

THE VATRA DORNEI TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LOCAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP (ROMANIA)

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Abstract: Dorna Depression as a whole and Vatra Dornei particularly associates, for many reasons, with tourism activities emerged early as the nineteenth century. While health tourism is most developed currently, other types of tourism are taking shape, especially due to local, public or private stakeholders. This paper aims at being an analysis of the state of entrepreneurial initiative in tourism and its outcomes at the Vatra Dornei resort, analysis performed on four components: who are the entrepreneurs in tourism and what do they offer, what is their relationship with the local environment, who are and what do the Vatra Dornei tourists look for, and which are the available alternatives to spas that tourism entrepreneurs can turn to in order to deal the competitive local and national economic environment. The analysis is based both on statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics and data obtained through a questionnaire applied to more than 90% of the accommodation in Vatra Dornei. Outlining local entrepreneur's profile (average age, with a higher level of education and training in tourism, open to innovation, but still reluctant to access financing sources exceeding the local), identifying what he can offer (complex tourism products), but also what he actually provides for the application of tourists (minimal tourist services), and the relationships they have with local stakeholders and decision makers, it may refer both to untapped opportunities and possible courses of action in the future.

Key words: tourism entrepreneurship, entrepreneur profile, tourist offer, green tourism, local stakeholders

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INTRODUCTION

The chosen area for the analysis has experienced a series of stages of economic development which have led to real life cycles of the communities, whether urban or

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rural, that has mobilized the population's entrepreneurial resources and triggered spontaneous mechanisms of adaptation to the new socio – economic conditions.

Thus, we mention a whole historical period (years of centralized economy, extended to mid 90's) in which the local economy was supported by mining, followed by primary wood processing - developed through national and international entrepreneurship withdrawn at this time outside the urban area itself.

The mining crisis and the closure of manganese and sulfur mining in the Călimani Mountains led the Dorna area to search and find alternatives to an important segment of the population. After a period of substantial migration in the European Union countries, in which they accumulated entrepreneurial experience, capital and the right attitude, the Vatra Dornei area population developed in about 10 years, primarily service businesses and then wood and food industry. Although mainly grafted on the same approach of local development, each evolved differently depending on predisposing factors or inhibitors.

Located in the northern Oriental Carpathians, the national interest resort of Vatra Dornei can be regarded as representative for Romanian spa tourism, but is at the same time a complex tourist destination by completing, in the recent years, the tourism offer with green products tourism, the white dominant and the active tourism. The aspects by which the Vatra Dornei resort can be considered a representative case study for the evolution of this type of tourist destination in Romanian area are: the early development of tourism activities based on the exploitation of the mineral waters as early as the nineteenth century, the diversification of the tourist offer by winter sports, but also the emphasis on the balneary destination character of the social tourism during the communist period, the attempt to adapt to the new trends in the tourism market by developing the concept of green tourism and the active tourism after 1990.

Although these are specific stages of a cyclical development of spa resorts in Romania, the extent to which these resorts have managed to resist and to impose themselves on the national tourism market is again mostly given by the specifics of the local entrepreneurship in the field.

Assuming that the success of tourism activities depends largely on the characteristics and the vision of those who initiated and / or coordinate this study aims at providing a detailed analysis of these elements in the Vatra Dornei resort. Considering the voice of the tourism entrepreneurs as very important in the context of regional and local development, we intend to make it known by an investigation on the owners / managers of tourist accommodations in Vatra Dornei.

The analysis of the results of this investigation aims to outline the type of tourism entrepreneurs working in this area and tourism products they suggest their ability and willingness to integrate into the local environment, and that of the effects of their activities on local and regional level.

REVIEW OF THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

Entrepreneurship Tourism was approached as a distinct theme in literature, in a period in which it was found difficult to create a balance between the values of the past and the demands of the present, between what is sought and what is consumed, between urban and rural reality expectations (Oppermann, 1996).

Tourism and entrepreneurship extent depend directly and indirectly to sustainable development of other areas (McKercher, 1993). So, overall improvement of infrastructure, decrease corruption, economic growth, rising living standards etc. will lead to creating conditions conducive to sustainable development of tourism. Given that competition between destinations is strong, each area must know the resources and potential customers, the success of belonging to those who know how to capitalize on their comparative advantages (Hughes & Allen, 2005).

