

GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN MOUNTAIN AREAS (E.X. RA)

A.H. Potosyan, K.V.Shakhoyan

Yerevan State University

10, Alex Manoogyan str., Yerevan, 0025, Republic of Armenia;

aksel.potosyan@yandex.ru; shakhkar@rambler.ru

Received: 29.05.15; accepted: 03.08.15

Rural tourism as new type of tourism in RA and actually is very perspective sector of economics. One of the basic factors of fast development of rural tourism in Armenia is matching of its concepts to the new world tendencies of touristic demand that urge on the international market during recent years. Rich historical-cultural heritage and traditions, those mostly are preserved in rural territories, and possess to the rural population. Fast development of this sector of tourism, new for our country, can help to resolve many social-economic issues in marzes of Armenia, and particularly in the most problematic and vulnerable mountainous regions of the country that have substantial resources for development of rural tourism. For development of rural tourism in Armenia there is a necessity of coordinated activity of governmental, non-governmental and commercial organizations.

Rural tourism in the world, and especially in developed countries, is becoming one of the most promising areas of development in the industry and an important segment of the tourism market. Interest in rural tourism is sparked by the possibility to meet the recreational needs of the population living in urban settings and in areas with complicated environmental issues. Against the backdrop of the rising number of tourists in the world, increases the number of those wishing to relax in the countryside, which implies a change of scenery, the whole way of life and rest in a clean environment for the inhabitants of megacities. The growing popularity of rural tourism is explained by a powerful impact of environmental attitudes on modern society, changing public views on environmental issues, as well as the concepts of sustainable development and biodiversity. We can say that the increased interest of tourists towards rural areas is associated with a change in the conditions of existence of modern humans. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), rural tourism is one of the five main strategic directions of development of tourism until 2020.

One of the key factors in the rapid development of rural tourism in Armenia is its compliance with the concept of a new global trend of tourism demand, emerging on the world tourist market in recent years. Rich historical, cultural heritage and traditions are big contributors to this. Those are more preserved in rural areas by the residents

of villages. Also, the fact is that Armenia's cultural and historical monuments are mainly in the marzes (regions) and rural areas.

Armenia is very attractive for foreign tourists in terms of the specific features of life and ancient traditions (baking lavash, holiday Vardavar-Armenian festival in honor of the Transfiguration, holiday Barekendan-Armenian analogue of Carnival, the blessing of the first grapes harvest-analogue to the Feast, wedding ceremonies, the festival dedicated to wine-making, etc.). The demand and the increasing popularity of our traditions help to revive the forgotten ones, as well as to create the new.

As of now, a single universal concept of rural tourism in the world does not exist, as countries differ in their traditions, natural and environmental conditions, as well as goals and objectives. National model of rural tourism organizations in each country is unique by virtue of uniqueness of culture, history, geography and political system. In addition to a huge variety of country-specific concepts of rural tourism, there is even more diversity in specific agro-touristic products with their own characteristics and differences in different areas, even within the same country. Ethnic mentality has a central role in various models of rural tourism; hence, those cannot be borrowed from other countries. In this regard, one of the most important and priority measures is to establish the own national model. Development of the latter, taking into account regional, national and other specific features

and the active growth of this new tourism sector in Armenia, could help to solve many social and economic problems in the regions of the country, particularly in the most problematic and vulnerable mountain areas. The main objective of rural tourism is to prevent negative phenomena leading to degradation of villages. The most acute in the regions of the country, especially in the mountain regions, is the problem of unemployment, and as a consequence - the decline in living standards and migration of the population, not only to the big cities, but also outside Armenia.

Developing rural tourism in agrarian areas by establishing it as a new sector of the economy, promoting small and medium-sized businesses, creating new jobs in the service sector is largely able to solve social and economic problems of the Armenian villages and make a significant contribution to improving the welfare and quality of life of the rural population.

