

SUMMARY

Key words: sustainable development, rural tourism, cluster, spin-off, Lapusna.

The general objective of the doctoral thesis “**Studies Regarding The Perfecting Of Service Management And Ecotourism in the Gurghiu Valley**” is identifying and making use of the development potential of ecotourism in relation to the rural communities in the Gurghiu Valley.

The current paper deals with an important issue that affects numerous rural communities – the development of rural ecotourism and services within the current European mainframe.

The motivation behind this doctoral thesis is highlighting the scientific and practical importance of a formal strategic management process, as part of the development of rural services and ecotourism, implemented at the level of rural communities, in terms of both development options for said communities, and the general framework of European development.

The goal consists in **drawing up a complex scientifically grounded study** for improving the rural ecotouristic service management in the Gurghiu Valley, as well as in **drawing up a scenario regarding the lasting development of the Gurghiu Valley ecotouristic Destination** in the European context (**Integrated regional development model**), based on the previously mentioned complex study. The foundation of the study represents the methodological principle of the complex systemic approach of the contemporary economic and social concepts.

Using creative methods (**Tripon A. – 2006**), I have identified and sought out answers to the following questions: What is the stockpile in terms of ideas, attitudes, experiences, goods that can contribute to the lasting development of the analyzed region?...How can we mobilize the full existing potential in order to develop a reference point in terms of Romanian ecotourism in the Gurghiu Valley?...How can we integrate the Gurghiu Valley ecotouristic products/services in a European and global context? What are the steps that need to be followed in order for the visions to become current

reality in a short period of time?...What are the major managerial problems that may occur and what are the advised managerial solutions?...

The following tasks are solved in accordance with the specific **objectives proposed in the thesis**:

- **Identifying the optimal means of promoting the Gurghiu Valley ecotouristic destination.** The essence of the objective is the region's development via ecotourism, which can ensure a judicious usage of its potential following the principles of lasting development and can insure a viable organizational framework for perpetuating the local traditions and culture. A precondition for "opening" the region consists of the communication ties within the region as well as connecting these ties to the national and international network, an aspect that implies modernizing and rehabilitating the local road infrastructure and extending to the modernization of the telecommunications infrastructure. The region is still confronted, in certain areas, with the need to develop the primary facilities networks: water, sewerage system, electrical energy and natural gasses.
- **Identifying the means for developing tourism.** The priority is to make use of the region's touristic potential by means of highlighting and being aware of the existing ecotouristic objectives' value, establishing an acceptable level of the quality of services rendered, developing certain new ecotouristic objectives and products in order to increase the economic income resulted from the touristic activity, insuring supplemental income sources from the traditional work of the locals, geared towards insuring their livelihood.
- **Identifying the concrete means for sustainable development of rural region.** Due to the high percentage of rural areas in Romania, we emphasize promoting the integrated and lasting development of these areas by means of optimizing the existing sectors, encouraging the diversification of economic and social activities, sustaining the development and modernization of the infrastructure through access to the latest technology, among others. We are

also aiming at improving the quality of life by preserving the environment, improving living conditions, as well as improving the access to basic services, and maintaining viable rural communities by preserving their culture and traditions. The regional rural environment is characterized by a shortage of public services, healthcare, household utility furnishing (methane gas, drinkable water, telephone lines), which creates a discrepancy compared to the urban environment.

- **Developing the human resources.** One of the main requirements for the successful implementation of the ecotouristic sustainable development strategy for the Gurghiu Valley is exploiting and increasing the quality of the human resources.

Considering the scope and specific objectives in the thesis through their realization solve the following tasks:

- identifying and making use of the local resources pertaining to the development of the rural ecotouristic product and services;
- highlighting the important regional partners and integrating them into a cluster;
- arguing the superiority of the cluster in terms of exploiting the local potential;
- revealing the fears/concerns of the partners collaborating via cluster, as well as mentioning the manner through which to overcome them;
- drawing up a plan of action – first an innovative spin-off for applicative research, followed by a cluster.

Brief of the doctoral thesis' main parts

Part I, entitled “BIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDY IN THE FIELD OF ECOTOURISM AND ITS MANAGEMENT”, is made up of 3 chapters that encompass the theoretical aspects regarding the bibliographical study – sustainable development and ecotourism in Romania and in Europe, as well as the concept of ecotourism and management.

Part II, “PERSONAL RESEARCH, RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS” is made up of 8 chapters that illustrate my own research, results and their interpretations.