Issues addressing tourism have become increasingly more business ties and the analyzed situations are becoming increasingly complex, aiming at different types of relationships, such as that between tourism development and key elements that ensure the process of developing (Lane, 1991); of the distinctive features of tourism and nature of economic interactions causing them (Bramwell, 1994); relationship between tourism policies addressed to it and the regional development (Bouquet & Winter, 1987); relationship between how entrepreneurs in tourism and tourists affect the environment, the perception and thinking of the community (Ryglóva, 2007) or the relationship between tourism and how it creates changes in the local culture (Hall & Jenkins, 2004); the ability of rural tourism and recreational activities having influence on community local development (Fredericks et al., 2008); residents' attitude towards tourism development areas and leisure activities (Hall, 2001); tourism development based on community image and on tourist rural destinations or the relationship between local stakeholders and tourism development (Nistoreanu, 2004).

There are also many approaches in terms of the role of tourism in business development zones and regions, outlining the main points are in general: the implementation of development projects for recreational locations is a mechanism to attract tourists and new investments (Hall, 2001).

The tourism activities in the Vatra Dornei area have been the subject of numerous studies, of geographical, economic or sociological nature. They analyze the tourist activities in Bucovina (Chasovschi et al., 2011), in Vatra Dornei in a broader context (Dincă, 2013), the tourism demand and supply specificities (Muresan et al., 2012), regard to spa tourism (Erdeli et al., 2011), refer to the active tourism alternative (Iațu et al., 2011), the tourism development strategies in Bucovina (Minciu & Stanciu, 2010) or the impact of climate change on tourism activities (Dincă et al., 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was based both on the analysis of the available statistical data on the establishments of tourists' reception and the tourist flows in the Vatra Dornei resort and the analysis of results of a questionnaire applied to the owners / managers of accommodations. The questionnaire was structured in three sections: the entrepreneur's profile and relationship with stakeholders in the local environment, the characteristics of the existing local tourism products and the features for the tourism services consumers, and it was implemented in July 2014 on over 90% of registered tourist accommodations in the resort. The analyzed data were provided, in most cases, by the owners of these structures, and where not possible, it was discussed with the managers of the structures in question or the person authorized such as directors or receptionists. The questionnaire was conducted face to face and was completed by broader discussions with those concerned.

The research results can be considered representative of both the very large share of the entrepreneurs interviewed in the total number of those who work in this field and the fact that the investigation took into account all types of accommodation, regardless of their size (from large hotels to guesthouses offering just a few accommodations), their type (hotels, villas, bungalows, guesthouses) and tourism services offered (accommodation, bed and breakfast, lodging and complete packages including leisure activities, etc.). Finally we obtained 39 complete and valid questionnaires, whose answers were interpreted in a broader context, of the analysis of tourism activities in Vatra Dornei. The analysis of the results was completed subsequently of discussions with key players in the development of the local tourism: representatives of Mountain Rescue Department and of the Călimani National Park, catering establishments managers and local authorities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The beginning of the tourist activities in Vatra Dornei is placed in the nineteenth century, when the Austrian government representatives in northern Moldavia who was then known as the Bucovina, highlight the mineral springs they had discovered since their arrival in the area, by the end of the seventeenth century.

In 1845, the first spa in Vatra Dornei was built, and in the second half of the nineteenth century the development and modernization of the resort begins by capturing springs, applying peat mud treatments, and mostly, building, in 1895, modern spa facilities. Tourism activities are developed in parallel with the activities from the mining and wood processing activities that defined the economic profile of a larger area, that of the Dorna Depression.

After a period of decline, imposed by the effects of the Second World War (during which the spa facilities were destroyed), the tourism activities have entered a new stage of development, imposed by the economic and social policies of the communist state. It is the period in which Vatra Dornei develops as a spa resort of national interest, which results in the appearance of large accommodation units that integrate spa facilities. Social tourism is the one that gets the biggest scale in the resort, being generated mainly by highlighting of mineral water, mud and healing climate valence, developing facilities for winter sports supplement and diversifying the spa profile of the resort.

