

ABSTRACT

RURAL TOURISM

In this work, I have matured my experiences and reflections in tourism education and research, my successes and failures in the classroom, and the conclusions of my travels into a volume as required by a systematic approach to geography. The present work is part of a continuation of a broader professional and methodological vision, a work that draws mostly on the common frontiers of historical geography, general settlement geography, population geography, sectoral economic geography and, within economic sciences, visitor economy (tourism), ecology, and cultural geography as well as on education policy. While attempting to formulate a systemic, historical view of visitor economy in villages, I draw attention to the present leaning towards the future. I have tried to emphasize that the spaces where the harmony of nature and man, the values, have been established, can still determine visitor economy, the development of communities, the resilience, and overall living. However, I have sought to demonstrate that visitor economy in villages needs to be optimised today, and not maximised. As a geographer, I am convinced that village tourism cannot be a “modern party”, based on the experience of “overtourism”. The village is not just a place of activity, not a mere tourist attraction, but a common denominator both in the lives of tourists and local inhabitants. This is the way existence can be enriched. This is the main message of the present work.

Taking sustainable visitor economy and the development of villages as conceptual framework, and assuming functionality, I consider villages to be capital structures where the social, economic and technical spheres that play a role in the structure of space are an integral part of culture. Yet, the physical foundations and conditions of their development are determined by the natural environment and the use of resources rooted in human thinking, in identifying and testing reality through practice, and in focusing on utility. In my view, development, which is an inherently continuous qualitative phenomenon, must be achieved in such a way as to ensure continuity and create a world that sustains villages. In the meantime, the spirit, fashion and trend of the times (in this case, focusing on visitor economy) should not risk the eradication of life-sustaining, well-matured village communities, of educational values, since the organisation, functioning and development model of a viable, sustainable system can provide the basis for a network of human living spaces today. My professional experience has led me to realise that the wise energy of our present and

our future lies in the power of true communities. That is why both visitor economy and the education system must strengthen communities in their very existence. Thus, this is my task too. This is one of the challenges, in fact an art that science, research, education, church and politics have to face today since we can see that a school or church of a weakened community cannot be maintained in the long term, neither by using grants, nor by projects. Following this train of thoughts, one of my main ambitions is the attempt to formulate a historical, systemic, ecological view through the continuity of my work. To use the world of villages so as to give a sense of what separates us from those who are pushing for globalisation imposed by the 'West', which can then indirectly – even without naming it – convey that which unites us.

I see tourism education as one of the universal issues of the 21st century, as the challenges are the same in the West and the East, in the North and the South. Through this work, I shall get prepared and shall also prepare the readers to face this challenge. In order to be a producer and operator of a tourism product, to be creative, innovative and sustainable, it is not possible to dispense with the correct interpretation and use of concepts, nor with the lexical knowledge and general literacy that are considered as the ultimate instances by those who have sworn to competence. Consequently, in order to integrate tourism as a discipline into the larger economic entity, and to train creative, responsible and authentic product developers in tourism, it is essential to combine knowledge, general basic literacy with a sense of rootedness, identity and creativity.

This work fulfils the expectations required from a geographer, namely to reflect on the results and experiences of the research and then draw conclusions. Moreover, to validate good examples, ideas and improvement, to develop recommendations to solve the identified dilemmas, or at least to experiment with the local inhabitants' visitor economy and, at the same time, to lay the foundations of tourism education. At the same time, as the author of this book, I am committed to functionality, bearing in mind the subjective foundations that are required to create, to conceptualise, to give content to a discipline, to serve general and professional literacy, respecting cause and effect.

In this work, before explaining rural tourism as a space-specific tourism product (Chapter 2) and ecotourism as an approach (Chapter 3), I will focus on tourism products (Chapter 1), then, with the help of case studies (Chapter 4), highlight sustainable examples, and in the case of undesirable phenomena leave the reader to a perception rooted in pragmatism.

The product and ecological approach to tourism is justified by the broader discussion of rural tourism. In the economic sector of tourism, the product aspect can be traced back to only a few decades (the early 1980s), when the product was recognised among professionals as the attraction. The product approach to tourism in Hungar-

ian scientific literature can also be dated back to the end of the 20th century. The themes of this first chapter are presented in the following order:

- the macro and micro level understanding of tourism products,
- the components of tourism products,
- classification of tourism products,
- the experience provided by tourism products.

