

Possibilities of Improvement in the Regional Touristic Infrastructure of Bucovina for Sustainable Economic Development- Gura Humorului

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Abstract: Bucovina, a region where it is also situated the Gura Humorului resort city, is sought by tourists from all over the world, especially in the summer, for visiting the famous monasteries nearby. In this regard, in the recent years, the Gura Humorului resort city developed in terms of accommodation and facilities. The achievement of strategic objective for tourism development requires appropriate policies for different branches of industry, namely: the policy of tourism product aims at modernizing and expanding the Romanian tourism, increasing its competitiveness and attractiveness on the national and international market; marketing and promotion policy must ensure the creation of a real image of Romania, designed to stimulate the national and international tourism demand. While Gura Humorului resort presents an outstanding tourism potential, it is not fructified, which pushes away tourists and it imprints a chain reaction for all those involved in the tourism phenomenon in the city and in the region.

Keywords: tourism development; tourism potential; tourism phenomenon

The city struggles in the face of a series of constraints which contribute to its development stagnation, from an economic point of view, but also from a touristic perspective:

- Scarcity of touristic services: the resort offers only the usual touristic services of accommodation and meals;
- The remarkable touristic potential of the resort regarding the possibilities of playing winter sports (skiing, skating) is not exploited;
- The dendrological and STOPOVER park “Lunca Moldovei” with all the STOPOVER sights it encompasses is in an advanced state of degradation and it is impracticable¹;
- Tourists have limited access to information regarding the touristic sights in the area;
- 13% of the population of the resort has no job²;
- The city hall spends money annual for the maintenance of the park although the park is not exploited;
- The indicators “the average duration of stays overnight” and “the average occupancy indicator of the touristic establishments” are at a minimum (2,6 nights/tourist in 2004 for the first indicator and 37,36% in the same year for the second indicator³).

Gura Humorului resort has been declared to be struggling and underprivileged⁴, against a background of poor economic activities, of a small number of jobs and of a badly exploited economic and

¹ The detailed current situation of the STOPOVER in the park is presented in the Report on The Feasibility Study – E Annex, page 14.

² Information given by the Specialized Service from the Gura Humorului City Hall Administration.

³ Marketing Study – Appendix 5, page 54.

⁴ Decision no. 208, 25.03.1999, OG 24/1998 regarding the regime of the impoverished areas, approved and modified through L20/1999.

geographic potential. By extending and modernizing the touristic infrastructure and by rehabilitating the resort's STOPOVER infrastructure, the investment would lead to the attraction of tourists, of investors and to the creation of new jobs, which will determine a sustainable economic growth. Moreover, implementing this project would also mean a diversification in the types of tourism practiced in the area: from the cultural-religious and heritage tourism which is practiced at present, to the sport tourism, STOPOVER tourism, business and itinerant tourism.

The accomplishment of this investment targets the development of the infrastructure of the area Ariniş from the Gura Humorului resort, and could contribute to the improvement of the regional infrastructure and to the economic growth, creating a proper incentive for attracting investors. The number 1 specific objective of the project refers to the "Rehabilitation and modernization of the sport tourism's infrastructure in the Ariniş area from the Gura Humorului – resort of national interest".

This objective will be accomplished by:

- Creating a ski slope in the Ariniş area from the national interest resort Gura Humorului;
- Rehabilitation and consolidation of the access way which leads to the ski slope, consolidation of the banks and the layout of a parking lot close to it;
- Implementing the ski slope's utilities (water supply, energy supply, drainage and water purification micro station).

This objective contributes to the accomplishment of the first specific objective of the Phare Programme 2004-2006 "The Development of the Regional Infrastructure" through "the rehabilitation and development of the tourism infrastructure, including the STOPOVER facilities, including transportation links with these facilities."

The specific objective number 2 of the project refers to the "Rehabilitation and modernization of the infrastructure of the touristic subarea <<Lunca Moldovei>> which is a part of the Ariniş area from the Gura Humorului resort with a view to promoting the regional STOPOVER tourism".

This objective will be accomplished by:

- Rehabilitating and modernizing the STOPOVER area from the "Lunca Moldovei" Park;
- Establishing a touristic information point;

Which will lead to the rehabilitation of the STOPOVER infrastructure of the Gura Humorului resort, contributing to the achievement of the first specific objective of the programme.

The proposed project solves, through its objectives and targeted results, the problems linked to touristic and STOPOVER infrastructure of the national interest resort Gura Humorului. Moreover, considering its objectives, this project falls into line with The National Plan of Development, The Strategy for The Development of Tourism in Romania and The Regional Development Strategy for the period 2004-2006.

