

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON RURAL TOURISM

Cornelia Elena TUREAC \*, Anca Gabriela TURTUREANU\*\*, Ioan BORDEAN\*\*\*

### Abstract

*The authors like to stress some elements related to the concept of rural tourism which has nowadays become very important around the world. The rural tourism can revitalise the conventional concepts and views on tourism, and bring in a new dimension to the sustainable development of tourism. It has been realised that tourism can play a major role in many countries economies, especially in developing ones, where it can substantially contribute to the increase of the national income.*

*In this respect, mention should be made that Romania has a lot of resources to develop this tourism branch: villages with well conserved traditions, folklore, wildlife, natural heritage. All these natural elements put in value together with investments in infrastructure have determined an increasing demand for the Romanian rural destinations.*

**Key Words:** sustainable development, rural tourism, revitalise

**JEL Classification:** L83

### 1. Introduction

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defined sustainable tourism development as “that which meets the needs of present tourist and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential for ecological process, biological diversity and life supporting system”.

The economic quality of a regional development is ability of the region due to its own resources to produce such a gross income, which can provide high levels of consumption and accumulation in the region for a long time. The social quality of a regional development is ability of the region due its own demographic potential and social infrastructure to

---

\* Cornelia Elena TUREAC (cornelia\_tureac@yahoo.com) is assistant professor of Business Management Department at "Danubius" University, Galati, Faculty of Economic Sciences. She received her PhD in Management. Her research interests include: Business Management, Resource Management, Services Management. Her teaching interests include: Management.

\*\* Anca Gabriela TURTUREANU (ankterra@yahoo.com) is associate professor, of Business Management Department at "Danubius" University, Galati, Faculty of Economic Sciences. She received her PhD in Geography. Her research interests include: Sustainable Development, Tourism, Natural Resources. Her teaching interests include: Tourism Resources, Tourism Economy.

\*\*\* Ioan BORDEAN (ioanbordean@yahoo.com) is assistant professor of Business Management Department at "Danubius" University, Galati, Faculty of Communication. He received his PhD in Management. His research interests include: Business Management, Resource Management, Services Management. His teaching interests include: Management.

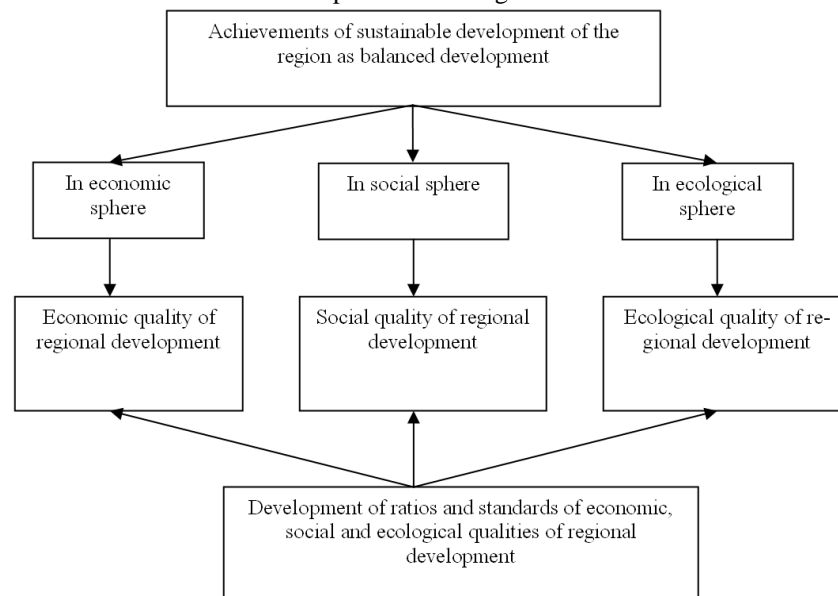
provide stable population in the region and to maintain high standards of life quality in the region during a long period of time. The ecological quality of a regional development is ability of the region to maintain its natural-resource potential and high qualities of environment during a long period of time. A sustainable development of the region is its development with high qualities of a regional development maintained for a long period of time (tens years). Selection of the main parameters - indices and calculation of criteria and limitations of sustainable development is the major phase in creation of the model of sustainable development of the region (Fig.1).

