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ИНСТИТУТ ЗА НАЦИОНАЛНА ИКОНОМИКА, РУМЪНСКА АКАДЕМИЯ

DIVERSIFICATION AS A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE CUSTOMIZATION OF TOURISM

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Abstract: Observing the tendencies of the international tourist market through the last few years shows some changes in the behavior of the real and potential tourists. These changes are significant and reflect on all participants of the process of forming and realizing the tourist product – the suppliers of the tourist package, its manufacturers and distributors. In this new situation, new, higher requirements are brought up to the indicators for steadiness, diversity and quality, ensured from the tourism industry. The initiated surveys on the international tourist market show the appearance of new customer's segments (OECD Tourism Committee). Their forming had begun in the middle of 90's of the XX – th century, and till now under the influence of the world processes of transformation, globalization, commercialization and last but not least – antiterrorism got exact and distinct characteristics. Experts pay special attention to the consumers of the forms of tourism characterized with steadiness such as rural, eco and cultural tourism. In the different regions of the world their development have reached different stages of vivacity, depending on the degree of commercializing the destination and saturation the consumer's interest. In Bulgaria the mentioned above forms of tourism are subject of special attention as a significant aspect of the process of rehabilitation of our country as a tourism destination. When, in connection with the establishing the new tendencies in the tourism searching process – complicated and multilayered, demanding unifying the efforts of the governmental, branchal and non – economical structures on national, regional and local level. Roles performed by the individual participants are specific despite the fact that in their generality they are routed to capturing the needs of the market and its satisfaction at a highest level.

Bulgaria and Romania are determined as dynamically developing destinations for rural tourism based on the multiple choice of partly explored and absorbed natural and cultural resources with national, regional and international importance. The possibilities for our countries to take a leader position in regional and European aspect are great, moreover on the background of the world stagnation in the tourism industry in Bulgaria and Romania it rises. Our countries is believed to be a little known, secure and stable tourist places situated near West Europe. At the same time its setting as a destinations for alternative tourism – in general – eco, cultural, rural – in separate and combined tourist product, is a condition for steady economic and social development in caring for the environment decisions.

Key words: sustainable tourism, strategic planning, diversification, development

Observing the tendencies of the international tourist market through the last few years shows some changes in the behavior of the real and potential tourists. These changes are significant and reflect on all participants of the process of forming and realizing the tourist product – the suppliers of the tourist package, its manufacturers and distributors. In this new situation, new, higher requirements are brought up to the indicators for steadiness,

diversity and quality, ensured from the tourism industry. The initiated surveys on the international tourist market show the appearance of new customer's segments (OECD Tourism Committee, 2002:38). Their forming had begun in the middle of 90's of the XX – Th. century, and till now under the influence of the world processes of transformation, globalization, commercialization and last but not least – antiterrorism got exact and distinct

characteristics. Experts pay special attention to the consumers of the forms of tourism characterized with steadiness such as rural, eco and cultural tourism. In the different regions of the world their development have reached different stages of vivacity, depending on the degree of commercializing the destination and saturation the consumer's interest. In Bulgaria the mentioned above forms of tourism are subject of special attention as a significant aspect of the process of rehabilitation of our country as a tourism destination. When, in connection with the establishing the new tendencies in the tourism searching process – complicated and multilayered, demanding unifying the efforts of the governmental, branchal and non – economical structures on national, regional and local level. Roles performed by the individual participants are specific despite the fact that in their generality they are routed to capturing the needs of the market and its satisfaction at a highest level.

This research is an attempt to determine the possibilities of the tour operators – in their role initiators of offering a product connected with the rural tourism – for providing and increasing the satisfaction of the consumers.

Of worldwide fame, according to data from WTO, for tourism traveling for rural tourism are spent 10 % from all the expenses made for international travels. The annual increase of the number of the trips offered by the European tour operators and pointed to rural areas, according to data from Euro Barometer, is about 23 %. The biggest interest from both the tour operators and the consumers – tourists is observed in France, Spain, Great Britain. For example, in Spain a huge amount of the tourism traveling up the country are connected with visiting rural areas. In USA the market is still developing: according to the National Association of the tour operators 5 % of them offer rural tourism products.

