechnologies – and the narrowing up to eliminating the 'tough' ones as far as their use has polluted some geographical areas.

The problem is not exactly to know the volume of growth but that one referring to the kind of growth that has been looted for and accomplished.

Taking place under the conditions of limited resources and mostly those that are not recycled the process of economic growth is not a continuous set of circular fluxes where the poles are production and final personal consumerism. This means that on one side the economic development is addicted to the environment. On the other side any economic activity entails problems between nature and economy, man and environment. This ratio regarding the economic activity and the environment is outlined by entropy, entropic and antientropic.

In an economic area entropy means the process of degradation of material and energetic resources and this process takes place both within economic and not only.

If energy within a certain source might be infinitely used there would be no more economic activity therefore there would be no economy.

Free energy is the energy used to obtain a certain economic asset. After its degradation its transformation into rubbish, free energy changes into linked energy.

Low entropy has an ordered structure and is used in economic processes. High entropy represents a structure of total linked energy with disordered character. Such a qualitative, continuous and irreversible degradation takes place within the economic processes. The free energy turns into a linked energy, order turns into disorder (see Georgescu-Roengen, 1996).

Knowing that the economic processes have entropic character, people must act in correspondence with nature laws, to give a anon entropic character to their activities. Almost people by their actions especially economic ones, produce the acceleration of some natural entropic processes being able to act by accelerating the nonentropic processes too (see Georgescu-Roengen, 1996).

Today, more than ever the theories of the well known researcher seem to be true that the negative and positive social and economic process for Terra are taken into consideration by people in different ways: finding and using new types of energy, managing carefully the existent ones. Avoiding the pollution, degradation of

environment factors; so one of the most important contemporary options is the selection with responsibility - the type of economic growth, economic development.

In context, is necessary that the economic agents to organize and to lead the economic processes, so as they to get the entropy free, instead of the linked on the organized entropy instead of the unorganized one. As a consequence, the intensity of non-entropic economic growth depends on two important complementary and contradictory processes: the entropic, where the natural potential is degrading; another nonentropic, creative, informative, with new possibilities to discover and valuing the resources, to use new ways saving.

By enforcing such a type of development means more powerful ecologic prices which overlaps the global financial-economic crisis. The ecological challenges mostly regarding the principles, the economic system works, shapes the dimension of the efforts which are being asked by this new way.

In a world in which the economy demands are forcing the limits of the natural systems to rely on the distorted signals of the market to guide the decisions on the investments is a certain way to disaster. Converting the economy into an eco-economy is a major challenge. Building an eco-economy will affect "every corner of our life" (see Brown L., 2001).

In an ecologic vision, tourism finds to be within a tight interaction with abiotic elements, biotic elements, antropic and economic, social, cultural elements of the environment. The current evolution of tourism is characterized by the profound renewal of the world touristic offer especially by developing a new array of touristic products, both by a qualitative and quantitative point of view.

Four general factors determine and influence directly the touristic activity: the quantitative and qualitative value of touristic resources; the general economic growth, which mostly influences jobs and incomes; the exchange rate, which determines the evolution of the purchase power of residents and non-residents; the reparation which determines the purchasing power of clients.

These factors mainly rely on exploiting the natural and cultural resources with touristic shades. All touristic activities determine in time and space potential effects on the environment, health or social system. All these influences together are being expressed through the notion of impact.

Tourism, more than any other domain, relies on the environment; this represents its "raw material", its object and domain of activity and tourism deployment being its main frame carrying the resources.

Tourism is being carried out through the environment and its quality can favor or on contrary, touristic activities.

The tourism-environment relationship has a special meaning, the development and protection of the environment representing a sine qua non condition of tourism, any alteration of it can cause damages also to the touristic potential by diminishing or even canceling its resources. Thus, the appreciation of the Swiss specialist prof. J. Krippendorf is conclusive: "If we can lose and then rebuild capital in other domains of

the economy, in tourism this thing isn't happening where the base substance: landscape and earth – once lost is irrevocably lost” (see Zimmer P., 1999).

Of course, the problem is raised at the same level and obviously correlated to all touristic resources whose existence and attraction are directly influenced by the quality of different components of the environment. The more the damages onto the environment have a larger development, the more the touristic activities are affected. In the case of tourism, the consequences of damaging touristic resources generate serious social-economic implications.