Thus tourism has to be human and adapted to the needs of the tourist, respond to the needs of the local communities, be socio-economic and culturally well planned and environmentally sound. The tourism must offer products that are operated in harmony with the local environment, community attitudes and culture so that they become permanent beneficiaries and not the victims of tourism. The basic cultural identity of these local people should not be adversely affected. Sustainability also ensures economically sustainable-development process in the efficient management of resources and such management to ensure that the resource supports the future as well as the present generation.

Thus sustainable tourism aims to:

- Improve the quality of life of people.
- Provide good experience to the tourists
- Maintain the quality of environment that is essential for both tourists and the local community.

A scheme of sustainable development of the region



Source: [P. Y. Baklanov, 2007, "Model of SD"]

**Figure 1. A scheme of sustainable development of the region**

## 2. Emerging dimensions

Tourism will expand greatly in future mainly due to the revolution that is taking place on both the demand and supply side. The changing population structure, improvement in li-

ving standard, more disposable income, fewer working hours and long leisure time, better educated people, ageing population and more curious youth in developing the countries, all will fuel the tourism industry growth.

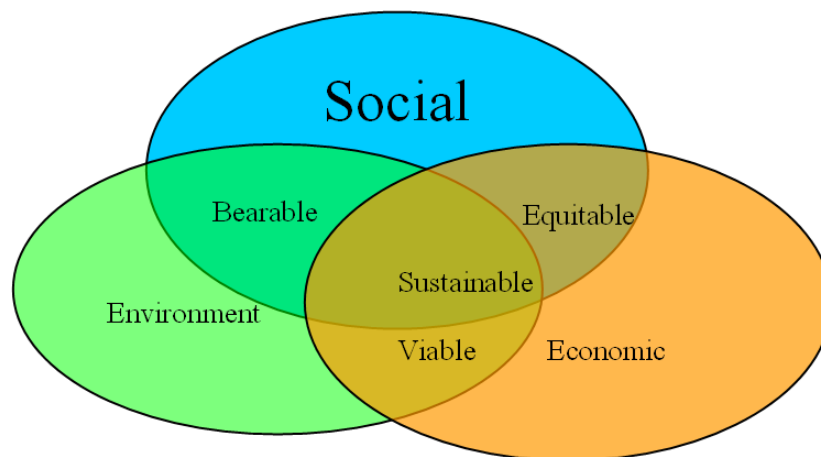
To tap the immense opportunities, coordinated activities of all agencies involved in the development are required. A carefully planned and properly implemented development will definitely benefit the community economically and improve the quality of life in the villages. The success of such development depends upon the people's participation at grass root level for the development of tourist facilities and for creating a tourist friendly atmosphere. Development of rural tourism is fast and trade in hotels and restaurants is growing rapidly. Increase in the share of earnings through rural tourism will no doubt; provide an attractive means of livelihood to the poor rural community. It increases the purchasing power at all levels of community and strengthens the rural economy. Development of infrastructure facilities such as rail, electricity, water, health and sanitation will definitely improve the quality of life.

The concept of sustainability means that mankind must live within the capacity of the environment that supports. Sustainable development has been defined briefly as "that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The definition brings out certain important aspects of sustainable tourism:

- Conservation and enhancement of resources for the future generation
- Protection of biological diversity
- Equity within and between generations
- Integration of environmental, social and economic considerations

The concept of sustainable development is all about conservation and stewardship of resources for the future. The support for ecologically sustainable development emerging strongly in the tourism sector, as it is the logical way of balancing environmental concerns with growth and development of the industry. Environmental problems facing the world today are of such magnitude that urgent actions have to be taken at the highest levels to counter this fatal degradation. But it is not just enough for government organisations to work towards sustainable development. Every individual, every neighborhood, and every community has to contribute in every way possible to get close to the goal.



Source: [UNESCO, 2001]

**Figure 2: Scheme of sustainable development: at the confluence of three preoccupations**

Many tourism professionals have already identified Romania as the country with the highest potential in Europe regarding the development of rural tourism as a major source of income, both for investors, as for the budget of the country. Nevertheless, and in spite of the fact that more than 18 years have passed from the December Revolution, rural tourism in Romania is still at its beginnings. And it doesn't seem to have an easy way, as Romanian authorities don't yet fully acknowledge the importance and the potential of this type of tourism. They still support major investments in classic mass tourism. But more and more entrepreneurial-spirited people begin to see the benefits and the potential of practicing rural tourism. First steps in this field have started several years ago, shyly, in some traditional places of the country (Prahova Valley, Braşov neighbourhood), and later in other areas. The present-day offer extends from types of accommodation to location.