CHAPTER I – THE CONCEPT OF ECOTOURISM. ITS TYPOLOGY AND MANAGMENT. The chapter creates a general analysis of the main concepts of ecotourism – conceptual clarifications, principles, the ecotouristic market – size, tendencies, the profile of the ecotourist ; Entities involved in sustaining ecotouristic activities ; touristic/ecotouristic management ; total quality management ; innovation as a process. There are product innovations in ecotourism (new ecotourism products or services); method innovations, as well as planned modifications within the process of combining influence factors; structure innovations, as well as changes in the doers’ task coordination, changes in authority reports or retribution system reports; social innovations – which is linked to the firing or hiring of collaborators, behaviour change through reconversion or professional specialization, motivational systems, etc.

CHAPTER II - THE PROCESS OF INNOVATION IN AGROTOURISM. Here, we enlarge upon subjects like the Europe 2020 Strategy - a union of innovation; European Destinations of Excellence; Nature 2000 – particularities and implications in the Romanian market; the master-plan for the development of national tourism 2007-2026; the “South-East Europe” program; The Regional Operational Program For The Increase In Economic Competition; the integration of companies within the supply chain or the clusters. **The hospitality industry is different from any other, and any hospitality manager has more direct contact with clients (guests) than most of the managers in other fields, goes through more crises and tension than production industry managers, plans more simulations and training within the coordinated department, seeks people with special managerial skills, and must be capable to expect the unexpected.**

CHAPTER III - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT introduces the National Strategy For Sustainable Development In Romania, Horizons 2013-2020-2030 and the national strategy for ecotouristic development in Romania. **The important fields that need to be considered in order to be promoted towards the development of**

ecotourism are: public acknowledgement and education, the preservation and protection of nature, marketing and promotion (The National Strategy For The Development Of Ecotourism In Romania).

CHAPTER IV - THE PURPOSE, THE OBJECTIVES AND THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH", sums up the pursued goal and objectives, the research methodology (research methods, "quantity-quality" dichotomy, quantitative research methods, qualitative methods, integrated methods of study, consulting in the field of agriculture, survey-based research), integrated study methods – whose purpose is reducing the disadvantages of other types of methods already presented, in order to build an accurate and faithful picture of the reality of the investigated company, for as much as possible; we used the SC "ANCA'S SECRET" SRL company case study for this purpose.

CHAPTER V - THE STUDY OF GEOGRAPHICAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE GURGHIU VALLEY. We present the study of the geographical, cultural and economic state in the Gurghiu Valley, the geographical and economical outline of the Aria Fâncel region, the types of tourism that can be practiced in the ecotouristic structures, human resources, Gurghiu Valley cultural traditions and anthropic resources.

We emphasize the practicing, from the very beginning, of the following ecotouristic recreational activities: becoming familiar with and learning certain traditional crafts, studying and learning certain traditional customs, viewing films and consulting scientific documents regarding protected areas, studying such areas' ecosystem, photographing /filming local floral and faunal resources, mountain hiking on predetermined hiking trails, riding horse-drawn carts in arranged spaces, sleigh rides or skiing on specially arranged trails, cycling on predetermined trails, visiting specifically arranged historical and cultural objectives for the tourists' passion.

CHAPTER VI - CHAPTER VI. STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ECOTOURISM. The results of the opinion poll on the development of ecotourism and rural tourism in the Gurghiu Valley emphasize the real contemporary possibilities and point out as a main attraction within the sample communities, the natural framework, followed (on the same level of interest) by the flora and fauna, the tradition and culinary art specific to the Gurghiu Valley, highlighting the customs and traditional

culture. The analysis of certain aspects of the touristic phenomenon in Sovata – renowned neighboring resort, can be considered a worthy example.

CHAPTER VII - CHAPTER VII. STUDY ON MANAGEMENT INTEGRATION IN THE GURGHIU VALLEY ECOTOURISM. We approach the subject of the strategic management of the ecotourism processes (The Strategic Management of the Ecotourism Processes, The Integration of Intuition and Analysis), performance management exploration in the Gurghiu Valley (Measuring Performance, Initiating Performance Measurements in Ecotourism, Integrating Management in the Gurghiu Valley Ecotourism, Project Management in the Gughiu Valley, Gurghiu Valley Clusters – examples, interactive collaboration – the cluster (Porter M. –Clusters and Cluster Development) implies the interactive collaboration of the members' synergy, from the economic, governmental, non-governmental, institutional, scientific, cultural and social sectors, from a common geographical area, interested in achieving a common purpose with individual benefits for all the parties involved. The cluster, as it is promoted by Porter – expert in global economic strategies at the Harvard Business School, is a form of management superior in that it maximizes the value of the involved resources in a geographical area, while respecting certain requirements. Through the cluster the involved parties benefit from the increase in more efficient exploitation of the resources in the geographical area in question while solving certain socio-economic aspects: *an increase and more rational usage in terms of employment through sharing information, experience and personal abilities; correlating the training of specialists in higher education institutions according to the real regional niche necessities; increasing innovative potential and perfectly in the regional economic development; stimulating newly created companies and reducing individual pressure on its members, as it is created by the external competition medium of other areas.*

CHAPTER VIII - STUDY ON THE EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AND FOR ECOTOURISM - We illustrate the education and professional formation by means of and for ecotourism (continued education and professional formation, conscious learning categories, major themes and key messages), project management for education by means of and for ecotourism – education related issues Gurghiu Valley ecotourism is faced with.