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To forming and offering rural tourism product are orientated mainly the small tour operator companies which are particularly specialized to keep up with the others on the market. The experience of the tour operators – leaders in the area of the rural tourism shows that to be effective and stable this form of tourism some benefits for the local communities have to be ensured. The positive consequences of this have to be connected mainly with the local social – economic development – creating new jobs and stimulating the development of the infrastructure, education, crafts, rural economic and other branches, catering for tourism.

The local community is a significant indicator for influence on the natural and cultural resources and also important component for the rural tourism. This is obvious also by the research from 2002 year by the Project for keeping the biodiversity and economical rise to the American Agency for economic development. The analysis of the inquiry leads to the conclusion that the potential tourists determine as the ideal place for alternative tourism mountain village with picturesque scenery, presence of cultural – historical monuments, river, lake or mineral spring. From the additional attractions interest is shown in walking and cycling routes, sleeping amidst nature, itineraries for picking mushrooms and herbs, culinary

specialties, looking at cultural – historical monuments. Preferred areas for setting are the family hotels which create a sense of calmness in cozy atmosphere without the intrusive presence of the owners and highly hygiened conditions, and also, healthy and ecological food. But as main criteria in choosing concrete destination, a place for sleeping and eating is the optimal correlation quality – price.

In connection with the previous we should mention that the clear realizing and satisfying the concrete and supposed needs of the potential tourists have a key role for the effectiveness of the process of forming the searched version of the tourism traveling, which to maximum extend can satisfy consumers' interests (Thomas, E., 1996:125). That is why for the tour operator companies serving the segment of the rural tourism as an important aspect of activity must be the care for the customers. It is the main moment in the market approach towards the business. Accepting it in connection with the rural tourism allows to be determined and anticipated the demands of the tourists in an objective way to create additional advantages and unique products and services differing from the competitive ones with the care for the clients – tourists. As a result the product is planned according to the needs, wishes and expectations of the consumers.

It could be said that forming and implementing the rural tourism product is obeyed on the general principle – the successful sale in the different objective tourist groups is reached with the optimal correlation of a product, advertising, price, kind and hospitable people “on the right place in the right time”. We should mention, however, that the analysis of the rural tourism customers show lack of clearly determined objective groups. In fact, there can be outlined groups and individuals who, in spite of consuming one and the same superstructure and infrastructure, have different needs and demands. Their successful satisfaction requires knowing different cultural perceptions. For example, routing the attention to the European

market shows that the potential tourists may have a number of differences in their behavior respectively to achieve different level of satisfaction, depending on their natural features (Nevet, B., Hobson, J., 1996:26). The tourists coming in Bulgaria from Germany are open – minded but absolutely official. The Belgians appreciate the individual attitude, punctuality and discretion. Italians are emotional, prefer tourist packages which satisfy the interests of the whole family. The tourists from Great Britain want to be determined according to their regional belonging as English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish. As a whole they prefer the official attitude, appreciate punctuality, security and hygiene.

To the potential customers of the rural tourism product and their needs the tour operators point various market researches. The results help them to understand the different types of tourists, consuming the rural tourism product, their origin, sums they are ready to spend, the future tendencies in the tourism, competitors' market positions, price levels, etc. In general, they analyze inner and outer sources of information as long as investigate the competitors on the market, the types of customers and their attitude towards the offered product / products (Marinova, E., 1993:96), (Doganov, D., 1994: 58), (Doganov, D., Durankev, B., 1995:238). To achieve impartial and measurable data are used methods such as observing, inquiry investigations, discussion groups, personal interviews, correspondence with regular customers. An important element in investigating the consumers of the rural tourism product is the feed – back.

