THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES IN TOURISM – A FACTOR IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TIMIS COUNTY

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Abstract. Scientific steps concerning the role of the entrepreneurial sector in the economic development of a region have been taken especially by economists, however, the analysis of the factors that influence the entrepreneurial dynamism of a region, of a territorial distribution of the entrepreneurial initiatives, as well as, their impact on the local and regional development may become interesting topics of study for geographers. Depending on the existent local resources, the entrepreneurial initiatives can become known in various fields of activity: industry, tourism, commerce, transportation, etc. The existence of some remarkable touristic resources and the possibility to make the most of them were the main factors which founded and developed entrepreneurial initiatives in tourism. A lot of local development projects, which mainly refer to rural communities, assign a central role to tourism when it comes to the economic relaunch of the respective areas. The high tourist potential of Timiș County (historical and cultural values, folklore and specific tradition), the development of the infrastructure of access to the tourist objectives, the entrepreneurial culture and spirit of population represent important opportunities in the development of activities in tourism. The study tries to outline the factors which contributed to the emergence of various entrepreneurial initiatives in tourism and their role in the economic growth of Timis County, but especially of several communities affected by a strong economic decline.

Rezumat. Inițiativele antreprenoriale în turism – un factor în dezvoltarea economică a județului Timiș. Demersuri științifice asupra rolului sectorului antreprenorial în dezvoltarea economică a unei regiuni au fost realizate mai ales de către economiști însă, analiza factorilor care influențează dinamismul antreprenorial într-o regiune, a distribuției teritoriale a inițiativelor antreprenoriale, cât și impactul acestora asupra dezvoltării locale și regionale, pot deveni interesaante teme de cercetare pentru geografi. În funcție de resursele locale existente, inițiativele antreprenoriale pot apărea în diverse domenii de activitate: industrie, agricultură, turism, comerț, transport, etc. Existența unor resurse turistice remarcabile la nivelul unor regiuni și posibilitatea de punere în valoare a acestora au fost principali factori care au stat la baza apariției și dezvoltării unor inițiative antreprenoriale în domeniul turismului. În multe programe de dezvoltare locală, ce vizează mai ales comunitățile rurale, turismului i se atribuie un rol prioritar în relansarea economică a spațiilor respective. Potențialul turistic ridicat al județului Timiș (obiective istorice și culturale, tradiții specifice, folclor), gradul de dezvoltare al infrastructurii de acces spre obiectivele turistice, cultura antreprenorială și spiritul antreprenorial ridicat al populației reprezintă factori determinanți în apariția și dezvoltarea activităților turistice. Studiul de față încercă să evidențieze factorii care au contribuit la apariția unor inițiative antreprenoriale în domeniul turismului și rolul pe care îl au acestea în dezvoltarea economică a județului Timiș, dar mai ales a unor comunități afectate de un puternic declin economic.

Key words: entrepreneurial initiatives, tourism, economic development, Timiș County;
Cuvinte cheie: inițiative antreprenoriale, turism, dezvoltare economică, județul Timiș
INTRODUCTION

The development of the entrepreneurial sector represents a priority in the market economy which is based on competition and risk. The entrepreneurial economy has been mentioned more often in the last decades, where the economic growth is supported by the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as a result of the embodiment of certain entrepreneurial initiatives. For the economies in transition from a centralized economy to a market one, the stimulation and development of the entrepreneurial sector outline a main target in the politics of economy reorganization, which positively influences the rhythm of a durable economic growth. The development is affected by the SMEs especially at inferior levels, such as the local and regional ones, through their following characteristics: innovation, close relations with the community, a high degree of energy, an efficient use of local resources, and the creation of job opportunities. Therefore, we can state that the entrepreneurial sector plays an important part in the local and regional economic development with the condition that the SMEs are included in a well-structured environment, within a coherent territorial network.