After professional education, we place great emphasis on informal education (the lessons of professional and extraprofessional life), which constitute, beyond any opinion or practice, a never-ending source of education and innovation, not only as far as practicing a certain profession, but also in the learning and teaching methodology, and the social-cultural values system.

CHAPTER IX - STUDY ON INNOVATIVE COMPANIES' ECOTOURISM SERVICE MANAGEMENT REFINEMENT presents a case study – local tourism agency (presenting the agency, the presentation of a local agro-touristic package, the improvement of the agency's management) and the substantiation of the establishment of an applicative research company for innovative spin-off type ecotourism, whose specific objectives are the development of 6 innovative concepts: “The Gurghiu Valley ecotouristic destination”, “Sustainable, sequential self-financing for the SME's and partnership networks for the innovative eco SME's centered on ecotourism”, “the sustainable empowerment network of the eco SME's specialists for creative human and professional formation”, “Center for applicative research in technological and non-technological innovative eco-projects”, “Promotion of ecotourism using sustainable development principles, energy efficiency and climate change centered activities”, “methodology of information and communication technology for utilizing/capitalizing on the brand - **FROM THE HEART OF TRANSYLVANIA** (which starts with the Gurghiu Valley ecotouristic destination). The activities and sub-activities, the anticipated results, the implementation methodology and the demand for immediate results are also mentioned.

CHAPTER X – SCENARIO FOR THE REFINEMENT OF ECOTOURISM INTEGRATED SERVICES MANAGEMENT IN THE GURGHIU VALLEY. We begin with a **scenario for the improvement of ecotourism integrated service management with a target** of 5.000 tourists/year brought into ecotouristic low-cost programs in the Gurghiu Valley (starting with 1.000 tourists/ year in Year 1, and up to 5.000 tourists/year in Year 5). Then we develop a **managerial program called “From The Heart Of Transilvania”** with a registrable trademark starting from the Gurghiu Valley through the foundation of a cluster with a methodological synthesis and a life cycle, project management (principles, logical analysis framework), planning (the

planning, control and surveillance process), reference and learning in the integrating project, project evaluation (preparing and elaborating the project, cost evaluation, activity evaluation, results evaluation, goal evaluation, general objectives evaluation, evaluation opportunities).

Finally, through **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**, by re-analyzing the initial hypothesis and analysis, we underline our own interpretations and their importance for the rural communities of the Gurghiu Valley. We end with a set of conclusions regarding the impact of strategic management integrated in the development of services and ecotourism in the rural communities, the evolution of certain processes and indicators in the analyzed area, as well as the manifestation of various components of the researched processes and the findings resulted from analyzing the existing constraints, premises and possible solutions (together with the stakeholders).

Essentially, what we know is that sustainable rural development is one of the newest European priorities, to which the public and private Romanian sectors can actively respond in order to contribute to the increase in the standard of living. The concretization of existing ties between neighboring rural communities for different types of human and social activities lead to the creation of a stable environment, appropriate for the more general economic and social development and particularly for ecotourism. The secret of integrated strategic management for sustainable community development is the possibility of utilizing innovative solutions, while considering the multitude of tangible or intangible resources available at a rural level.

The resulting recommendations refer to: adopting sustainability as the central concept of the integrated development strategy of the Gurghiu Valley communities; finalizing the management plan; developing needs and development potential analysis; developing a performance management system, emphasizing on communicating the vision regarding the objectives to all of the inhabitants, establishing criteria and levels of individual and group/community performance in direct connection to the major objectives; consolidating an interdisciplinary team for the purpose of capitalizing on available resources; integrated exploitation of the cynegetic production, forest fruit, fish, chlorosodic mineral springs and salt resources, the centuries-old oak forest at Mociar; the development of cultural traditions; superior exploitation of anthropic resources; adopting

high-interest decisions for the area based on multiple criteria; the continued consolidation of the local knowledge and innovation. We recommend starting the development of a local network for handcrafted products – with local and export capitalization.

The conclusions and recommendations have to do with my own contribution to solving, by way of management, the problems generated by the process of developing services and ecotourism in the rural communities in the Gurghiu Valley and, indirectly, developing a spin-off as a result of personal research and of a management scenario within a cluster specialized on ecotourism.