It is an important mean for the tour operator company to control the whole process of the tourist serving and achieving the requested level of satisfaction (Reilly, R., 1980:54-240). The surveys show that the tourists which express their frustration have no trust in business because they lose time in complaining. At the same time 54 – 70 % of the clients come back if the problem has been decided in their way. Clients, compensated enough and in the

right way often show loyalty and “work” for the tour operator by popularizing it between their closenesses – friends, familiars, relatives.

For the employees and representatives of the tour operator, working with the tourists, is important to know some main rules in solving the tourists' complaints. For example, in satisfying their claims the attitude should be serious, the clients should be listened very carefully without personal assessment on the situation. Expressed care, individual attitude and satisfying customer's wish is a pleasant surprise for the client. As a hopeful method for investigating the level of customer's satisfaction is believed to be the talk with the tourists (Krysteva – Ibrahimova, 1994:39). This, however, sets the problem with the language preparation and organization of the process of cultivating contacts with the tourists. Acquiring the method of care for the clients from the tour operators offering rural tourism product is pointed towards forming wanted, sought product. In practice, in tourism can be achieved satisfaction of needs and wishes with change of values without presuming ownership above the received value in a way of achieving a material product (Tomas, E., 1996:187). That is why the tourism customers show concern to the quality of serving. Namely improving the product's quality parameters and the culture of serving are the tour operators' necessary conditions which attract clients and make them loyal ones.

The potential tourist make preliminary imagine for the offered product while researching and choosing the desired destination. This imagine is built by the information in brochures, tourist guides or Internet, presented by tourist information centers, shared with other tourists or tour operators /tourists agents and to a big extend may be “manipulated”. The most common method for informing is the advertising in brochures. In the brochure the specific advantages which can be offered are exactly described. To be achieved this the brochure must show:

- the quality dimensions of the rural tourism product;
- the type of customers the product is aimed to;
- the unique qualities of the destination /culture, history, traditions/;
- map of the destination;
- the advantages of consuming the product /relaxation and recovery through preserved environment, accumulating knowledge and unique impressions/;
- the ways of buying the product /complete address, telephone, fax, e – mail/;
- area and serving atmosphere;
- the special events and reductions.

At the moment of buying the client is influenced mainly by the location, design and layout, the outer and inner space, presenting the product and before all the appearance and attitude of the serving staff.

Arriving at the tourism place the tourists already have concrete expectations and inevitably evaluate the real condition of the area of living as far as it concerned its quality. The first impression which they can get, concern mostly the tactile qualities of the tourist product. Good impression is created with the easy accessibility, opened area near the building / for example family hotel with garden or open – aired areas /, cleanness, order and enough light in the rooms, enough – lighted and cozy, lack of working materials in the common dwellings, nice odor, neat and tidy dressed staff, suggesting calmness and trust, well – arranged and qualified advertising materials, understandable marking leading the tourists and inspiring security, presence of signs, connected with safety, anti – fire procedures, local attractions, outside signs with the company's logo, information for some products such as food or drinks. Non – tactile qualities of the tourist product like atmosphere and situation are created by pleasant music, good attitude and incorporating the tourists to the local culture and traditions.

Tourists complete their image during the whole stay, looking possibilities for

satisfying exact needs. This is true especially for the tourists coming from West Europe and USA, whose culture and apperception of the world are different, moreover this is their first visit to Bulgaria. The confidence in the guests can be seen when the rural area, in which they live, answers to their expectations: premises are clean and tidy, for the preparation of the food are used ecological products, consummation of the water hides no health risks, safe keeping of valuable things and the security of the tourists are guaranteed. An important role has the document, certifying the hotel category, also the presence of certificates for anti – fire safety, hygiene, etc. Positive effect has their exposure to an easy visible place together with other documents, presenting received certificate, award or prize, if there are such.

It has to be mentioned, however, that a number of expectations are often out of the control of the tour operators. Some disappointments are possible or omissions in serving the tourists when they come to the country, but they can be compensated for the good serving and “careness” from the company’s representatives accompanying the tourists or living in the tourist area. In fact achieving is guaranteed from fixing standards in servicing and supposes identifying with the tourists, which is offered special attention to. The concern for satisfying the special needs of the customers is a certain way for improving company’s image.