Various economists (Drucker, Lalatka, Kuratko, Loyd, Stokes, Storey, Nicolescu, etc.) have studied the role of the entrepreneurial sector in the economic development of a region. However, the analysis of the factors which influence the entrepreneurial efficiency in a region, the territorial distribution of entrepreneurial initiatives, as well as their impact on the local development and organization of the geographical space, can become interesting research subjects for geographers.

The emergence of entrepreneurial initiatives in a certain area, their varied territorial efficiency and distribution depend on a series of factors as follows: the economic potential of a territory, the local business climate, the incomes of the population, the entrepreneurial tradition, the initiative, the entrepreneurial culture, the entrepreneur’s ability to monitor and make good use of the opportunities offered by the respective area, etc.

In this context, the geographers’ studies can concentrate on the analysis of the degree of development belonging to the entrepreneurial sector with a view to its connection to the economic potential of the territory, as well as to its impact on the economic development of a region.

Depending on the existent local resources, the entrepreneurial initiatives can become known in various fields of activity: industry, tourism, commerce, transportation, etc. The existence of some remarkable touristic resources and the possibility to make the most of them were the main factors which founded and developed entrepreneurial initiatives in tourism. A lot of local development projects, which mainly refer to rural communities, assign a central role to tourism when it comes to the economic relaunch of the respective areas.

In this context, this study tries to outline the factors which contributed to the emergence of various entrepreneurial initiatives in tourism and their role in the economic growth of Timis County, but especially of several communities affected by a strong economic decline.
1. THE PREMISES OF THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES IN TOURISM IN TIMIȘ COUNTY

Situated in the West of Romania, at the border with Hungary and Serbia, the Timis County is one of the counties with the highest level of economic and social development in the country, but also one of the most efficient with regard to the emergence and progress of small and medium enterprises. Some of the factors that contributed to the strong development of the entrepreneurial sector are: the advantageous position in the west of Romania which has allowed foreign investments to promote the entrepreneurial culture in the region, the high economic and human potential, the favorable business climate, the developed infrastructure, the high business spirit of the population in this region, etc.

The analysis of the structure evolution on fields of activity belonging to the SMEs from Timis outlines a permanent diversification of their formation. If in the first years after 1989 the majority of small businesses were developed in the field of commerce, although the importance of this field is high, at present we can observe a rise in the number of SMEs within the production sector, but also in the one of services for the population (tourism, transportation, etc).

Even though it is not among the counties with a significant touristic potential, bearing in mind it is mostly a plain with a small portion of mountainous areas, traditionally intended for tourism (only in the East there is a small part of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains – somewhat low and with a high degree of humanization), in the recent years, however, a series of touristic activities have been developed, which provide relevant earnings to the human communities. The activities present in these communities are as follows: new accommodation locations, travel agencies, transportation companies, but also a series of services meant to support tourism (commercial activities, gas stations, car rental firms, exchange offices, etc).

A series of factors caused the emergence and development of small and medium enterprises in tourism with an alert rhythm after 1990, as well as their varied efficiency and distribution. These factors can be divided into two categories: internal factors, that refer to the entrepreneurs’ ability to observe and take advantage of the opportunities provided by the environment, and external ones, that refer to the economic and social micro-environment where the entrepreneurial initiatives have developed and which, in some cases, have favoured or not the emergence and development of small and medium enterprises, correspondingly: the potential offered by the location, the touristic potential of the territory, the ease of access to touristic sites, the incomes of the population from the touristic regions, the entrepreneurial culture, etc.

The Timiș county provides a multitude of possibilities to develop small and medium-sizes enterprises in tourism, as a result of the various touristic resources that can be used: reservoirs and parts of rivers that can be turned into locations for leisure and fishing, forests which represent the foundation of developing the forestry tourism, extremely attractive mountainous landscapes in the East of the county (The Poiana Ruscă Mountains), various historical sites (Timișoara Fortress, the ruins of some feudal fortresses), religious locations (monasteries and wooden churches), cultural places, traditional ethnographic elements (customs and traditions, architecture, crafts, folk art), etc.