The Vatra Dornei landscape, the easy access by road connecting Moldavia and Transylvania, as by the railway Iasi – Timisoara, and the presence of well known monuments of religious architecture are known to be the factors that led to the tourist business development in Vatra Dornei.

After 1990, the resort faces the inertia of a social system in decline compared to other Romanian spa resorts (Dincă et al., 2014), the indifference of the local authorities, that, at least in the first part of the 90s, were not involved almost at all in the preservation and enhancement of tourism potential, but also by the competition generated by the spectacular growth of another nearby tourist destination - Gura Humorului. However, the number of accommodation structures, as the number of accommodation places experiences a continuous upward trend from 1997 to the present, and the number of tourists is also growing, except for the period from 2009 to 2011, marked by the economic crisis (Figure 1, Table 1).

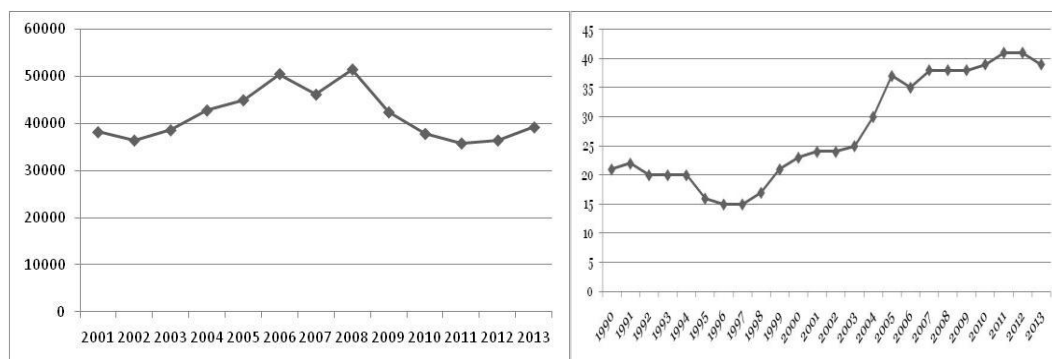


Figure 1. The evolution of the number of tourist accommodations (a) and the number of tourist arrivals in Vatra Dornei

The figures demonstrate the presence of an active economic environment, the relative success of tourism activities and prove the adaptability of the tourism entrepreneurs. This adaptability was manifested by the development of tourism products focusing on the active

tourism (Iațu et al., 2011), the green tourism, the gastronomic tourism attractions and by associating tourist attractions in complex, not specialized tourist products.

Table 1. Number of accommodation and number of tourist arrivals in Vatra Dornei
(Data Source: data supplied by www.insse.ro, Tempo Online)

	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
No.of accommodation	24	25	37	38	38	41	39
No.of arrivals	38212	38623	44956	46126	42390	35844	39232

However, the lack of coherent strategy on tourism development in Suceava region and insufficient exploitation of the Bucovina notoriety gained in the past 25 years, becoming the fifth tourist destination in Romania (according to the Masterplan for tourism development in Romania from 2007 to 2026 proposed by MDRT) are issues raised in the literature (Minciu, 2010) as negatively affecting the tourism in Vatra Dornei.

The Profile of the entrepreneur

One of the aims of the conducted investigation was to outline the portrait of tourism entrepreneurs in Vatra Dornei as it results from associating objective characteristics (age, sex, level of education and training in tourism, etc.) and subjective aspects that relate to the attitude towards their business, practices to promote business, relating with tourists, openness to funding opportunities, motivation to start a business in this area, etc.). The survey results outline a respondents structure by age dominated by people between 41 and 50 years old, representing 30.7% of the total, followed, with equal share, by those aged between 31 and 40 years old and those aged 51 and 60 years old (23.07%)(Figure 2a).

Correlating the age structure of the time in which they started their business, it can be concluded that when entrepreneurship, most existing entrepreneurs were in the age group of 30-40 years old. The most dynamic entrepreneurship period in Vatra Dornei tourism resort proved to be the period of 2000 - 2008, when there over 56% of the analyzed accommodation units appeared (Figure 2b).