But certain things able to add value to Romanian rural tourism are missing. First of all, the infrastructure (especially roads) to facilitate the access to the places most wanted by those tourists who want something different, not just sun and a patch of sand near other thousands of persons. Then, the promotion, especially outside the country, of the potential touristic destinations in the Romanian countryside. An isolated mountain area guesthouse owner will never be able to access by himself a professional event in Vienna or in any other city of the world. And last but not least, the know-how, the science to offer tourists an experience that goes beyond good accommodation and rich meals.

Tourism represents a major factor of general economic progress; it contributes to increasing the Gross Domestic Product, to equilibrating the external balance of payments and to improving life quality.

Today's rural communities provide a stunning image by their contradictory dimensions and very mobile structure. They describe a system in which private property predominates and they often show "parallel economies".

Romanian rural communities represent a significant asset which proves itself useful from the perspective of touristic development.

In this context, research on effective use of rural tourism potential has been begun, at the level of Romanian rural communities, underlining the possibilities of integrated urban development in Dorna District, Suceava county, a region with a remarkable potential, but still underexploited.

It is very likely that in the near future, rural tourism and especially agricultural tourism will contribute to increasing the touristic offer, redistributing touristic rush, a superior revaluation of the resources and to attaching young people to their native areas. These activities can largely contribute to globally developing the Romanian villages, thus human communities will unite in associative forms, action groups, to solve problems like roads and communications networks, water supplying and sewerage, or environment protection.

Tourist hosting in villages has been practiced for a long time in most countries, in a more or less organized manner. But the present-day extension of this phenomenon is something new and it can be explained, on the one hand, by the relaunch of rural areas development, and on the other, by the variety of forms recently taken by mass tourism.

Inside local economy, rural tourism can be defined as a form of revaluation of rural spaces through exploiting natural assets, cultural and historic values and traditions, agricultural products and by consecrated brand products of regional, ethnographic and cultural identity, that could meet consumers' needs of welcoming, food, leisure activities, entertainment and various services.

Largely speaking, rural tourism includes a large variety of guesthousing ways, activities, events, festivities, sports and entertainment, and all happen in a typically rural environment. It is a concept which covers touristic activity organized and led by rural local people and which generates from a tight contact with the natural and human environment.

Agricultural tourism can be defined as an additional activity, based on the excess of housing space available in rural homes, especially prepared for guests; it is made of a whole

of goods and services provided by rural homes for the benefit of those persons who search rural environment for temporary relaxing, rest and leisure, or therapeutic cures, or business, or hobbies, to initiate in traditional peasants' crafts, for studies and research, as well as many other specific activities.

The farm is still a powerful symbol for urban dwellers. It is the farmer's home – that person who knows the nature's secrets, the best fishing or mushroom-gathering places around. It is the place where domestic animals are bred, with whom urban people lost contact; it is the place where fresh fruit can be eaten, the place where generations succeed, representing at the same time a specific place and lifestyle.

The village means something special for urban people: human dimension, local village life, townhall, local pub, school, the church, places that have been marking people's lives for centuries. Here live craftsmen, marketers, small investors, local actors who make village life easier. It also represents the cradle of the most beautiful feasts, wedding and christening customs, or those specific to wintertime.

The farm, the rural village and space, taken together or separately, represent the charm of rural tourism through attractiveness. Rural tourism must be understood as a form of activity that provides urban dwellers the most adequate conditions of therapy against stress, created by the uproar of everyday life. This form of tourism is strongly influenced by psychologic factors and mainly addresses nature lovers, those who know how to use it for the benefit of their own health and mental comfort, without destroying it.

Globally, agricultural tourism has been imposing itself more and more. Considering the numerous problems in rural space and agriculture, European rural tourism has acquired major importance. European rural spaces need new perspectives and viable alternatives, lest the social position of rural population should degradate.

