

Economics of agriculture
SI – 2
UDK: 338.48-44 (1-22)(498)

LEGAL ORGANIZATION OF CYCLING, THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP AGRO TOURISM IN ROMANIA

Florescu Georgiana¹, Camelia Toma², Lepădatu Ion Cristian³

Abstract

Presently, the Ministry of Tourism is under way to promote a law to introduce in our country as well a form of tourism successfully practiced in western countries, namely the cycling tourism. One can state that cycling tourism is even nowadays practiced in Romania, but on an un-organized basis and on routes that are not homologated. The development and promotion of this form of tourism can provide to some rural and agricultural pensions in the country new possibilities for attracting customers, due to the fact that tourists going on cycling tours will need hosts to rest and taste the traditional Romanian food.

Key words: Romania, cycling tourism, agro-tourism, legislation

Introduction

In this paper, we wish to investigate the adoption of legal regulation on cycling in Romania and the ways such a project can lead to the development of agro tourism in our country. Currently, the Ministry of Tourism wants to promote a bill to introduce and regulate in our country a form of tourism practiced with great success in Western countries, cycling tourism. This type of tourism exists already, of course, but it is unorganized and there aren't any approved routes.

1 Florescu Georgiana, Ph.D., lecturer in Bioterra University, Bucharest, Romania, georgiana_florescu1972@yahoo.com

2 Camelia Toma, PhD, Senior researcher, Institute of Agricultural Economics, Romanian Academy, Calea 13 Septembrie no. 13, Bucharest, Romania, cameliatoma2004@yahoo.fr

3 Lepădatu Ion Cristian, Ph.D. student, Bioterra University, Bucharest, Romania, llepadatumihai2006@yahoo.com

Background and existing infrastructure

The development and promotion of this form of tourism will be for some rural and agro hostels in the country new opportunities for attracting customers, because tourists will be bike paths hosts and will need to rest and to taste traditional Romanian food. We consider agro-tourism as a narrower concept, while integrated rural tourism and tourism refers to all services related and charged directly to peasant households. Term accommodation and tourism activities is aiming at leisure in peasant households, together with the hosts, so this concept aims at providing services of accommodation, dining and entertainment in the household and in close connection with them.

The rural tourism is the need to create accommodation, while the farms will be used as tourist sites of deployment of the service. Agro-tourism as a particular form of rural tourism must be practiced by farmers and householders as a secondary activity, while agriculture remains the main occupation and source of income. The Mountain Area Commission in Romania, under the organization and development of tourism in the mountain area, defines agro-tourism as follows: a particular form of rural tourism, more complex, encompassing both the tourism industry itself: accommodation, hostel, tourist service, the programs, and additional basic services and economic activity, usually agriculture, practiced by the hosts of tourists (productive activities for obtaining and processing of agricultural products in the household and their sale to tourists, or commercial networks, and house leisure).

Within the concept of sustainable development, agro-tourism becomes the factor that is contributing to the preservation of rural structures and lifestyles, habits and traditions. This form of tourism is a multi-activity type, it is more than staying at a farm house. Increasing interest for the natural and rational nutrition is a key attraction and is manifested more strongly in the international market, particularly in developed countries. Life in the country ensures an active rest, becoming scarcer and more expensive in urban areas. Due to the relatively small size of farms involved (often family farms), agro-tourism is better equipped to meet tourist demand for quality, privacy, originality, while the elasticity of purchased services ensure their adaptability to individual needs. Agro-tourism can help diversify and improve the local economy, increase business and employment opportunities, promotion and development of services, diversifying the use of the workforce, attracting new investments. Agro-tourism is emerging as an activity able to capitalize on existing surplus of accommodation in many households, prepared and equipped to receive guests for a period of time. It generates motivation of the householder to improve the household inside and outside, in order to obtain additional incomes; it stimulates additional concerns to develop its core activities, up to the quality standards desired by tourists.

1. In essence, agro-tourism involves a recovery of the valence top economic, natural and man of rural settlements by tourism, with the emphasis on maintaining traditional components in parallel with satisfaction of attractive modern tourism, competitive co-participation and mutual cohabitation tourist and host-guest receiver defining elements. Radu Rey appreciates that “agro-tourism is not just a factor

of economic balance, which engages many reproducible resources adjacent factors, but education is a cultural ambassador, a constant and not very expensive instrument of social progress” (*Radu Rey, 2001 Romanian Carpathians, no.5/2001*).

The performance puts in contact agro-tourism people (hosts and tourists) from all different economic and social environments and through this interaction can lead to positive developments, both among the tourists - who come into contact with other mentalities and habits, with other way of organizing life, and among the hosts who may know a number of environmental features and places of origin of tourists. Thus, by sharing information, people are coming out of rural isolation, but are still protecting its cultural dimension, the viability and stability through tourism. Agro-touristic activities must be capable of maintaining and developing agricultural activities and their substitutes, because otherwise they would lose the essence of tourism.