For the potential consumers of the rural tourism product, important is the approach, behavior and the manners of the servicing staff. Their gaining is important not only for creating right first impression but also for establishing long lasting relationship and stimulating the repetitiveness of the purchases.

Tour operator’s representatives participating directly in the process of the tourist servicing should gain a number of behavior models in respect of the body language and gestures’ messages. Researches show that the body language and gestures deliver to 2/3 of the message

in a standard talk, as the level rises when a language barrier exists (Mayo, E.J. & Jarvis, L.P., 1981). From the perceived approach depends the right or wrong understanding of the message.

The way the body is exposures talks about the intensions of the associatives. Bleakness and good intention are evaluated as positive. Leaning, towards the tourist talks about personal interest. Pose with crossed hands is an example for lack of interest. Hands on the waist is a classical signal for aggression. The degree of closeness when talking is also important. There are four estimated zones for comfort when in touch – intime zone for emotionally close people (15 – 46 sm.), personal zone for contacts with friends (46sm. – 1.2 m.), social zone for a contact with far familiars and strangers (1,2 – 3,6 m.), social zone for a talk with a big group (over 3,6 m.). When welcoming the tour operators should care for the tourists and their personal plans have to be respected (Tomas, E., 1996:205).

Special attention has to be paid to the regular clients. Calling them on their given names underlines the identification degree and talks about a “caring approach”. A real concern is demonstrated when good intentioned help and advices are offered. Tour operators’ companies, respectively their employees, are ackwainted not only with their product but also with the interests of their regular clients and therefore they can offer and ensure unique experiences when sharing their impressions about the “most interesting and unknown” outside the brochure.

Giving the information in the tourists native language predisposes them and creates a nice imagine for hospitality which is indicative for the sympathy relating to the satisfying of their needs. The possible difficulties in a lack of knowledge of some foreign languages can be overwhelmed through information boxes and detailed advertising materials which make the communication more effective. For this purpose can be used the meanings of the inside advertising which is committing

services in a written form or physical exposing so that to inform, encourage and create positive image of the offered product (Seaton, A.V. and Bennet, M., 1996). If the potential tourists are well – informed they add advantages to the product and assist to the process of communication.

The maximum satisfaction of the clients is linked with figuring out a plan for working with clients including the activities of researching and analyze of the present situation /estimating the level of satisfaction of the existing and potential clients from the five elements of the marketing – product, staff, advertising, price, place/ and defining the marketing aims /segment which is orientated the activity to, providing for the sellings/.

The plan “work with clients” combines the components product, servicing staff, advertising, distribution, price, planned profit, analysis. The structure of the separate elements should answer to the individual requirements of the existing and potential tourists and guarantee the profitableness of the tourists’ activities. Taking the conception of caring for the clients, the tour operator companies should approach from the principle position that the quality of serving should coincide with the tourists’ expectations. At the same time should be ensured continuousness of the process of researching the customers of the rural tourism product, because there is

possibility their needs to be not completely acquainted; from the other side the expectations of the tourists in connection with the quality characteristics of the offered product change as the time passes. Under the new conditions in the sphere of competition it is normal to be doubled the specifics in the approach of caring for the client, because it provides positive results for the tour operator’s company when it distinguishes it from the competitors. In its bottom stays the estimation for the activity from the potential customer’s point of view who has to receive constant level of excellent quality. Orientated to the tourist structures “ win “ as they outstrip its expectations – the satisfaction and the surprise from the unexpected leave solid impression which shall be shared with others, shall lead to repetitiveness of the visits and as a result shall raise the incomes. The consequences from the accepting of a special attitude towards the client helps and ensures longlasting success for the tourism business. Achieving a high level of accordance of the elements of the marketing and the individual requirements of the potential tourists ensures the growth of the sales, respectively the realized profit which is enough condition for achieving satisfaction of the tourists, but also of the tour operators in connection with the rural tourism.

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