Rural tourism and agricultural tourism have developed differently in various countries. There are big qualitative differences particularly about equipment and services. Each country has its own strong points and potential that allow the development of rural spaces. In Western and Central Europe, the most attractive and best-developed area, the Alps zone is representative from the point of view of rural tourism and agricultural tourism. Austria is considered the country for rural tourism.

International experiences must be carefully selected and adapted to Romanian conditions. Western specialized rural tourism service providers are going to show their influence, and in a united Europe, Romania is about to become a more and more attractive and looked-for touristical destination.

Ethnographical assets have a distinct role among rural resources, as each community owns a spiritual and material patrimony, as a result of its evolution and the geographical spreading of its people. That's why foreign people will assimilate this patrimony, as it appears as unique and original.

Usually, ethnographic assets are characterized by a permanent combination of attractive objectives and specific events. Therefore, a symbiosis of matter and spirit.

There is nowadays a paradox concerning ethnographic patrimony, as its lowest value can be found in most urbanized and industrialized countries, and its highest value in developing countries. Because genuine pop culture can be found but inside rural life, where traditions are preserved and enriched by the experience of its own creators.

Several major attractive rural events: trades and crafts; peasant clothes, dances and songs; traditional feasts; peasant architecture and technical equipment; human communities. Trades and crafts show a great regional diversity. The way rural people make their lives differ from a climatic type to another. They are so attractive because the way they are used is different, as well as the tools that are used, or the final result of human activities. Such trades and crafts are: plants' cultures, farm animals breeding, wood working, hunting and fishing, bee-breeding, gold and iron working, pottery, furrier's trade, spinning, weaving, whitewashing, etc.

Traditions are creative forms of rural spirituality, which consider various events in the community life as symbol status and oracle's practice. They are associated to the natural cycles of seasons, family or individual events.

Peasant clothes, songs and dances are very different from an area to another and from a nation to another. In Romania there are genuine treasures as far as these are concerned, represented by clothes, peasant songs and dances. We wish to underline the absolute originality of Romanian folklore, its great variety and its exceptional preservation up to our times. Peasant clothes from Nasaud, Oas, Bucovina, Oltenia, Muntenia or Banat are unique landmarks for Romanian peasants' spirituality.

Peasant musical instruments – the Panpipe, the shepherd's flute, the dulcimer, etc. have also their own specificity.

Architecture and traditional equipment confirm the genius of the anonymous artist, whose love for beauty and practical insight materialized in special buildings and production means. Peasant architecture has certain regional features: gates sculpted with solar or floral motives, or spiral-shaped in Maramures, Maramures, Salaj or Apuseni Mountains wood churches. The way they are built, as well as the materials that were used, confer uniqueness. Traditional equipment: water mills, fulling machines, whirlpools, are in their turn very complex and varied.

Human communities are the essence of the above-mentioned elements, a communion of buildings and spirituality. The rural village is a self-sufficient whole, defined by its dwellers' creativity.

Human habitats are attractive due to their values: age, structure, space placing etc.

The revaluation of the originality of the Romanian village and its geographical personality impacts the transformation of local activity, an objective reached on the following conditions:

- crafts are reactivated and services are developed - they should ensure a stable work market;
  - alternative activities are stimulated or those that bring additional income (rural tourism, agricultural tourism);
  - local economy is promoted and stimulated (processing food and non-food products);
  - the organization of production structures and their processing through pattern guides
  - the organization of association forms: family micro-production farms, family associations, professional associations, etc;
  - a local institutional structure is created and of "public - private" partnership type;
  - legislation comprises the real problems of the rural space, including social protection.
- The main targets that must be aimed to fully reevaluate the rural potential are:
- the reconstruction of rural homes and of the whole agricultural policy
  - the stimulation of complementary non agricultural activities, especially through the creation of new economic units and through the turning to good account of the touristic and agricultural potential;
  - the selection of certain towns and villages specific to Romanian ethnographic areas in order to gradually finance some projects of complex planning for rural tourism;
  - research for local fitting up of rural space, especially as a project for practicing sports, cultural entertainment, touristic programs, in order to offer tourists as many attractions and activities as possible.

