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INITIATIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EQUESTRIAN TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Equestrian tourism is a fast growing sector in Romania, considered as a form of active recreation, adventure tourism, ecotourism or nature-based tourism. Equestrian activities are diverse, such as horseback riding, donkey rides, traveling through the countryside with a horse-drawn carriage discovering fauna and flora, a few days or just a few hours, but also visits to the farm or equestrian centers, sporting events, shows, thematic fairs, etc. This analysis aims to highlight the potential of equestrian tourism in Romania, and how this type of tourism can develop.*

Keywords: *equestrian tourism, adventure tourism, current issues, economic-financial developement*

JEL Classification: *Z32, L83*

Introduction

Equestrian tourism offers social and recreational opportunities, which depend on the country's natural resources and cultural and historical heritage. This form of tourism is addressed to all people, regardless of age, social status and physical condition, and its main advantage is that it is practiced in all seasons, outdoors, in nature and is based on contact with a living being – the horse, with whom man is in constant communication (Gyôrrffy-Villám, 2001). This form of tourism can be combined with: hunting, ecotourism, adventure, fishing and much more.

Therefore, equestrian tourism contributes to human development, maintains the physique, spirit, removes stress and provides the opportunity to revive the traditional or rural lifestyle.

National experience in the field of equestrian tourism

The development of equestrian tourism involves the creation of “funding mechanisms and biodiversity conservation programs, the revision of legislative instruments that have as their theme this area of awareness among the stakeholders, education at local level with the aim of focusing on the principles of sustainable thinking, strengthening institutional capacity in order to implement environmental legislation” (Legislative Portal, National Strategy of May 30, 2019). In other words, the development of equestrian tourism needs several elements: a real equestrian sector, plus a structured tourism sector, plus an environmental policy and the involvement of all those who work in the tourism sector. Please note that Romania has all the assets to develop equestrian tourism. Thus, Romania has: attractiveness, accessibility, minimum level of touristic services, minimum level of public services; has a sustainable management focused on destination management, legal compliance, staff training, customer satisfaction, responsible marketing, design and construction of buildings and infrastructure; conditions that provide for maximizing the social and economic benefits of local communities and minimizing negative effects.

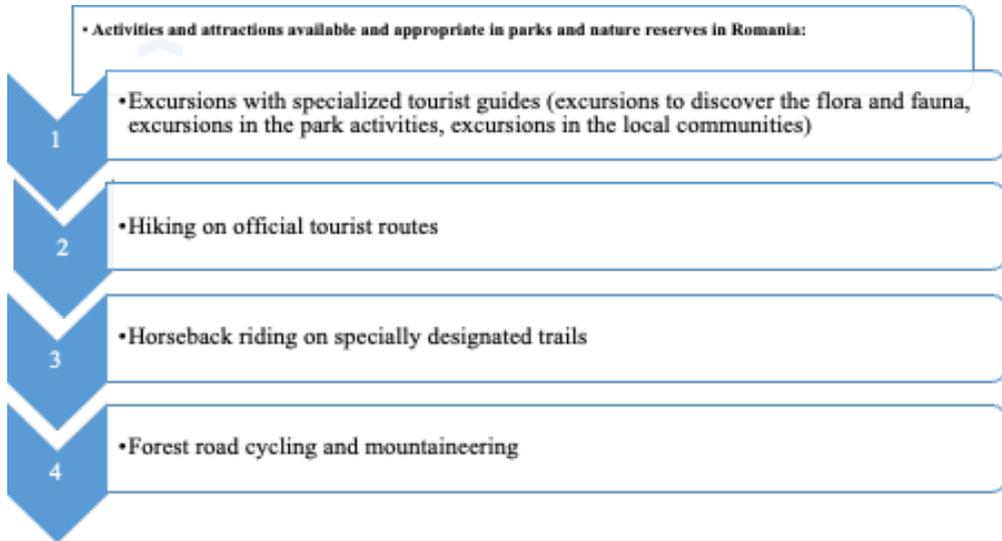
In this regard, the National Committee for Equestrian Tourism in Romania must have the support of the government and not only to implement a project of equestrian tourism routes, in connection with protected areas, as an ecotourism solution.

We mention that the International Federation of Equestrian Tourism (FITE) has made an analysis of the indicators: the framework of the equestrian routes, the marking of the equestrian routes, the specific brand, the list of accommodations, the projects implemented etc., and the results show that in Romania there is no framework of equestrian routes and there are no listed accommodation places. The maintenance and management of equestrian routes are also not ensured. An important aspect of this analysis is the fact that there are specific marked and marked equestrian routes in the national/natural parks and in the national reserves, thanks to the collaboration with the National Forest Agency (ROMSILVA).

At the same time, the project implemented in Romania, “On the horse in the Carpathians” aims “to transform equestrian tourism into an ecotourism alternative, while contributing to the development of communities living in protected areas”. In this regard, we remind that equestrian tourism activities in our country are available in 7 of the 29 major protected natural areas (Danube Delta biosphere reserve, 13 national parks and 15 natural parks), most of them (57.14%) being in national parks (National Strategy for Ecotourism Development in Romania. Context, vision and objectives 2017-2026).