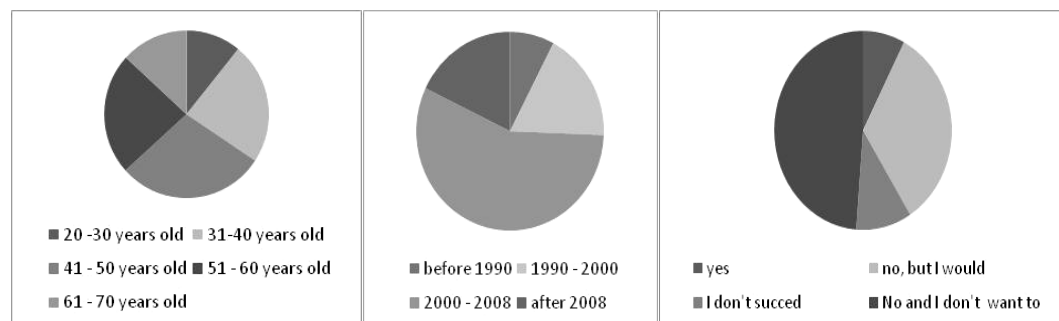


Fig. 2. "Entrepreneurs' responses to the following questions: a. What is your age?
b. When did you start the business?
c. Did you access European funds for business development?"

Contrary to the sketched portrait of Romanian entrepreneurs of different research groups (the National Council of Private Small and Medium Enterprises, 2009, Report on the SME sector Post Privatisation Foundation, 2010), indicating the predominance of men among Romanian entrepreneurs, in Vatra Dornei women entrepreneurs / manager dominate the rate of 61.5%.

Regarding educational level, most of the respondents are university graduates (66.6%), the rest are high school graduates and the structure of the Vatra Dornei entrepreneur approaches the nationwide one.

The share of those who said they had specific training in the field of tourism (postgraduate courses organized locally, etc.) is even higher (74.3%). We believe that both the training and qualification in the field of tourism are beneficial aspects that can positively influence the undertaken tourism activities.

Beyond the objective aspects of the Vatra Dornei entrepreneur profile, their attitude towards their own business can provide interesting information on entrepreneurial behavior. Thus, the majority of the successful respondents find their business (64, 1%) a success, which is also an indicator of the wealth of tourist activities carried out. Tourism businesses in Vatra Dornei resort are mostly family businesses: 79.4% of respondents said that family members are involved in conducting business. In fact, if we take into consideration the three hotel-types large accommodation structures, almost all other tourist accommodations are family businesses, which can be a guarantee of their stability.

An analysis of motivations for starting a business in tourism also seemed interesting. Although in this case not all the pursued have responded, however, the primary motivation is emerging: referral opportunity in this area in the context of an established tourism brand, an obvious tourist potential and rigid accommodation structures, very large and with a certain inertia in adapting to the new demands of the tourist market.

In the background, we can mention: consideration of tourist activity as the only solution for survival in job losses, recovery of professional experience when they retire etc. Vatra Dornei entrepreneurs promote their business especially in the virtual environment (87.1% of respondents) and the additional options and / or alternatives turn to travel agencies (53, 8% - given that multiple answers were possible), but also promotion by relatives and friends (25.6%).

The clear options for advertising online demonstrate the respondents' adaptation to the requirements and characteristics of the current tourism market.

An element identifying the Vatra Dornei area entrepreneurs is the relationships that they have with tourists to whom they provide services: 53.8% of respondents said they always keep in touch with tourists who visit, and 35.8% occasionally do this. This attitude can individualize tourist offer entrepreneurs in Vatra Dornei resort, bringing it closer to agritourism and opposed to the standard offer specific to the mass tourism.

A final aspect that helps to portray entrepreneur is Vatra Dornei relationship with European funds. This method of business financing is still not very popular among those surveyed. Only 7.6% of respondents said they accessed European funds to develop the business, while 33.3% said they were open to try to use these opportunities in the future, (Figure 2c). Also stresses the important share which excludes this possibility clearly (48.6%), while only 10% said they had tried to access European funds, but failed.

The contractor - local economic and social environment relationship

Good cooperation between business environment, civil society - represented by NGOs and other associations - and the public administration - represented by local, county, regional and national stakeholders, but also by their subordinate services (Rescue Service) is a prerequisite for development of all economic activities and hence those in the tourism industry.