The second chapter, as a grounding flow and a visible context of the first chapter, tends towards the main objective, i.e. to demonstrate the theoretical approach, the history of development, the complexity and the real and perceived sustainability of rural tourism in the development of the following topics:

- a product approach to visitor economy in villages,
- village tourism as a spatial, group or activity-specific tourism product,
- the conceptual framework of village tourism. Interpretation of farm, farm/ranch, agro, rural, rural tourism,
- evolution of rural tourism. Rural tourism in Hungary, Romania, Transylvania, Szeklerland,
- attractions of rural tourism,
- characteristics of rural tourism,
- rural tourism as a method of economic development, as a local community creation,
- village tourism in relation to tourism marketing and heritage protection,
- the organisation and development of rural tourism (TDM organisations and clusters, certification system in rural tourism),
- thematic and specialised products in rural tourism,
- eco-groups,
- impact of rural tourism (partial summary).

Ecotourism does not show (great) distance in the chain of rural tourism, since the natural environment of rural areas and culture are more closely linked to each other than the tourism of urban spaces, which are based on the division of labour. The false illusion of development in the 20th century (bigger, more, redder, farther, etc.) and, on the threshold of the 21st century, the success-oriented approach of growth, quantity, speculation and (sacred) cunning, have eroded the ecological knowledge and practice that the village community has developed for centuries.

If we want to see ecotourism as an alternative to rural tourism, we cannot ignore the modern stage in the evolution of tourism. Its substance is the result of a process of development that combines the vision and practice of gentle, green, sustainable and responsible tourism. This is why, in the context of rural tourism, the discussion of ecotourism is a task that requires a broader approach. I have therefore structured the discussion around the cardinal pillars of the following sub-chapters:

- ecotourism on the scale of tourism history,

- the interpretation, characteristics and requirements of ecotourism,
- the ecotourism sector, its characteristics, requirements, standards, requirements, demands and supply,
- ecotourism certification categories, environmental labels,
- the boundaries of ecotourism: globalisation, development, sustainable development, responsible development; the path towards sustainable and responsible tourism.

In the present work, the previous three chapters have prepared the case studies at several points. In relation to the cause and effect connections, the case studies have been presented, on the one hand, to provide theoretical guidance and facilitate the understanding and interpretation of the alternatives to ecotourism, while at the same time providing clarity to the ecological perspective of rural tourism, guaranteeing and generating its scope of validity. On the other hand, to demonstrate to the reader that if one of the alternatives to tourism is well represented in the lives of local inhabitants, then existence itself will be enriched.

The interpretations and presentations in the case studies give an example of the complexity of rural tourism, which draws its themes and subject matter from the “genres” of tour management, nature walks in protected areas, cultural heritage, ethno-health and festival tourism in the following thematic areas:

- alternative tourism in the practice of tour management,
- National parks at the service of ecotourism; the Great Plain-Egyeskö-Ecsém on the scale of tourism demand (empirical research),
- alternatives of historical-archaeological destinations in the offer of rural tourism,
- alternatives to health tourism in the responsible offer of rural tourism,
- alternatives to festivals as the responsible supply of rural tourism (empirical research).

The last chapter is a deliberate presentation of different methods, sometimes based on hypotheses and empirical research, with the intention of associative logic and analogy, which can serve as a research basis for thesis papers, dissertations and other studies. It can be a model for the informational background and, last but not least, can confront the reader with the fact that the thinking and creative human being is the creator and mediator of everything that we call tourism product, and that tourism products cannot be separated from any human being’s way of thinking. The two case studies in this chapter rely primarily on empirical data collection research because local residents experience the impact of visitor economy directly, they observe reality, and because the experience of reality is complex and multifaceted, it is not appropriate to measure everything on the strict grounds of rationality. For example, when we look at the impact of tourism on the emotional resonance, awareness, belief, genius loci or identity of local residents, we can characterise it less in terms of so-called derivatives, but it has a very significant impact on individual and commu-

nity relations. In the context of rationality and science, however, it should be noted that empirical findings are not to be rated without rational, scientific rigour.

Ultimately, this book is a way for me to contribute to teaching visitor economy through my own vision and with my own tools. Furthermore, to contribute in part to the elimination of the theoretical and practical challenges the profession faces in this age of tourism, to advocate in solidarity with economists, while at the same time maintaining the main drift line of professional advancement in the service of the public. I trust that the information contained in this work will provide a basis for tourism education, for the possession of knowledge in the field of tourism, and at the same time will serve as an inspiration for students in the substantive completion of seminar papers, and can be profitably leafed through in the writing of theses. I expect that the concepts, terms and research findings that I have summarised in this paper will help to understand tourism and our globalising economic environment in theory and practice too. Not incidentally, for ecologically minded visitors interested in experiencing village economy, it will bring awareness above all else, and can provide a basis, a form and alternative to consumer demands. In addition to being useful for students of tourism in education, this volume can also be of benefit to those who are interested in tourism or who, as members of various organisations, are involved in planning, preparing or even taking decisions on tourism development concepts. The contexts presented may be of help to those who are involved in regional, local or rural development processes, in order to be able to participate responsibly in the development of a tourist destination by understanding the basics and complexities of tourism.

Translation readings:

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