Among the available and adequate activities and attractions in the parks and nature reserves in Romania (adapted from ROMSILVA, quoted by the National Strategy for the Development of Ecotourism in Romania, 2009) we mention: (figure no.1)

Figure no. 1 - Available and appropriate activities and attractions in the parks and nature reserves in Romania



Source: Own development

Taking into account all these aspects, we specify that there are and must be drawn up tourism programs based on nature (called ecotourism programs). There are some examples of ecotourism programs developed and implemented in several areas of Romania: the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and Dobrogea; Piatra Craiului National Park; Apuseni Mountains Natural Park; Retezat National Park; Țara Hațegului Dinosaurs Geopark; Măcin Mountains National Park; Rodnei Mountains National Park; Călimani National Park; Lunca Mureșului Natural Park; The Vânători Neamț Natural Park, with programs focused on: equestrian tourism, cycling, thematic hike; the Târnava Mare area; Maramures; Bucovina (nature observation programs, thematic hikes combined with cultural tourism and monastic tourism) (Legislative Portal, National Strategy of May 30, 2019). We mention that both ecotourism (Cntours.ro, 2021) programs certified¹ by the Romanian Ecotourism Association and

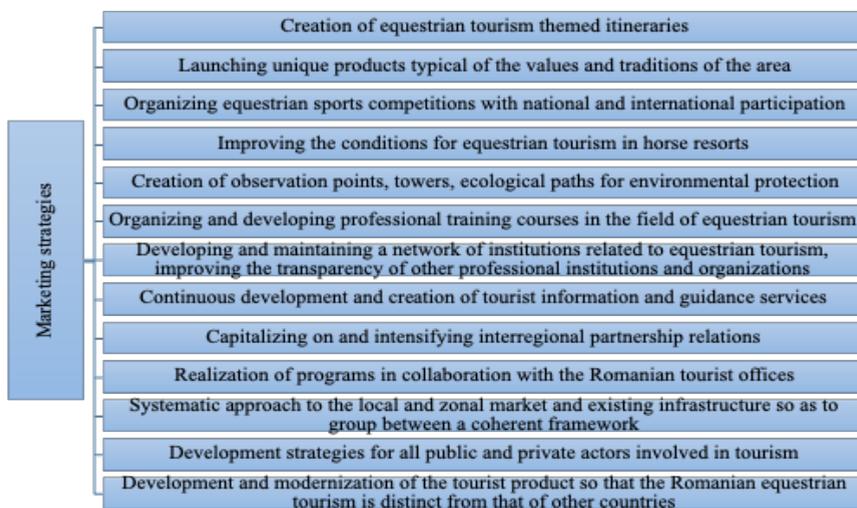
1 Anderlust Tour; Tymes Tours; Outdoor Experience; Kentauro; Absolute Carpathian; Active Travel; Carpat Bike; Apuseni Experience; Discoveromania; Explore Romania;

uncertified (www.eco-romania.ro) ecotourism programs are offered for sale by tour operators.

The existence of ecotourism programs and the development of related services and infrastructure have led to the appreciation by the World Tourism Organization (WHO) of these ecotourism destinations.

At the same time, the development of equestrian tourism is also related to the implementation of marketing strategies, presented in Figure no.2, which would require the development and advancement of this sector.

Figure no.2 - Marketing strategies



Source: Own development

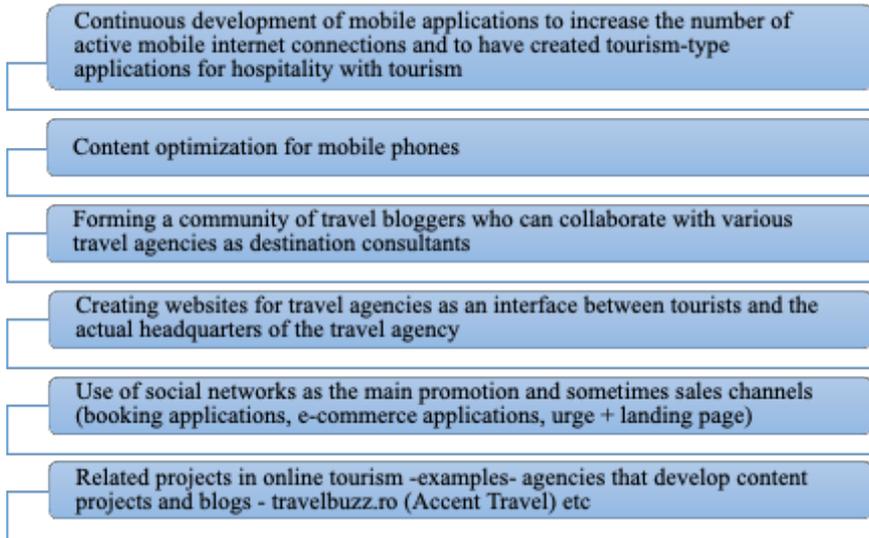
The equestrian tourism sector must respond to the new requirements, make available to modern tourists applications that offer the possibility to book stays (tourist packages) directly from their Smartphone, tablet, laptop etc., price reductions for loyalty and intense presence on social networks.