In the Dorna Depression there are some powerful entities involved in the development and promotion of tourism activities: The Local Action Group "Dorna Basin", The Călimani National Park Association of Ecotourism "Country Dorna", which add local

and county authorities (Vatra Dornei city hall, the County Council), under which The Vatra Dornei Mountain Rescue service is.

Our survey results show a good cooperation with both associations working in tourism at local and / or county level (64.1% of respondents gave a positive answer) and with representatives of the Călimani National Park (43.5%), but mostly Mountain Rescue service (84.6%).

Regarding the relationship with local authorities, it can be categorized as rather tense, as long as 79.4% of respondents said that the authorities involved to a small extent (48.7%) or none (30.7%) in developing and promoting tourism (Figure 3). In this context, the relationship with the local authorities, we considered interesting to know if they can have an economic multiplier effect, contributing, through the activities they carry out to maintaining other local businesses.

We believe that the impact of tourism entrepreneurs in Vatra Dornei is important for commercial activities in the city (58.9% of respondents said that they procure the necessary products of Vatra Dornei), and also for those in rural areas nearby (from where the food used by 12.8% of respondents in their business comes) or from the county capital, Suceava (25.6% of respondents).

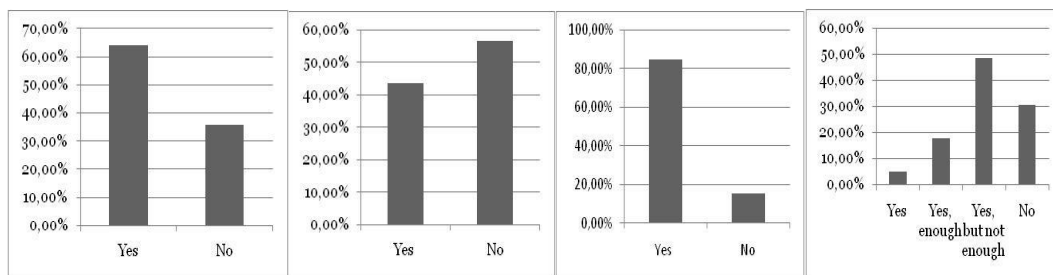


Figure 3. “The responses of the entrepreneurs to the question: a. Do you collaborate with organizations, associations, institutions involved in tourism development?
b. Do you build a cooperative relationship with the Călimani National Park Administration?
c. Do you take good working relationships with Mountain Rescue service?
d. Do you consider that local authorities are involved in the development of tourism activities?”

The tourist offer

Another objective of our research was to understand the features of tourism product that the entrepreneur puts at tourist’s disposal, to confront this model with the tourists that get to Vatra Dornei. The survey results show that most of the entrepreneurs (41%) have the ability to offer tourists complete packages that include accommodation, meals and other activities (spa, ATV rides, the ability to engage in everyday activities, etc.) but almost as important is the percentage of those who can only offer accommodation services (34%).

One element that could individualize the Dornean tourist offer, gastronomy and organic products, is sadly little represented among the entrepreneurs in Vatra Dornei resort. Only 5.1% of respondents said they offer tourists their own household products currently, and 15.3% said they do so partially.

The valorisation of the food quality in Dorna Basin, the gastronomic traditions in the area, could be an element that would customize the tourist offer, differentiating it from the standardized offers and enhancing tourism attractiveness. Over 60% of respondents said that the reception structure they manage offers tourists the opportunity to pursue leisure activities, and 87% said that they offer tourists information about activities that may take place in the area.

Therefore, while the Vatra Dornei tourism is still anchored in a development due to spa and climate potential, which gives certain stability from the perspective of overall tourist demand, along manifests two development directions: the ecotourism and agritourism? They are located at the rural periphery of the city and use the gastronomical resources and traditions associated with the famous Dorna dairy products to develop the stay small tourism.

Much of the development trends of the offers are blurred, largely by increasing local food industry, monopolizing resources by developing an international entrepreneurial complex in Candreni Dorna area, in the vicinity of the resort.