The special architectural and cultural-scientific legacy, the active cultural and scientific life emphasized by numerous activities such as: conferences, symposiums,
economic events (national and international fairs and exhibitions), festivals, etc. have transformed Timișoara into one of the first centers of SMEs emergence in tourism, at present being the most important touristic center in the county. Thus, there have been developed new accommodation venues designed for business tourism which include polyvalent places, commercial centers, restaurants, discos, casinos, etc.

The development of new touristic activities has also been caused by the need to create a recreational system in close proximity to the city of Timisoara. Consequently, a new series of initiatives has emerged regarding the design and inclusion, within the touristic circuit, of several lakes nearby Timișoara (Dumbrăvița, Ianova, Sânandrei), parts of rivers (Timiş, Bega), and forests (Bazoși, Pișchio, Cheveres, Remetea Mare).

The rural places in the East of the county, which develop close to the Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Curtea, Margina, Pietroasa, Fârdea, Nădăș), provide, through the variety of natural touristic resources they own, a multitude of opportunities to develop the agro-tourism. Apart from the natural touristic resources, the existence of an important anthropogenic potential, represented especially by the numerous ethnographic elements (customs and traditions, architecture, crafts, folk art), increase the touristic importance of these places and lead to the development of touristic activities. The agricultural potential, although very low, can support the practice of rural tourism in these regions. The small enterprises based on touristic activities could facilitate the inclusion in the touristic circuit of several rural households, adding a number of handicraft activities, as well. (Ianos, I., 2000).

At present, the watering and spa resorts in the Timiș County are in decline. Despite this fact, resorts such as Buziaș (mineral waters) and Calacea (geothermal waters), with a long tradition in the spa and treatment tourism, could represent an advantage in the development of some dynamic entrepreneurial activities. However, it is essential that the county authorities get involved in the reintroduction of touristic activities in these resorts by diversifying the touristic offer and guiding tourism towards other branches as well, in addition to the spa and watering ones. Moreover, regaining the attractiveness of the Buziaș resort for the native tourists as well as for the ones from Serbia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia is imperative.

Although the Timiș county benefits from a significant touristic potential which could promote the development of several entrepreneurial activities in tourism, there is, however, a series of restrictive factors, such as: the detrimental access infrastructure towards a number of touristic objectives or rural areas where agro tourism could be put into practice; the lack of specialized human resources in tourism; the low incomes and the high percentage of old population; the weak touristic promotion of regions with a touristic potential; the lack of cooperation with the touristic operators, etc. Apart from this, the narrow-mindedness of the people which produces a certain drawback regarding the emergence of new activities and the confusion which still exists between the concepts of guest and tourist represent two restrictive factors in the process of introducing various touristic activities in the rural areas.

These factors, together with the county politics to promote tourism as an alternative in the economic development of some communities, have a fixed role in the emergence, development and geographic-territorial distribution of SMEs in tourism.
2. THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES FROM TOURISM IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TIMIȘ COUNTY

The experience of successful market economies proves the important role of developing the SMEs sector, which stands as a key element in the regional economy development. This fact was proven by the importance and quick increase this sector experienced in the first years after 1989 in the Timiș County. The effects of the entrepreneurial sector on the local development depend on the importance, the outline and manner of integration of new enterprises, but especially on the specific of the geographic space they develop in.

Tourism, as a component of the economic activity, represents an essential alternative in the development of several communities that benefit from important touristic resources. The implications of new activities in tourism on the local development are obvious, particularly that at the level of rural communities, for a number of them tourism represents one of the most important income sources.