The revaluation of the assets of the Romanian villages can be done through various fairs, festivals, contests, meant to ameliorate the positive image of the village. Nevertheless, the most important way to turn to good account these assets is rural tourism - as it contributes to introducing certain natural conditions into the domestic and world touristic circuit and to revaluating traditional or modern culture of the rural space.

This large activity is based on three interdependent elements:

- the attraction towards natural beauty, ethnography, events happening in rural life ;

- meals and accommodation that, even if they don't meet hotels' standards, must be qualitative and offered with hospitality;
- transports to rural environment are vital to provide a constant rush of tourists.

A good example for Romania is The Dorna District, known as "The Bucovina Gem", well-known for the natural assets it has been providing, for its quality products, ("La Dorna" milk and processed cheese, the "Dorna" mineral water), for its generous pastures which made possible the secular tradition of animal-breeding, for its rich sources of mineral water. A better revaluation of the touristic potential of this area and a greater involvement of the local villages are necessary.

The Dorna District has a surface of 222,194 square km, that is 0,63% of the surface of the Oriental Carpathians and 0,093% of the surface of the country. Within this area, there are 10 counties with 49 villages and two towns: Brosteni and Vatra Dornei (Suceava county).

The Dorna District provides numerous assets which facilitate the development of local tourism: the mountains around with a lot of touristic itineraries, the rivers that, while crossing the mountains, form beautiful gorges (the Zugreni gorge on the Bistrita river), the resinuous forests that spread fresh air, a lot of game as well as many monuments, historic objectives, and last but not least genuine traditions.

Such a potential, as well as the technical and material basis, have allowed several types of tourism types in the area, such as: mountain tourism, hunting, sportive tourism (ski, river-rafting), therapeutic tourism and rural tourism.

Touristic activities such as accommodation, serving, special food, medical cures, leisure and entertainment, etc. are a key to the social and economic development of the Dorna District. Thus, tourism, along with its cultural and recreative impact on tourists, creates new jobs, limiting people's migration to different zones. But economic impact is the most powerful.

In The Dorna District one can notice the growth of the living standard of those dwellers who practice rural tourism. As they had to meet certain rules imposed by the Worldwide Tourism Organization, people in the area had to ameliorate infrastructure and accommodation; moreover, they had to extend the accommodation space in order to be able to practice tourism in the long term. Together with greater incomes and a higher living standard, tourism encourages the development of traditional peasant activities.

Although the Dorna District enjoys high potential, touristic population is mainly domestic, foreign tourists counting only about. 2%. This can be explained by the lack of an adequate material basis.

For a bigger number of foreign tourists, who would bring greater income to local people, the material basis needs to be ameliorated and intensely promoted, something that recently showed up, through various methods: flyers, illustrated touristic guides, web pages, TV etc.

Vatra Dornei spa is an area enjoying many investment opportunities that would lead to a faster economic growth. Thus, we recommend:

- the consolidation and the arrangement of the Spa Casino and its rendering to the touristic circuit;
- the building of the market and the planning of the neighbourhoods;
- a parking system;
- the improvement of the heating system of the spa;
- the arrangement and the ratifying of the ski and sledge tracks;
- the turning to good account of the Lunca Dornelor and Runc leisure areas;
- transforming the Dorna river into a touristic objective by building a modern water storage dam and equipping the lake with boats and water bikes;
- building a berry-processing plant;
- building a wood plant.

If these investments are made, the Dorna District will have more tourists and maybe it will get worldwide recognition. For the moment, it just follows its slow but sure evolution.

The Dorna District doesn't allow cereal and technical crops, forage crops etc., in exchange here one can get the basis for the development of the zootechnic field; it is the best area to breed bovines (especially the ones for milk) and sheep. Among agricultural crops, potatoes are representative.

Secondary mountain lawns are composed of natural hayfields and pastures, occupying extended surfaces and being at the same time good food for cattle. It has made possible ancestral pastoral economy, that represented a major factor of unification between local people and those in Transylvania and Moldavia.

The landed stock of the Dorna District sums 222194 ha; the major part is natural pastures (28894 ha), natural hayfields (22681 ha), and arable land represents only 2349 ha. The population of the area sums 50.730, of whom 34,8% live in the urban environment and 65,2% in the rural environment. In comparison to the national average (54,7% urban and 45,3% rural), this confirms the generally low economic level development.

