

An overview of the new trends in rural tourism

Karin Andreea SASU¹, Gheorghe EPURAN²

Abstract: *The main purpose of this paper is to examine the concepts of creativity and authenticity and their connection to rural tourism. A review of the types of rural tourism has been made, highlighting the authentic character of each one: in agritourism, authenticity is experienced by the tourists performing chores in a rural setting; the authentic feature of ethnic tourism is represented by living the life of local minorities; authenticity in ecotourism is perceived due to the ecological aspect; the authenticity in creative tourism is derived from the creative activities performed together with the locals; the authentic feature of culinary tourism is given by the fact that the tourists can experience local cuisine and beverages. This paper draws on the literature which explores the new trends, namely creativity and authenticity in rural tourism.*

Key-words: *rural tourism, types of rural tourism, creativity, authenticity, commodification*

1. Introduction

The importance of rural tourism has been widely recognised as an important factor in the development of rural areas. This fact is acknowledged by several authors (Tureac, Turtureanu and Bordean, 2008; Albu and Nicolau, 2011; Fagioli, Diotallevi, Ciani, 2014; Garau, 2015) who perceive rural tourism as a means of sustainability by creating new jobs that are much needed in a declining rural area or by reviving traditional customs. As Bessière states, “rural areas are now increasingly seen as places for entertainment, leisure activities, second homes and as an alternative to urban residential areas” (1998, p. 21).

Regarding the number of tourists who practice rural tourism, the trend is an upward one, while they seek a form of responsible or ecological tourism. At the same time, the tourists turn their attention to certain areas which offer unique and specific experiences, and consequently authentic ones, in which the promoted lifestyle is primordial. In this way the globalised nature of mass tourism can be avoided.

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, sasu.karin.andreea@unitbv.ro

² Transilvania University of Braşov, epuran.gheorghe@unitbv.ro

The word *tradition* is often linked to rural tourism; however the rural space cannot remain isolated and unaffected by the influence of globalization and the natural advance of modernization. In order to make this process less noticeable for tourists, there is a trend that focuses on creating activities, such as visiting ethnic villages, theme parks and ethnic homes, taking part in events and ethnic festivals and participating in traditional dances or ceremonies (Yang, Wall and Smith, 2008 cited in Yang, 2011, p. 562).

These activities or features emphasize the unique character of rural areas and they are also an alternative to classical cultural tourism. The development of creative activities in rural tourism involves creating a sustainable form of tourism in which the seasonality becomes less and less evident.

2. Definition and types of rural tourism

Even if there is not a clear-cut definition of rural tourism, researchers have found several similar features. A comprehensive definition that uses these characteristics is given by Nagaraju and Chandrashekara (2014, p. 43) who state that rural tourism represents “any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience”.

A reason why it is hard to find a common ground in defining this form of tourism is because it is an umbrella term which encompasses more types of tourism, such as:

- agritourism – this form of tourism uses the farm as the main place for activities. Darău et al. (2010, p 41) states that agritourism “is organized by farmers, usually as a secondary activity, agriculture remaining their main occupation and source of income”. What is specific to agritourism is the fact that the tourists spend the night in the peasants’ households and not in specially arranged accommodations, such as guesthouses or hotels. The tourists participate in the everyday farm chores actively, hence the authentic nature of the touristic experience. As Daugstad and Kirchengast point out, “agri-tourism appeals to a target group that is eager to have ostensibly intimate, personalised, and ethically correct experiences in their holidays” (2013, pp. 183-184).
- ethnic tourism – it is highly based on involving the locals, especially the minority population of a rural settlement, by displaying their way of life in front of tourists. This statement is supported by Wood (1984, p. 361), who considers that the focus should be displayed directly “on people living out a cultural identity whose uniqueness is being marketed for tourists”. King (1994) adds that travelling for ethnic reunions with the aim of finding one’s ancestry plays a big role in ethnic tourism.

- ecotourism – according to The International Ecotourism Society, “Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel” into one form of tourism that is not harmful to the environment or to the people who practice it. In order for tourism to be *eco*, it must fulfil certain conditions, such as: to help protect and preserve nature, to use local resources (both human and material), to have an educational purpose, the activities should have a less negative impact on the environment (Nistoreanu, Dorobanțu and Țuclea, 2011). Some of the ecotouristic activities are: hiking, skiing, biking, canoeing, trips to local communities where people can buy and learn about the traditional foods and drinks, visit the cultural attractions etc.
- creative tourism – in its simplest definition, it implies that the tourist learns “new skills and undertake recognizably creative activities” (Cloke, 2007, p. 43). Moreover, UNESCO adds an important element, that is “creative tourism is travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience”. (UNESCO, 2006, p.3). There are many new associations that organise an amalgam of interactive courses, workshops and presentations of food or traditional items while these activities take place in the rural space. Just like ecotourism, creative tourism must meet several purposes: it must be “a means of involving tourists in the creative life of the destination, a creative means of using existing resources, a means of strengthening identity and distinctiveness, [...], a source for recreating and reviving places” (Richards and Marques, 2012, p. 4).
- culinary tourism – food and wine routes – culinary tourism is part of cultural tourism, but because of the nature of its activities and principles, it can be perceived from a rural perspective, as well. The tourists’ main motivation for travelling is the desire to discover traditional dishes specific to a certain place. In her work on food, authenticity and tourism, Sims (2009) argues that the food and drinks consumed by the tourists, but which are locally produced, play an important role in the development of both economic and environmental sustainability, especially by helping farmers produce and sell the foodstuffs. As Heldke points out, “food is a medium that allows an immediately authentic relationship with a culture or tradition” (2003, cited in Robinson and Clifford, 2012, p. 577). The activities a culinary tourist can cover during travelling, as suggested by Tomescu and Botezat (2014) are: visits to local food festivals, food producers, wineries or thematic museums.