From an economic point of view the deficiencies due to the existence of damaged touristic resources are reflected first in the impossibility of taking into account the touristic potential and mainly the lower use of touristic base and lower incomes from their marketing.

The touristic potential as part of the environment, the existence and development, on its quality, therefore considered a possible quality index for its environment, in other words, a barometer of its quality; it is intensively used in those areas in which the adequate requirements are met and it is diminished and gradually removed in those areas in which, for various reasons, a certain component of the environment, such as the scenery, air, or water is degrading.

The economic effects of tourism – estimate income, jobs – are easily emphasized while ecological effects cannot be qualitatively measured rather than quantitatively.

Besides the fact that it is a source of income and jobs, tourism is also a source of satisfaction, for people inhabiting touristic areas.

The protection of the environment and of the touristic heritage is greatly influenced by the ecological awareness of the population and its respect and love of nature, historical, artistic and architectural heritage. Education in the protection of the environment and touristic potential is interdisciplinary; it is a continuous process and an integral part of education in general. It includes the main issues of protection from both a global and regional perspective and examines the economic development and growth in relation to environmental protection, focusing on local, regional and national co-operation for an adequate approach to pollution-related issues.

Currently, in many countries, travel agencies do not always consider the ecological situation of the touristic areas. Tourists are mainly interested in costs rather than in ecological aspects in their social and ecological responsibility. Moreover, many travel agencies are not strong enough to spend substantial funds for involvement in the ecological compatibility of the offers they advertise.

The promotion of a “green” ecological tourism requires the involvement of several decision-makers. First the state, through its economic development policy, through its durable development strategies, provision of high-quality services so as to reduce excessive and inadequate exploitation of cultural and natural heritage. The state is able to trigger involvement of tour operators in environmental protection through legal, juridical and financial regulations. The involvement of local

administrations is equally required, as well as that of the population in Eastern European countries.

Green tourism involves the improvement of the infrastructure, the rural-urban development, the use of non-conventional sources of energy. Moreover, an effective marketing policy is required, as well as a macroeconomic development able to prevent excessive exploitation of a specific area.

The opinion of the local population with reference to the development of touristic areas is equally important.

Given the fact that pollution is not enclosed with the borders of a specific country, international co-operation is a must for the promotion of a regenerating, ecological tourism, for exchange programs and partnerships. Some European countries (Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands) have taken significant steps during the last 2-3 decades in developing an ecological tourism in the areas they intend to visit.

The main cause of the negative effects of touristic development on the environment is neither of a demographic origin, nor related to the increase in consumption, the urbanization, but it is due to the uncontrolled and unilateral such development.

The green tourism will facilitate the efficient use of resources, of the available labor, for the mitigation of inter-regional imbalances, a complex means of diversification of national economies.

The *Global Codes of Ethics for Tourism* was meant to regulate touristic behavior, to determine ecological and ethical lines of action and to become a code of good practice in tourism. Moreover, pilot-actions are envisioned for the development and promotion of new touristic products in rural areas facilitating the collaboration between local, regional and European tour operators.

The concept of durable tourism has become increasingly popular at a microeconomic level through the promotion of green tourism. The actors of the industry of hospitality and travel have become increasingly sensitive to environmental issues. Few are those who support the idea the economic activity does not influence the environment. On the other hand, more and more managers and employers in tourism admit that natural resources have a great economic, actual and potential value if they are adequately handled (see Glăvan V., ).

Developing a rural eco-economy depends on the global vision of the natural resources and on a broad understanding of the restructuring of economic notions and concepts needed to realize this vision.

Concerning the classification of some agro-tourist pensions from Romania (from the actual system with flowers or daisies) like eco-tourist pensions (on could adopting a system with acorn or something else), it is necessary to harmonize the existing system with international models (Swedish, Austrian, Swiss, German, French, and Italian) in order to adapt the methods and techniques of implementing an eco-pension to the local ecotourism, by taking into account the character and traditions of the Romanian tourist village.



