Relocating Entrepreneurs and their Contribution to the Diversification of Rural Tourism in Transylvania, Romania


Keywords: rural tourism, relocating entrepreneurs, Transylvania, rural guesthouse, authentic experience

Focus of present research
The present research focuses on the innovative contribution of relocating entrepreneurs, newly established in the countryside, to the diversification of the rural tourism sector, as illustrated by 3 case studies from central and northern Transylvania.

According to recent estimates, in Romania operate over 8000 rural guesthouses with 140,000 beds; about 1/3 are concentrated in Transylvania (FNTM 2012). Transylvania was ranked as #1 tourist region in 2016 (Lonely Planet 2015), attracting increasing numbers of domestic and foreign tourists with a mix of charming rural landscapes, cultural World Heritage sites and local traditions, under the motto “unspoiled nature and authentic rural traditions”.

Our research is based on questionnaires and in depth interviews with entrepreneurs/owners and guesthouse staff and analysis of guesthouse websites, guest comments, SNS postings etc

Case studies
Mrs. A.D. (58), a rural development consultant based in Bucharest and working abroad, bought an old Saxon house at the center of Saschiz, faithfully restored it and started a rural guesthouse in 2010, employing a full-time local manager and few part-timers. She sees it as a long-term investment but also as a post-retirement (active) life style choice. She markets the authentic Saxon experience, illustrated by the romantic story of the house, the small museum of traditional cooking, cooking classes etc, very appealing to foreign visitors transiting Transylvania.

In the neighboring village of Viscri, a young couple, R.&M.G (35), left their top managerial jobs in Bucharest in search of a family-centered, stress-free lifestyle. They bought an old Saxon house and, using their savings and substantial CAP funds, beautifully restored and refurbished it. Since 2010, the couple operates a rural guesthouse, offering niche recreational products such as authentic rural/Saxon experiences (workshops, traditional activities) targeted to well-off Romanian and foreign tourists. The guesthouse’s reputation spread (word-of-mouth, SMS) and the business has been expanding (2 neighboring houses bought and restored recently).

M&E (33) an educated, well-traveled Danish couple moved to the village of Breb, Maramures in 2011, in search of a natural, fulfilling lifestyle. They bought a farm from a local granny who “adopted” them, and decided to share their new home and lifestyle, by operating a hostel and campsite on their property. Relying on a network of like-minded people and SNS, they welcome visitors from all over the world to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area and genuine human contacts.

Common features
It is possible to identify a few common features of these entrepreneurs and their innovative practices/approaches.

– High level of education and/or extensive work experience (managerial level) in related fields
– Initial motivation: a family-centered, stress-free, natural lifestyle; decision to relocate is not (mainly) business-centered
– Extensive travel experience; good knowledge of international tourists’ needs/demands
– Extensive social networks; smart use of the internet and SNS
– Capacity to build trust and integrate in the local community; good interaction with local NGOs
– Capacity to identify the area’s tourist potential; clear vision and a viable business plan
– Personal savings and/or trust to obtain loans
– Innovative business approaches: offering/sharing authentic rural experiences and genuine human contact; niche marketing: targeting high-end segment, international youth.

Contribution of relocating entrepreneurs
– Their new, innovative business models contribute to diversification of rural tourism offer
– Create (small-scale) local employment
– Bring a new perspective and act as role models at the local level
– Their insistence on authenticity leads to a reappraisal of (disappearing) traditions, lifestyles

Sources: FNTM (2012); Guesthouse tourism in Romania

Acknowledgment: This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number26580144.