3. Theoretical considerations

Tourism, as other service industry components, had to constantly remodel itself in order to meet the diverse and changing market needs. It is known that the phenomenon of globalization is transforming tourist destinations into standardised ones, where almost the same services are offered and the representative features of

the place are diminishing. At one point, the need arose for a new concept to be developed, namely *glocalization*; thus, the destinations would offer universal services, but in an autochthonous manner.

Salazar argues that “Diversity sells. The marketing of cultural and heritage tourism, which promotes the experience of so-called ‘authentic traditional cultures’, vividly illustrates this” (2005, p. 631). Based on this, it is obvious why tourism has developed in all its forms with all its subtypes. The concept of *tradition* has been used extensively in marketing; for example, in France the use of this term “in new brand names applying for registration by the Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle, increased from 10% in 1980 to 70% in 2000” (Amilien, Fort and Ferras, 2007). Moreover, authenticity is considered an “essential asset of firms that provide services for consumers, which are not only satisfied with low costs and high quality, but also seek for genuine experiences” (Pine and Gilmore, 2008 cited in Ram, Bjork and Weidenfeld, 2016, p. 110).

On the one hand, the commodification of authenticity has deconstructive effects that lead to kitsch, as Cole states: “tourism turns culture into a commodity, packaged and sold to tourists, resulting in a loss of authenticity” (2007, p. 945). An example of this is the case of mass produced souvenirs. But on the other hand, Littrell, Anderson, and Brown (1993 cited in Trinh, Ryan and Cave, 2014, p. 276) argue that the tourists look after “uniqueness and originality, workmanship, aesthetics seen as traditional in function and looks, cultural and historic integrity, local craftsmanship and the genuineness of the shopping experience” when buying souvenirs.

If until recently, the main focus in rural tourism has been on the development of sustainability, lately, two new trends have emerged, namely creativity and authenticity.

3.1. The concept of creativity – a new trend in rural tourism

As stated above, creative tourism helps rural areas by diversifying activities and by attracting a new typology of tourists, i.e., urban tourists who actively participate in educational activities specific to the destination. According to a study supported by the Commission and the Council of Europe, “the development of creative tourism is evident in rural areas (where creativity is needed to combat a lack of economic alternatives)” (2010, p. 26). Because “creativity allows destinations to innovate new products relatively rapidly, giving them a competitive advantage over other locations” (Richards and Wilson, 2006, p. 1215), this is a reason why in Romania, for instance, some associations have developed diverse programmes with the aim of promoting rural areas (see the case of My Transylvania Association from Sibiu).

The assimilation of creativity by the tourism industry was due to the fact that, as Richards points out, the marketers had to find a way in which to develop new strategies in order to promote original places, which are differentiated by creative or

distinctive activities (2011). The creative tourist does not share the same characteristics as the one who practices mass tourism. According to Richards, “the tourist is also transformed from an insensitive individual who is ignorant about local culture into a pupil and a colleague who is there to receive and exchange knowledge with their hosts” (2010, p. 140).

3.2. The concept of authenticity – a new trend in rural tourism

The need of studying authenticity from a tourism perspective is supported by Kolar and Zabkar who state that “current trends in tourism coupled with the postmodern view suggest that a more affirmative and operative framework is needed for an examination and application of authenticity within tourism marketing” (2010, p. 655). According to MacLeod (2005), authenticity is constructed as part of the product presented to tourists. Moreover, it does not represent an object, but a construction assigned to tourists by those who have the power to do so. It is admitted that the folklore of rural areas is usually best preserved, coherent and balanced; it creates and ensures the identity of each geographical area of the country (Gogonea, 2007).

Authenticity was first correlated to tourism in 1973 by professor MacCannell (1973), who perceived it as a staged authenticity. There are two dimensions of authenticity, in this regard:

- front stage authenticity – it represents the tourists’ first encounter with the new culture. It is an artificial authenticity, shaped by the locals in order to attract curious tourists who have predetermined stereotyped images of that place. It is mostly represented by physical objects such as stores adornments or reproductions of historical events. According to Wang, “things appear authentic not because they are inherently authentic but because they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives, or powers” (1999, p. 351). Furthermore, “authenticity or truth is still determined by how closely something resembles people’s idea of it. For village life to be authentic, it must accord with how one thinks village life is” (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006, p. 74). Front stage authenticity may, very well, have nothing to do with the culture it represents and for this reason the participants are represented mostly by mass tourists.
- back stage authenticity - it represents the real authenticity and it is less visible for tourists; it opens the access to the nontouristic life of the locals.

Regarding the use of authenticity in rural tourism, it has the purpose of idealising and creating a pristine image of the village; thus tourists have a bucolic experience. Authenticity is also viewed as a “western cultural notion associated with the past ‘primitive Other’ articulated in opposition to modernity” (Cole 2007, p. 944).

4. Conclusion

To sum up, it is worth mentioning the fact that the concepts of creativity and authenticity are relatively new in the tourism industry, and hence the lack of research in this field. However, extrapolating, the two concepts may be correlated with rural tourism and their implication in this form of tourism can be furthered discussed. These concepts address a typology of tourists who are more educated and passionate about applying these principles.

This paper is the result of an exploratory research study based on reviewing available literature especially about rural tourism, creativity and authenticity. It has been pointed out that authenticity represents a set of values tourists assign to rural spaces. At the same time, creativity, through its creative activities, helps reinforce the authentic character of a place.

5. References

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