Investments in the online environment are necessary because soon the Artificial Intelligence System will connect online to websites such as “try before buying” offered by the largest travel agencies and will present the user with examples from virtual reality, which will allow him to see the objectives, hear and even feel the landscape. The system of anticipation and excitement will be started from a 3D, which will provide a multi-sensory walk. That does not mean that the user will abandon the actual vacation, but rather will awaken a stronger desire for him to live the real experience.

We believe that in the digital age, Romania must orient online tourism in the following directions: (figure no.3)

Romania needs to direct online tourism in the following directions:

Figure no. 3 - Directions for guiding online tourism in Romania



Source: Own development

Also, the big tourist brands will have the opportunity to rent to consumers those electronic agents customized as an integral part of the touristic package. In this way, customers are permanently interconnected with the travel agency and have the opportunity to make changes in real time and find solutions to any problem.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we mention that equestrian tourism is a “new” form of tourism practiced in Romania, has great chances of development (National strategy for ecotourism development in Romania - context, vision and objectives 2018-2027) and it is considered by many Western tourists as an ideal place of refuge/rest, which can be used by almost all age categories, with therapeutic and relaxing effect.

The tertiaryization of the world economy, as well as “robotization, led to the unprecedented increase in labor productivity, which allowed the gradual reduction of the working day and an increase in the time frame in which the individual can carry out other activities, including tourism” (Creeaza.com, n.d.). The appearance of free time within each day (after working hours –

tourism is practiced at a short distance or in the immediate vicinity), at the end of the week (weekend tourism or recreation tourism), public holidays, and during the holiday period (recreation tourism and health care are carried out over a longer period of time and at any distance) leads to “a consumption of more or less motivated amusement, such as: television, concerts, film, reading, various cultural and sports performances, etc.; short trips to the hotel, camping and a simple tourist escape; short holidays from one to two weeks and long holidays from three to four weeks (Croitoru and Becuț Marinescu, 2019).”

In this context, we note that the (paid) holiday market has turned tourism into a mass phenomenon, and the majority of the population uses their free time for recreation.

We mention that an essential factor of the emergence and development of equestrian tourism is also *the degree of culture and education of individuals*. In other words, equestrian tourism is carried out when free time, income and means of locomotion are intertwined with the receptivity of individuals for the beauties of nature and human creations, for the values of the material and spiritual culture of mankind. At the same time, the above aspects are completed with elements such as: the numerical growth of the population (possible practitioners of hiking and traveling), “increasing longevity and increasing the share of youth and old age groups within the population. So, the higher the number of people, of the current population, the higher the probability of the existence of a greater number of practitioners of equestrian tourism/tourism increases” (Factors that influence tourism activity in Romania, n.d).

According to the previously presented information, equestrian tourism “must promote the principles of sustainable development, allowing local people and tourism service providers to maintain high standards of living”.

In other words, equestrian tourism must ensure the preservation of the countryside and not support its urbanization. The touristic infrastructure must reflect a rural and traditional note specific to Romania both from an architectural and dimensional point of view.

Romania, by tradition, is a breeder of animals, having a very rich diversity of breeds – over 100 breeds of cattle, sheep, goats, horses, pigs, birds, bees and silkworms. Many of these breeds, at present, have declined in economic importance, and without intervention programs for their protection, many of them are threatened with extinction. The presence of animals in a rich diversity of breeds, varieties and lines is a characteristic with positive influence for those who live and work in the countryside and even for tourism. Animal husbandry forms the basis of economic activity in many of the disadvantaged rural areas. For all these reasons, Romania undertakes to initiate and implement plans of measures to save from extinction the endangered breeds, through the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), attention is paid to the protection

of animal genetic resources. The interest of breeders in a non-economically competitive breed decreases with the negative effect of gradually reducing the number of animals of that breed until the extinction of the breed. Consequently, Romania intends to align its strategic approach with FAO's priorities and with regard to the conservation of biological diversity, as provided for in the EC regulations on rural development.

Equestrian tourism is a type of active recreational and sports tourism, which is done with the help of one or more horses or other animals and can be a combination of passion for riding, the desire to ride in nature and the interest to visit places from other provinces. We specify that equestrian tourism has routes in the mountains, routes established through Romanian villages, routes that include visiting various tourist attractions, but also huge social and recreational opportunities, which allows you to travel outdoors in nature.

Equestrian tourism in Romania is also developing through the implementation of ecotourism programs by national or natural parks in Retezat, Piatra Craiului, Vânători Neamț and Apuseni. In this regard, online marketing strategies and offers for equestrian tourism have been implemented to meet current requirements. The desire of individuals to know and see the tourist objectives in the virtual reality force travel agencies to invest in the online environment to meet the demands of the market. Of course, the development of equestrian tourism depends on a multitude of direct factors (economic, social, technical, cultural, demographic, psychological, educational, natural factors etc.), but also indirect ones such as social stress, increasing children's education and raising current living standards. Therefore, the need for a trip depends in many cases on the biological need to restore and maintain health or to escape from the daily routine.

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