Evaluating the preliminary conditions for accrediting the pensions in Mărginimea Sibiului as eco-pensions will be done by field investigation and surveys. The results obtained will allow formulating some proposals for issuing a series of methodological norms of classifying the reception structures with the function of tourist accommodation of the type of eco-pensions, in collaboration with ANTREC and other professional associations of the kind. What we monitor is the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the eco-tourist potential of the natural capital, clean technologies, ecological agriculture, the exploitation of non-polluting natural resources, evaluation of the ecological impact and strategic eco-marketing, in order to identify those pensions that have an eco-tourist potential.

The use of the expertise and results of the research for the specialists in ecology and food industry will enable the implementation of food biotechnologies, the preservation of biodiversity, and the development of eco-friendly economic activities, including ecological agro-tourism.

A great importance have that the administrators of pensions from Mărginimea Sibiului aware of the advantages offered by ecotourism, which is more compatible with the traditional way of living than the other forms of tourism.

Promoting the concept of eco-pension among the administrators of the pensions selected as having eco-tourist potential and the highlighting of the profitability in time of this activity will be done through meetings and discussions held with the support of the town hall and of the members of "Mărginimea Sibiului" Association.

Evaluating and directing the activities from the field of tourism in relation to the ecotourism criteria will allow the exploitation of local natural and economic resources through the certification of eco-tourist products and that of destinations and accommodation structures, in order to guarantee the eco-tourist quality. The food products obtained in the household through ecological farming and stock raising activities could be valorized as traditional products and ecologically certified, in accordance with the effective legislation. The eco-economical principles are essential elements when deciding to transform an agro-tourist pension into an eco-tourist pension. Ecotourism creates jobs, sustainable development alternatives, and a well defined image that can be used in marketing the local, regional, or national products.

By implementing adequate marketing strategies, one could promote, together with the interested tourism agencies, a realistic and attractive tourist product. In the same time, we shall elaborate a guide which will contain short studies, destined for the administrators of pensions, useful for implementing the eco-pensions in the Romanian rural tourism. Alongside norms regarding the use of ecological building materials, of unconventional sources of energy, the use of biotechnologies, the conservation of biodiversity, the guide will also include menus, traditional recipes for valorizing the ecological food products, and leisure activities in protected natural areas.

While acting as a trainer for the administrators of tourist pensions during the courses organized by CCIA Sibiu starting with 2005 and until the present moment, I have become familiarized with the realities and concerns of the owners of pensions from Mărginimea Sibiului. As holder of the manager's license in tourism and manager



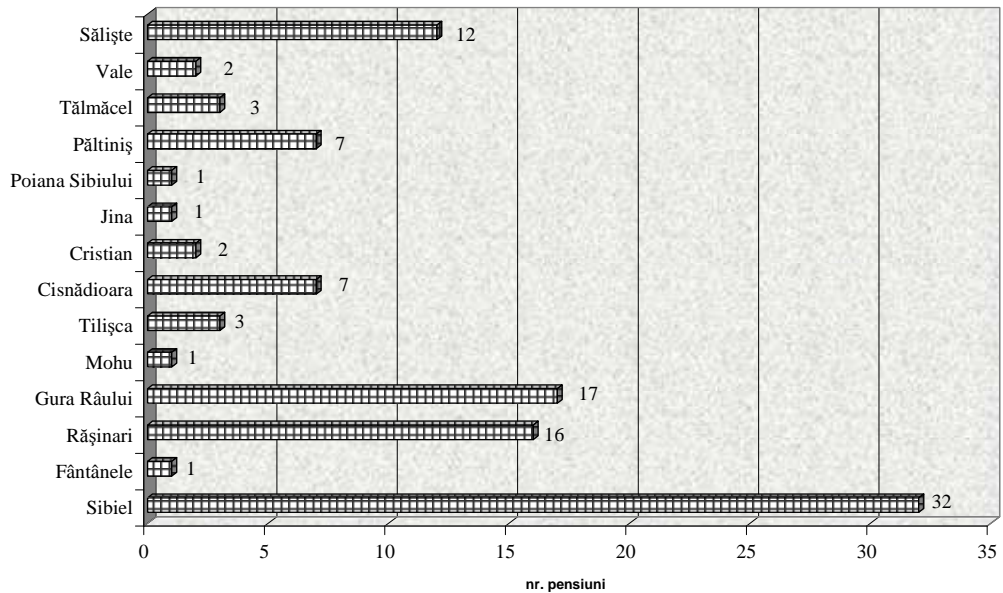
of a travel agency from Sibiu, I have been collaborating ever since 1992 with most of the agro-tourism pensions in the area. Our good relations and the long collaboration period represent an important starting point in the possibility of implementing bio principles and eco-economy in the agro-tourism of the region.