If in the urban regions with a diverse economy such as the city of Timișoara the emergence and development of SMEs in tourism represent but a very important income source and contribute to new job opportunities, in the rural regions the economic and social implications of these types of activities are much more obvious. Thus, among the effects of the promotion of tourism in rural areas and the emergence of some entrepreneurial activities, we mention the following:

- population’s stability in the areas affected by depopulation by intensifying employment (Rodica, Petrea and D. Petrea, 2000). In the communities far away from urban centers, the preservation of jobs through the development of touristic activities represents an important solution in the process of their demographic and economic recovery. In Timiș, the places affected by depopulation are situated in the North-East of the county: the ones starting from the Lipovei Hills (Bogda, Brestovăț, Secaș, Bara, Ohaba Lungă), as well as the ones near Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Margina, Tomești, Nădrag, Fărdea). These are all places with an outstanding natural and anthropic touristic potential, where the development of agro-tourism would represent an essential alternative to population stability and economic growth.

- employment opportunities, as long as, alongside the touristic activities, there are also other connected activities (commerce, transportation, leisure, etc.);

- expanding the use of employment, bearing in mind the fact that most of the employment force work in agriculture, a less interesting activity for the young population;

- promoting and supporting folk art and the local handicrafts industry which, apart from the incomes provided to the community, contribute to the preservation of these traditional activities;

- increasing the incomes and the life standard of rural population (modernizing the infrastructure and services, entering the informational circuit, etc.)

It is important that the entrepreneurial activities be initiated by local entrepreneurs so that the capital gathered stays within the respective community, thus contributing to the local economic growth and the diversity of activities through new ones (commercial activities for supplying the tourists who visit the area or other services).

In Timiș, the entrepreneurial initiatives in tourism are yet few when confronted with the touristic potential of the county. In what concerns the emergence of some private
accommodation venues for tourists, a development in this respect is noticed mainly in Timisoara (of the type belonging to big hotel chains), but also in the towns or places situated along the main communication route or in the areas with a high touristic potential where, in the recent years, numerous touristic and agro-touristic pensions have appeared (table 1).

Therefore, between 1998 and 2002, the number of hotels and motels increased from 22 in 1998 to 30 in 2002, most of them being situated in Timisoara; the new hotels, the majority of 3 or 4 stars, stand out in the urban landscape due to their modern architecture. Although new accommodation venues (from another category: villa) have also been built, their number has decreased in the recent years (from 29 to 11) due to the fact that this type of venues were closed in resorts such as Buziaș and Câlaca. In tourism recovers in these resorts, the existent villas can represent an opportunity for important investments.

Tab. 1 – Structures of tourists reception with functions of tourists accommodation between 1998-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and motels</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists chalets</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campings and houselet-type units</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists villas and bungalows</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists boarding houses</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agro-tourists boarding houses</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source : Direcția județeană de statistică Timiș)

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of agro touristic pensions in the East of the county, near the Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Margina, Pietroasa, Românești, Luncani, Tomești). Apart from the remarkable natural touristic potential, these places are situated in an important ethnographic area (Făget area) acknowledged for its customs, traditions, crafts (pottery, sheepskin manufacture) and special folk events. As they are small rural communities, the agro pensions comprise few accommodation places, the average being of 2-4 places in every household. In comparison to the existent touristic potential, agro tourism is still modestly developed, as a result of the people’s low incomes, the percentage of old population and the weak physical infrastructure.

A study of the number of tourists in the main accommodation venues in the year 2003 shows a high percentage of them placed in big accommodation locations (hotels and motels) (87,8%), a lower one in villas (1,5%), tourists chalets (0,7%), touristic and agro
touristic pensions (10%) (Chart 1). Moreover, the index of net using capacity in function is maintained at a low percentage: only 35.5% in 2004.

![Chart 1 – The percentage of arrivals in the main accommodation venues in Timiș County (2003)
Ponderea numărului de sosiri în principalele structuri de cazare din județul Timiș (2003)](chart1)

Maintaining a low percentage of this index could lead to a lack of interest from the part of the entrepreneurs to carry out activities in tourism. Therefore, it is necessary that the region be introduced into an international circuit and that convergences of interests at a local level are emerged in order to develop tourism.