Another analysis dimension is that of the intervention of local entrepreneurship in the development of tourist facilities by switching from the traditional health tourism to the specific geographic area of white dominant, of the winter sports. The Park and Squirrel ski slopes are made through funds raised by the local administration, while the Negrești slope was drafted by a successful public - private partnership.

Also, between mutations that the Vatra Dornei recreational tourism records there are the private initiatives for practicing active tourism facilities in the area of green dominant and the zip lines in the center, cycling trails totaling over 80 km in the mountainous areas of limited Dorna Depression, restoring bookmarks to Călimani National Park whose limit is 6 km from the resort and facilities for rafting on Bistrita.

The change of optics in attracting tourists to travel and practice winter sports has generated a relative revival of tourism in Vatra Dornei, after the decline of the 90s and early 2000s. However, some problems that overshadow this welcome change of perception on tourism in Vatra Dornei should be reported: facilities that generate tourism planning principles disturbances affecting the main attractiveness, the secondary offer or the principle of harmonious integration into the traditional cityscape.

The guests staying at the Fir tree-Călimani complex for spa and climate treatment are disturbed by the recent passing of the ski slopes near the city park. Once an emblem of the Vatra Dornei tourism for the famous highly ozoned air quality, the Central Park is affected by both the facilities and noise pollution of the leisure tourism accompanying the facilities near the ski slopes in the Central Park area and by the frequent clumps of colluvial deposits made by natural denudation on the ski slopes that are arranged upstream of the park, such as Squirrel slope (poorly designed for the slope processes).

The tourist profile

What features do tourists who come to Vatra Dornei present and what do they require of tourism service providers, according to the entrepreneurs? Tourists arrive at the resort, in almost equal proportions, summer or winter, causing a strong seasonality of tourism activities. Although most respondents said that most tourists practice plain tourism (56.4%) it is also quite high the percentage of those who said that within their unit of accommodation, travelers in transit prevail. Regarding the length of stay, most tourists (53.8%) spend on average 2-3 nights in Vatra Dornei, which means 3-4 days. Exceptions are practicing health tourism and tourists enjoying the social system of distributing travel packages, tourists who stay in Vatra Dornei for more than 10 days.

However, the presence of these tourists impact on the economic life of the resort may be even lower than those who stay only 3-4 days because "social tourists" are not willing to spend too much in addition to subsidized price of ticket treatment.

The forms of tourism in Vatra Dornei, in the opinion of entrepreneurs, are winter sports tourism (48.7%), spa tourism (30.7%), other (business, recreation - 35.8%), cultural tourism (7.69%) and agritourism (5.12%), (Figure 4c). Multiple answers were possible. Most of the tourists who choose Vatra Dornei are families with children (66.6%) but the share of elderly and youth groups is also important (Figure 4b).

Although entrepreneurs are largely willing to provide complete packages, most of the tourists (64.1%) require only accommodation and only 23% of respondents said that tourists require full packages (Figure 4a). The entrepreneurs' strategy to maintain contact with tourists, individualizing thus their offer, reflects in the fact that nearly 80% of the respondents said that the tourists they receive are not in their first visit, but they returned.

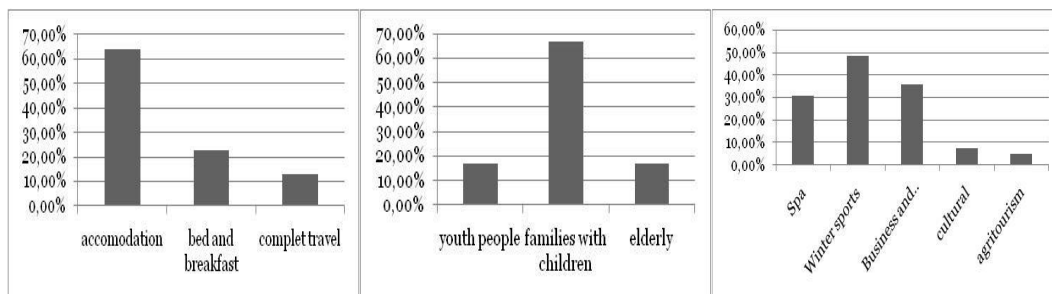


Figure 4. Responses of the entrepreneurs to the following questions: a. Which are the services most frequently required by tourists?, b. What category of tourists do you receive?, c. Which forms of tourism do tourists you receive practice? (multiple answers were possible)

Opportunities and constraints for tourism entrepreneurs in Vatra Dornei

The results of the survey conducted among entrepreneurs, as well as research in the field and discussions with key local stakeholders to development of tourism, led to identifying the key opportunities that are or could be used by entrepreneurs in tourism, as well as the constraints that they must face.