The marketing of ecological tourist services (accommodation, food, and leisure) that blend tradition and environmental protection will allow the sustainable development of the area. Ecotourism is the best practice for tourism in a sustainable environment. Adopting ecological technologies requires a systematic effort in formulating eco-economic policies, especially for restructuring the traditional agricultural activity. Sibiel has an old tradition (before 1989) and, more recently, holds the "Golden Apple" trophy for the hospitality of the people and the well established agro-tourism.

Eco-certification is more and more present in many of the fields of economy, including for identifying products with high ecological potential. The tourist product offered by eco-pensions can be a promoter of green tourism. The systematic construction of public support for changing the mentality implies an intelligent and concerted effort, developed with the help of well informed citizens. Ecotourism contributes to preserving the environment and to supporting the well being of the local population. Eco-pensions will represent a green model, focused on the strategy of the four R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Reexamine), by using eco-economic systems, procedures, and strategies.

Transforming the agro-tourist pensions from the village of Sibiel into eco-pensions, thus making Sibiel the first green village in Romania, and training the administrators of pensions and other key members of the tourist business into forming an eco-economic view of the sustainable development actively contributes to preserving the natural and cultural heritage, includes local communities in the sequential planning, development, and operating processes contributing to their well being.

For realizing such challenges, on elaborating an eco-agrotouristic pension guide, which combines essential knowledge about ecotourism and classification in ecotourism, in order to pass from an agro-tourist to an eco-tourist pension. The manual will represent a useful source of information that can contribute to generating new ideas or adapting practices of sustainable ecotourism to the local conditions of other regions. The manual will be based on the data gathered from the field from persons that will develop these initiatives and will reflect the complexity of small enterprises, the challenges and opportunities with which they are confronted, as well as the endless creativity that this type of business allows. The transition from the traditional economy to eco-economy is generally known, but there is too little understanding for the means that are involved and the technologies necessary in ensuring the development of this process. The necessity of an ecological agriculture, the safety of food, the use of non-polluting technologies and the implementation of the eco- and bio-economy in the future eco-pensions represent an educational challenge (see Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Number of agro-touristical pensions in Mărginimea Sibiului**

The role of the interdisciplinary teams of specialists resides in informing and making the local population aware, so that they are not just simple spectators to these changes, but actors that actively co-work at their accomplishment. The challenge launched by this research is to put together in a traditional agro-ecosystem as many pieces of sustainable development as possible, based on the principles of eco-economy. Once certified, the eco-tourist pensions in Sibiel can become polarization centres for the rural tourism activity. Obtaining the eco-classification and some commercial brands and inovative products of food biodiversity will generate the development of new projects. Taking part in fairs organized by ANTREC and ANAT (tourism scholarships) with our own stand dedicated to the eco-pension, and promoting the image of the eco-pension through leaflets, specialized catalogues and website, will ensure the coherence of the sustainable development.

Organizing a workshop with international participation has the purpose to implement among the administrators of pensions the methods and techniques of pensions eco-classification and to facilitate the exchange of experience with credible representatives of this field of activity.

The integrated approach and the possibility to use the methodology of selection, elaboration, and application in the eco-pension of various results that regard the food biotechnologies will represent an opportunity for a future access to the post-adherence structural funds for the sustainable development of the Romanian village. The eco-pension is an important link in the chain ecological agriculture – ecological food – conservation of biodiversity bio and eco-economic development.

## Acknowledgements

This paper was cofinanced from the European Social Fund through Sectoriale Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013, project number POSDRU/89/1.5/S/63258 "Postdoctoral school for zootechnical biodiversity and food biotechnology based on the eco-economy and the bio-economy required by eco-san-genesis".

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