The role that the touristic SMEs have within the economic dynamics of the Timiș County can be emphasized by analyzing some indices, such as: the number of employees in SMEs, the turnover and the value of investments in tourism. Out of the total of the existent SMEs at the level of the Timiș County, 6% have as main activity tourism, their contribution being insignificant to the local economic development.

Regarding the number of employees in the SME which are active in tourism (hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies), the percentage from the total number of employees is relatively low (3.8%), in comparison to other fields: commerce (20.6%), industry (39.9%), and transportation (5.1%). (Chart 2). On the other hand, considering that the development of tourism leads to the development of other connected activities (commerce, transportation, and other services), we can assert that the former indirectly contributes to the creation of new job opportunities.
Another performance indicator of touristic SMEs that outlines the importance of the entrepreneurial sector in the economic development of the county is the turnover. In 2002, the value of the turnover of all the enterprises in the county together was 2.8 billion Euros, achieved in proportion of 65.8% by SMEs. Analyzing the SMEs contribution, according to fields of activity, in achieving the turnover, we observe that tourism has a high value, more precisely 29.7 million Euros in 2004, from which 4.1 million Euros was obtained by travel agencies. At these values we can add the incomes obtained by a variety of SMEs in transportation, commerce and constructions, which emerged as a result of tourism development. Bearing in mind that tourism mainly comprises micro enterprises and small enterprises, it is accountable that the percentage (1.4%) of this field in achieving the turnover of the county SMEs is low, in comparison to other fields where the number of SMEs is larger and the added value of products is much higher (commerce – 42.2%, industry – 31.5%, transportation – 4%, etc.) (Chart 3)

Although the Timiș County is dynamic and well positioned regarding the possibilities of a quick development, the access to the funding sources is an essential element for the strong development of entrepreneurialism, considering the fact that, in order to be competitive, the SMEs have to invest in the research sector and in the constant training of human resources. Compared to the demands of developing the SMEs, the infrastructure that supports their activities is unevenly assigned in the county, thus existing great differences between the urban areas, where there are consultancy centers, banks and a series of facilities, and the rural ones. In the county, the total of gross investments of existent enterprises was 403.2 million Euros in 2002, out of which 53, 1% belonged to the SMEs, while the rest belonged to big enterprises. The greatest investments of SMEs were
achieved in the manufacture industry (44%) and commerce (12.5%), tourism being allotted only 4.5% from the total value of investments, more exactly 9.4 million Euros.

![Chart 3 – The structure of the SMEs turnover in Timiș County, according to fields of activity (2002)](chart.png)

One of the strategic objectives regarding the stimulation of SMEs emergence and development in tourism is promoting tourism, especially in rural regions, as well as legally and financially supporting the potential entrepreneurs. The development of rural tourism has to represent an alternative in the growth of the respective communities, but, at the same time, it has to preserve the cultural and spiritual identity of these communities. What is more, it is vital that there is collaboration between travel agencies and all the structures that provide touristic services, and, in addition to that, a promotion of all the regions where touristic activities are possible.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis made in the Timis County has proven the fact that, even though there is important touristic potential, the number of entrepreneurial activities in tourism is low. To encourage the emergence of new activities in this field, the following are required: the development of several local and regional strategies to promote tourism and various programs of financial and fiscal backing for entrepreneurs. Despite the fact that in the recent years agro tourism has developed, in order for it to have a visible impact on the economic development of the respective communities, it is important that the households involved be included in a greater economic circuit, which comprises other related activities, such as: commerce, handicrafts, transportation, etc.

In the context of joining the UE, the Romanian SMEs, regardless of the field of activity, have to increase their competitiveness to resist a determined and tough background, otherwise they run the risk of being annihilated.
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