Factors stimulating eco-tourism development

Factors that have stimulated and stimulate tourism development, influencing growth of tourist flows are mainly: (a) increasing urban stress; (b) increasing interest in health maintenance while increasing the level of education; (c) increasing interest in authentic, traditional food; (d) fulfillment of personalized travel demand.

Ecotourism is emerging as a new form of tourism, which grew rapidly in the last decade under the label of “nature tourism”, the main feature being the strong business orientation of certain environmental principles. Tourism is practiced by small groups of people, and as a business is contributing to biodiversity conservation and is sustaining prosperity of the rural population, by means of responsible action from both tourists and the tourism industry. Ecotourism involves all tourism activities and economic development in an unspoiled environment, where economic restructuring and technical adjustments or shaping urban environmental management - undertaken for the welfare needs of the population - should not affect, in any form, the inheritance of future generations. This is why this type of tourism requires the adoption of a new behavior and tour operators, tourists and the general public, from government and nongovernmental organizations, goal achievable through: (a) environmental education to all sections of the population; (b) promoting moral and ethical responsibilities, and attitudes directed towards preserving and protecting natural and cultural environment by all agencies; (c) cultural awareness from the tourists and their participation experience.

Nature-based tourism, as a form of ecotourism, has begun to be studied by experts in development since the early 90s. In 1991 “The International Ecotourism Society” (a non-profit society with 1600 members from 110 countries) defined ecotourism as “those responsible travelers that conserves the environment and supports the development of the local population”.

In 1996, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) considered ecotourism as trips organized by responsible persons towards the environment and tourists who enjoy and appreciate nature, elements that overlap with conservation

measures, thus limiting the negative impacts and providing social benefits and economic gains for the local population.

As a tool that helps development, ecotourism can be defined by the three principles set out under the auspices of UNEP (United Nations Administrative Council for Environment): (a) is conserving biological and cultural diversity by strengthening management systems (public and private) by increasing the value of ecosystem; (b) is promoting the use of biodiversity by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism and related business networks; (c) is sharing benefits with local communities by attracting development and their participation in ecotourism planning and business management.

Legal provisions for cycling tourism in Romania

With a land that ranges from steep to nice and smooth, Romania offers cyclists of all categories and levels all kinds and things they can enjoy, in addition to bike paths. A magnificent view of routes offered by forests and traditional villages invites cyclists to stop quite often. Romania has a great potential for cycling in general and mountain biking in particular, due to favorable topography, varied landscape, rich cultural and natural tourist attractions. Large parts of the Carpathian Mountains are well suited for mountain biking for all levels of difficulty, from easy trails to the forest highways long ridge shifts more uneven paths and high-level differences. Almost all are open for mountain biking (the very few exceptions representing scientific or natural reservations with strict regime, border areas etc.).

Currently, the Ministry of Tourism wishes to promote a bill to regulate the cycling tourism. The main regulations included in the draft bill are presented below.

The National Network of Cycling Routes in Romania is to be established (RNTCR), encompassing all the terrestrial communication paths in Romania which are marked for the tourist bike traffic, are known as „cycling routes”. They are classified as follows: (a) the geographical extension criteria: 3 categories: national, regional and local; (b) the type of communication means used, 2 types: road type and mountain type; (c) the difficulty level criteria, 4 levels: easy, medium, difficult and expert. The surface of communication lines is asphalt or equivalent, cycling trails should be paved as the road and possibly upgraded to the mountain, to the smallest roughness in all cases, except high mountain expert cycling trails. Average and maximum slope and the difference in total and each level of ascent cycling trails are consistent with: (a) grade - rising from casual to expert, (b) type - if possible lower than those of the mountain road; (c) rank - at the national and smaller regional, local high as possible.

Mountain cycling trails of national and regional ranking should be accessible also for mountain bikes loaded with luggage, in wet weather. Cycling trails used as communication routes should have adequate width and curvature radius for two-way bicycle traffic, should be safe and comfortable, and needs to accommodate the possible presence of luggage on bicycles with trailers up to 1 meter wide. The cycling trails

that cross the roads are devoted mainly to connect tourist areas and other areas of the country, including the natural, cultural, historical sights, with each other and with large towns and communications nodes. The mountain cycling trails are able to use trails on earth roads along rivers or dams, as well as in lowland regions or in peri-urban forests. Since biking is increasingly popular, in urban areas or in villages, cycling trails routes should be chosen so as to go wherever possible: downtown (center), commercial areas, administrative areas, sites of tourist interest, green areas or even quiet residential areas. Within the cycling trails, some itineraries should be chosen without a high sinuosity, easy to follow and close to other communication means.

Cycling trails configuration should comply with the principle of continuity and straightness. Cycling trails lengths should be chosen so as to take 5-12 days for the national ranking trails, 2-5 days for the regional ranking trails, and just one day for the local ranking trails.

Cycling trails come in two styles: linear or circuit. Linear cycling trails are generally of national interest, while the circuit type is mostly of regional and local interest. Each cycling trail is assigned with a conventional sense, except for the local mountain “expert” ones. Conventional starting and ending points are assigned to the cycling trails; they coincide in case of circuit-type cycling trails. Sometimes, for long trails, there might be additional secondary starting and ending points. Nevertheless, the starting and ending points of all cycling trails should be accessible by public transport.