1. Competition

Regarding the cultural-religious tourism, the exterior painted frescos which have been asserted as globally unique, offers the aforementioned areas a specific touristic advantage that cannot be and could never be contested by the regional, national and international competitive offers.

In relation to the sport tourism and STOPOVER tourism, the competition exists and manifests rather in an intense manner. Because of this strong competition, the tourist migration rate, as a consequence of the promotion campaigns of every offer, is relatively small.

Active tourists, who practice winter sports, take firstly into account the quality of each ski slope (features such as the existence/inexistence of cable transportation, the difficulty level, etc.), and only after that they choose between two or more ski slopes with similar characteristics, the one which offers them “supplementary value” (the resort).

2. The Analysis of the Present Touristic Product

Presently, in the Gura Humorului resort’s area, the most common form of tourism practiced is the cultural one, because of the numerous monasteries included in the UNESCO patrimony (Voroneț, Humor, Moldovița, Sucevița, Putna, Arbore etc.).

Furthermore, due to the existence of the 5 conference halls of the Mountain Club Best Western Bucovina, in the last few years the business tourism, congress and reunion have registered a growth.

The third form of tourism practiced is the religious or pilgrimage tourism.

Although significantly important, considering their size, these forms of tourism present two noticeable disadvantages:

- They don’t cover important market segments – for example, those who play sports;
- They don’t cover efficiently the cold season – the net utilization indicator of the bookings capacity in the cold season has a value of approximately 15%, which represents only 27% of the value of the net utilization indicator of the bookings registered in the warm season.

These two disadvantages have significant negative effects on the economic environment because:

- In the cold season, the economic agents which are active in the touristic sector are confronted with major problems due to costs that cannot be covered (a small percentage in the occupancy of the accommodation rooms of 15%, directly linked to the sector’s turnover, indicates a struggle for survival type of situation and not one of profitability);
- Leaves unexploited two extremely profitable segments:
 - Tourists who play sports (this entails supplementary expenses for renting various sports articles, chair lift transportation, foods that are specific to this type of tourism and also specific to the cold season, etc.);
 - Tourists who practice recreational and STOPOVER tourism - who allocate large sums of money for expenses on the duration of their stay which usually is longer than that of those who practice cultural-religious tourism.

In conclusion, the touristic “product” of the Gura Humorului resort must be diversified for the elimination of little inconveniency which has negative consequences in the economic and social background.

The predominant tourism type practiced at the moment is the cultural-religious one, due to the existence, on a radius of only a few kilometers, of some religious touristic objectives of international interest: the monasteries adorned with exterior frescos in Bucovina.

3. The Configuration of the Future Touristic Product

As a result of the STOPOVER Gura Humorului project, new touristic products will be created, which will constitute the basis for new types of tourism.

From the marketing perspective, “the product” will be diversified by the addition of three essential functions:

- The possibility of playing sports;
- The possibility to practice STOPOVER activities;
- The possibility of providing information regarding the offered touristic product.

Therefore, to the touristic product are added base functions as well as auxiliary functions. This restructuring will lead, on one hand, to the widening of the tourists segments, and on the other hand, to an increase in the quality of the touristic “product”.

The diversification of the touristic product represents the direct effect of the project, and consists of:

I. The creation of a ski domain in the national interest resort Gura Humorului:

- The layout of the ski slope “Șoimul”;
- Chair lift transportation installation and electronic billing system;
- Artificial snow installation;
- Beating snow machinery;
- Building a multifunctional nearby construction;
- The rehabilitation and consolidation the access way and the lay out of a parking lot;
- Installation for night time illumination;
- Utilities (cold water distribution network, electric energy, drainage, purification micro station).

II. The rehabilitation and modernization of the STOPOVER area from the dendrological and STOPOVER park “Lunca Moldovei”:

- Rehabilitation and modernization of the indoor swimming pool;
- Rehabilitation of the swimming pool for children;
- The layout of the natural skating rink;
- Rehabilitation of the sport pitches;
- To restore the pedestrian pathways and access gates;
- Utilities (cold water distribution network, electric energy, drainage, gas).

III. The rehabilitation of a building found in the dendrological and STOPOVER park “Lunca Moldovei” with the purpose of its transformation into a touristic information point.

The configuration of the actual touristic product:

- Generates a significant seasonal fluctuation, with important repercussions in the economic background;
- Does not offer the possibility of practicing various types of tourism;
- Does not satisfy the needs of some important segments in the touristic market: those who play sports (sports tourism), families (STOPOVER tourism), children (school group tourism);
- Has a negative influence over the tourist’s stays duration.