Nowadays, the active population of the Dorna District sums 22.453 persons, (44,26% of the total population), of which 10.594 persons are employed (47,18% of the active population). 11.859 persons work in agriculture (52,18% of the active population).

A survey of the denseness of the animal species of the Dorna District, that takes part to the creation of this marker by summing (50,90 UVM/100 ha arable land) shows that animal loading /ha. is sub-optimum (the optimum is, on the average, 1UVM/ha).

In the rural space one cannot speak about a regional development pattern but only about local patterns, where the territorial image of the investigated area is marked by the specificity of the agricultural structures which generate their own manners to deal with space, and with natural and social capital. The multiplication of the economic structures and especially the emergence and the encouragement of the specific structures of rural tourism lead to a bigger employment rate and reinserate the rural universe into different terms in the economic paradigm. This has cultural and communicational effects, as tourism is a dynamic element that can bring tradition closer to modernity.

Research shows that inside the rural space of the Dorna District, the factors favoring development are: various natural assets (mainly mineral resources of the subsoil, forest vegetation, productive agricultural land allowing the development of zootechnics, valuable elements of the natural environment); the human potential (the generous and cheap workforce, the youth, partially instructed in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities); the forest potential; natural parks; special landscape and cultural values (historic, cultural, architectural and ethnographic); local experience in animal breeding, crafts, trades and rural tourism. The unfavourable factors to the development of the rural space are: the higher emigration; the stagnation of economic activities; the low-result agriculture; people's low incomes; the low-quality roads – most of the communal roads are not modernised and over 61% of the rural population has no direct access to the main roads and the railway network; the water supply is insufficient and inadequate; the education network is not diversified, schools run into inadequate buildings and are hardly equipped with specific instruments; the degradation of the forests, mainly due to an uncontrolled deforestation.

## Conclusions

Tourism industry may become one of the major segments of the Romanian economy. It generates employment and helps infrastructure development.

The authors consider that Romania has a lot of resources to develop this economic branch, and especially the rural tourism: villages with well preserved traditions, folklore, wildlife, natural heritage.

The authors point out the rural tourism specific resources of Vatra Dornei area from Bucovina county, namely:

- the village, as natural entity, playing an important role in Bucovina's image as touristic destination
- the natural attractions as mountains, forests, mineral waters, large low polluted areas
- the traditional workmanship, customs, folklore and the ecological products

All these elements may constitute a solid support for developing the rural tourism in this county, obviously accompanied by economic measures to encourage improvement of the road infrastructure, renovation of the old houses, churches and monasteries, building of new accommodation capacities with modern utilities, implementing of facilities for time-spending and various out-door activities like skiing, trekking, cycling, rafting, swimming.

Adding a good promotion, both within and outside the country, of this region by the help of the local and national organizations, as a safe, healthy and beautiful Romanian destination, the authors consider that the rural tourism may substantially contribute to the economic development of this Romanian region, and Bucovina and Vatra Dornei area may therefore become one of the a pearls of the European rural tourism destination, internationally recognised.

### References

- Arnold, J., Why rural tourism is no picnic, BBC News, 2004
- Baldock, B., Beaufoy, G., 1993, *Nature Conservation and New Directions in the EC Common Agricultural Policy*, Institute for European Environmental Policy. 1993
- Fleischer, A., Tchetchik, A., *Does rural tourism benefit from agriculture?* Tourism Management, 2005
- Goosens, C., Tourist information and pleasure motivation, *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2000
- Tchetchik, A., *Rural Tourism in Israel: Structure Analysis and Policy Implications*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem., 2006
- Tribe, J. , *Economics of Leisure and Tourism*, Butterworth-Heinemann, London, 1999
- Tureac, C.E., *Management* , "Danubius" Academic Foundation Publishing-House, Galati, 2007
- Tureac, C.E., *Management of Sevices* , "Danubius" Academic Foundation Publishing-House, Galati, 2007
- Turtureanu, AG. , *The Actual Management- from theory at mathematic tooling*, Synthesis Publishing house, Galatz, 2005
- Turtureanu, AG., *The Tourism Economy*, "Danubius" Academic Foundation Publishing-House, Galati, 2007
- WTO – „Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally Suitainable Development”, 1995