To the opportunities we can mention: the favorable geographical position both locally (Dorna Depression, benefiting from numerous tourist potential elements near the Ciocănești, the cultural village of Romania in 2014, and the Stampei Glade, participant in the competition for the title mentioned before) as/and regional (Bucovina, which is already an established brand in tourism, near Transylvania, that can become a recruiting area for tourists that would make it the traditional superimposed Moldavia); the existence of remarkable initiatives regarding the development of the adventure tourism, whether it is river rafting, paragliding, rock climbing and mountaineering or Nordic walking, hiking and horse riding; good cooperation between tourism entrepreneurs and other active players in this activity (Association of Ecotourism "Country Dorna", Călimani National Park, GAL "Dorna Basin"); development of projects with different funding, completed or nearing completion, with major impact on tourism development (Rehabilitation of Municipal Park, Adventure Park Meadow Dorna and Runc, Spatial ski slope); development of infrastructure for winter sports; development of health tourism should be considered as a national priority by the authorities; individualization of tourism offer by the absence of standardization.

At same time, there are a number of constraints that may prevent the development of tourism activities in Vatra Dornei that must be solved: the fact that it is so close to Gura Humorului, the newest resort that has benefited in recent years, of massive investment and a more aggressive promotion; existing inertia in the spa tourism, which continues to be a form of social tourism, depending on state subsidies; insufficient development and exploitation of forms of tourism that are part of the new trends in the current tourism market; poor use of the local cultural potential; limiting tourist offer to minimal services, without them to be integrated into complex tourism products; lack of overall vision on the regional tourism development and weak involvement of authorities in tourist activities and those that can stimulate.

CONCLUSIONS

The Vatra Dornei resort is a national brand in health tourism and winter sports, but the image was completed in recent years by developing alternative forms of tourism in order to diversify the tourism offer and extending the categories of tourists interested. In this context, the role of the local entrepreneur is very important, the success of new initiatives in this field largely depends on his attitude and flexibility.

Outlining local entrepreneur's profile (average age, with a higher level of education and training in tourism, open to innovation, but still reluctant to access financing sources exceeding the local), identifying what he can offer (complex tourism products), but also what he actually provides for the application of tourists (minimal tourist services), and the relationships they have with local stakeholders and decision makers, it may refer both to untapped opportunities and possible courses of action in the future.

Among them there are: limiting social tourism to the low season, continued promotion of alternative forms of tourism already in use in the resort, the integration of complex tourism products, the use of the EU funds for the development of tourism activities, the use of comparative advantage given by the climatic conditions in winter sports in compared with Gura Humor, especially in the current climate change.

Items that were the basis for the development of tourism in Vatra Dornei through local entrepreneurship, show a modest anchoring in the tourism identity of the resort itself looking for a specific spa, climate or other complex alternative.

Although a climatic spa resort of national interest, it receives very little evidence of support from local urban planning for the conservation and especially the functionality of sources for the general public.

From another point of view, local entrepreneurship is not supported and is not interested in a specific tourist offer spa resort Vatra Dornei. The alternative favored by the local entrepreneurs for the development of tourism is its association with the winter sports tourism, gastronomic tourism or other forms of active tourism.

To these are added the architectural heterogeneity tourism arrangements without concern for the preservation of the old type of resort facilities set up by the Austrian government at the end of the eighteenth century, which prints an alien urban geographical space of Vatra Dornei. Combination image interwar resort to resort Karlovy Vary is now just a memory.

Although statistically most tourists entering the Vatra Dornei resort are attracted by the reputation of the spa, the changes foreshadowed in the last decade of local entrepreneurship in the absence of coherent development strategies of local administration, adequately funded, associated with the development of winter tourism, with winter sports and so we will probably witness the change in time of the Vatra Dornei tourism effigy in one of a white dominant.

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