The future touristic product could generate the following effects on the sector and touristic market:

- The emergence of a new type of tourism practiced in the “Lunca Moldovei” area;
 - The development of the sports tourism – by creating the ski slope and a skating rink;
 - The development of the STOPOVER tourism – building sport pitches, a swimming pool for adults and one for children;
- The development of the touristic circulation by:
 - Attracting tourists who enjoy playing sports;
 - Attracting families that live close to the area to spend the weekend at the resort;
 - Attracting a percentage of the tourists who are interested in visiting touristic objectives in the area;
- Increasing the average duration of tourists’ stay:
 - Emergence of the sports tourism, characterized by a long average stay duration;
 - Emergence of the STOPOVER tourism, also known to have a long average stay duration;
 - Diversification of arriving tourists’ behavior, on the background of consumption and other touristic objectives;
- Making the touristic sector efficient by:
 - To extend the length of time in which tourists can ski by illuminating the ski slope at night time, optimizing the fixed costs;
 - Keeping the circulation of those practicing the sports tourism running on the whole duration of the cold season, with the help of the artificial snow installation;
 - The growth of the commerce by using auxiliary touristic products;
 - Increasing the rate of occupancy of the accommodation structures, on the basis of an increase in the average stay duration;
 - Decreasing seasonal fluctuations;
 - Increasing the perceived aggregate value of the touristic product by:
- Adding the informational component to the base touristic product (the touristic information point);
- Adding new attributes in connection with experience: flexibility, adaptability to different categories of public;
- The rehabilitation of the access way which leads to the ski slope and building a parking lot of about 350 parking places;
- The implementation of an electronic billing system on the ski slope, which would conform to international standards.

4. Conclusions

Taking into account its objectives, the project solves a few important problems which the resort has been struggling with and also entails a series of long-term effects¹:

- the types of touristic services offered to the tourists in the resort grow from 2 (accommodation and meals) to 5 by the addition of: “sports”(the ski slope) “STOPOVER” (the STOPOVER

¹ Information given by the Report on the Feasibility Study

- area in the dendrological and STOPOVER park “Lunca Moldovei”), and “touristic information” (the touristic information point);
- a growth in the flow of tourists who visit, book rooms and stay in Gura Humorului with 26% in the 2009-2013 span, as a consequence of implementing the project, which will result in a net absolute value increase of 132.643 tourists;
 - an increase in the stay duration (number of nights spent) from 2,6 nights/tourist to 4,1 nights/tourist in 2013;
 - the rise of the average accommodation indicator from 41% in 2008 to minimum 80% in 2013;
 - a growth in the number of jobs and the increase of the standard of living for those living in the resort:
 - 55 permanent jobs as a result of completing the project;
 - 17 temporary jobs as a result of completing the project;
 - 152 temporary jobs during the construction and the implementation of the project;
 - 1.130 jobs indirectly created in the touristic sector and other linked activity sectors;
 - An increase in the average touristic expenses with 25,54% for Romanian tourists and with 27% for foreign tourists:
 - From an average expense of 130 Euro/holiday for the Romanian tourist in 2008 to an average expense of 166 Euro/holiday in 2013;
 - From an average expense of 167 Euro/holiday for the foreign tourist in 2008 to an average expense of 215 Euro/holiday in 2013;
 - An increase of 1.899 new businesses at Suceava county level between 2009 and 2013;
 - A growth of 11.830.507 Euro in the attracted investments by the Gura Humorului area between 2009 and 2013 as a result of the growing interest shown by the local and foreign investors and their want to invest in the resort;
 - An increase in the average annual income from tourism at the Gura Humorului resort level, with 4.072.794 Euro between 2009 and 2013;
 - A rise in competitiveness of the local economy, as a consequence of the development of tourism in the Gura Humorului resort, that will generate an annual supplementary income of 9.758.414 Euro, for the resort, between 2009 and 2013;
 - Easy access for tourists to information regarding touristic objectives found in the area;
 - Increase in the satisfaction degree of the tourists in relation to the touristic services in the Arinis area, on a scale from 1 to 10, from 3 to 9, 3 years after the implementation of the project;
 - Diversification of the types of tourism practiced in the resort through the emergence of business tourism, itinerant tourism, etc.;
 - Intense touristic promotion of the resort, inside the country as well as outside the country;

- Attracting tourists from Suceava County, but also from counties which are close (Iași, Botoșani) to the Gura Humorului resort, more so as the rehabilitation of the touristic objectives and STOPOVER objectives of the resort would be able to compete successfully with the similar objectives that can be found in Vatra Dornei, and the travelled distances will be significantly smaller.

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