In Romania, all cycling trails will be eventually connected with each other and arranged in a hierarchical network corresponding to the type and rank; so that all local or regional cycling trails will usually be connected with the next higher rank. The road cycling trails of national ranking will have multiple intersections with each other and will connect with corresponding cycling trails from neighboring countries thus connecting to the international cycling trails highways including bicycle trans EuroVelo network, thus forming a national subnet where RNTCR will represent the basic structure. The starting and ending points of the national road cycling trails points will be located at state border crossings open to international or pedestrian traffic.

RNTCR will integrate with other transport networks in Romania - pedestrian, road, railway, ship, air, ensuring inter-modality, and will become a part of the national transport system.

The cycling trails number, type and rank, their density and distribution should match the territorial needs, the available resources and the necessary regulations, “populating” each area of the country, by taking into account the specific features of the area, the amount and type of local tourist attractions and number of potential users, while strictly observing the environmental protection requirements.

For identification, management and promotion purposes, the cycling trails will be assigned with appropriate topic, name, logo and information. For tagging, description and management purposes, the cycling trails may be conventionally “divided”, where appropriate, in up to three successive levels of subdivisions, sections and segments. Only commissions in the county councils will be authorized to develop new trails,

significantly amend itineraries or eliminate existing cycling trails. The very same authorities will approve changes, restoration and maintenance work on the cycling trails, and they will be opened again for use only if all the re/construction and marking operations have been completed and received.

Restricting access to a cycling trail may be ordered only temporarily by public authorities for good reason, such as repair work, disasters, special events or other circumstances that make the bicycle traffic impossible, unacceptable or dangerous. In all cases these restrictions should be announced in advance and alternatives should be provided.

In the documentation for spatial planning, tourism cadastre, passageways cadastre, tourism resource inventories etc., bicycle routes should be appropriately outlined, as required by law. The specific signs, billboards with their accessories, and the other specific elements of bicycle trails require planning; special traffic signs and information for cyclists are public property and submitted to public protection and administration.

All costs related to the design, marking, monitoring and maintenance of the cycling trails should be covered by funds from the county councils budget, and in addition, by other public or private funds, domestic or foreign, channeled through the central and/or local authorities, NGO-s, tourism operators and other stakeholders in the industry.

The use of cycling trails is free and may not be subject to payment of fees for access and transit. Bicycle routes are marked on the ground by location along the communication lines that pass cycling trail at specified intervals and at branches and junctions of a series of graphics called "bicycle markings". Bicycle markings, depending on the complexity and technical requirements, apply by painting directly onto the substrate or through signs and billboards marking the cycling trail. Bicycle markings have specific standardized design and are composed of basic graphic elements, called cycling trail signs marking; additional text and other graphical elements may be added to form five types of combinations of increasing complexity, called bookmarks for cycling trails.

Cycling trails marking signs are the icon version of road cycling using, the common signs plus the symbol "C" as a mark of individualization. Additional elements that may appear on cycling trails markings are: indicative route, route logo, the GPS coordinates of the location, proximal or main destination (together with distances), track names, sponsor logo etc.

For easy visual identification of the difficulty degree of cycling trails, their names should be placed on signs and billboards in the corresponding color code: blue for easy, red for medium, black for difficult, and yellow & black for expert. Bicycle signs should as well indicate the distances to a main and a proximal destination. The indication will be given in kilometers, rounded to km for more than 10 km distance and rounded to hectometers (100 m) for less than 10 km distance.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, Romania has a great tourism potential and is providing multiple opportunities, unfortunately still modestly exploited as for rural tourism (agro-tourism), and ecological tourism (eco-tourism) etc.

But why not cycling? An essential part of ecotourism, cycling trips have taken quick and powerful development in Western Europe countries; there, special routes for mountain biking enthusiasts have been settled. In addition to marked trails, detailed maps and tourist information points advise on suitable routes based on their length and difficulty. Moreover, bike rental centers have been established, as well as professional guides and tours organized.

For the moment, Romania is unfortunately quite far from all this, since cycling became less and less popular during the last two decades. Even in very busy cities, there are no bicycle lanes, as a viable alternative for private and public transport, as in many other European countries (Germany, Netherlands, Belgium).

However, the natural environment offers plentiful of opportunities and the fact that in our country the network is still less arranged, is not necessarily a disadvantage and may even be an element of attraction.

Literature

1. Antonoaie Niculaie, Romeo Cretu, Tiberiu Foris, et al 2002. - Ecotourism - part of modern tourism, the "Tourism Management", Ed Psihomedica, Sibiu.
2. Catalin Romeo Cretu, 2005 - "Legislation in catering and tourism", Editura CERES, Bucharest.
3. *** - National Institute of Statistics, 2000-2008. - Romania tourism - Statistical Compendium.
4. *** - Official Gazette of Romania, 1997-2009 tourism legislation
5. Rey, Chris, no.5/2001 - Ecotourism - a national opportunity in the Romanian Carpathians, National Association of rescuers from Romania, Bucharest.