Natural conditions and resources are the most important and most accessible for recreational use of the area and are fundamental for the development of rural tourism in Armenia. Environmental conditions in the regions of the republic, especially in the mountain areas, are quiet healthy, which increases the value of this land as rest zones and becomes one of the positive factors in development of rural tourism. The large number of cultural and historical artifacts is in the countryside, among which are the ones recognized as World Heritage Sites (Tatev, Haghpat, Sanahin monasteries, churches Gayane, Hripsime, Echmiadzin Cathedral, located in different marzes of the republic, and others.), present a great interest and create preconditions for the development of this new direction of tourism in Armenia.

The possibility of using ethnographic peculiarities of the territory: familiarization with the traditions, crafts, folklore in a particular area, as well as participation in ethnographic and other celebrations to mark the most important events in the life of the population should be considered an important aspect of the tourism product. Not less important prerequisite for the development of rural tourism in the Republic of Armenia is a rich tradition of unique Armenian cuisine. This special part of the culture of the people, an attraction of its own, has preserved to this day centuries-old traditions of the Armenian people. According to a historian and author of numerous cooking books, V.V. Pohlebkina, it is one of the oldest in the world and the most ancient in the Caucasus.

Along with abovementioned natural environmental, historical and cultural resources, a prerequisite for the organization of rural tourism is housing suitable to host the tourists, which can become more attractive through improvement of the design and implementation of architectural solutions reflecting the ethnographic traditions of a particular locality. High potential of natural and

environmental resources and vast number of tourist sites of archaeological, religious, ethnographic and historical nature, as well as, spiritual culture and traditions of the Armenian people are the most important but not sufficient prerequisite for the development of rural tourism in the country. The government has a crucial role in supporting the rural tourism. It includes inter-state programs for the development of rural tourism, improving the system of roads, developing communication and other infrastructure facilities.

Rural tourism is a part of the agro-economy sector and can act as an important factor of socio-economic development of rural areas and rural infrastructure. The experience of countries successful in development of rural tourism shows that it has become an important component of the integrated development of rural areas, providing a largely local employment, creating income for the households and becoming means of diversification of the economic activity and sources of income of the rural population. Social aspect is one the most important when it comes to rural tourism. In addressing the socio-economic problems, rural tourism acts as a factor in policies to overcome rural poverty.

Almost all population groups in Armenia are interested in development of this, new type of tourism. Population of cities obtain an opportunity for healthy leisure by relatively cheap price and rural population can use their premises more effectively and what is also important sell part of farmed goods on place.

Effectiveness of this type of small and medium business in rural regions is evident, though creation of new touristic product it would help to resolve the problem of rural population joblessness one of the most actual problems in current point of time. Launched multiplier mechanism would be also help to resolve problems of urban population. Thus new connections between urban and rural territories would be established and gap between their social-economic development statuses would narrow.

Current status of economics of rural regions of RA lacks new forms of development of business that would allow resolving problems of villages that exists for recent decades. Small and medium business on tourists' accommodation is one of such forms since it requires availability of premises equipped according to certain criteria.

In terms of agro tourism projects development in Armenia it is planned to found small "Touristic villages" in Garni-Geghard surroundings, and in nearest future in Sjunik marz. For these villages building state contest is announced for small and medium business owners to bid.

In collaboration with Armenian foundation "Together" Armenian Association of Touristic households is founded and this has very important role in development of rural tourism. There are about 100 households, all over the country, that fits necessary requirements and are already

included in the business. They get help to establish connections with tourists from abroad and especially help with language issues which is crucial thing currently. Foundation supports several programs development and strengthening of association. Program of foreign languages learning for local population is set as first priority. Absence of language barrier would allow direct communication with tourists in future. For support of such perspective type of tourism foundation plans publishing of ecomagazines and promotional brochures that information about touristic households, beneficiary micro crediting for guesthouse owners creation of relevant web sites. Currently many of touristic households are located in Dilijan, Ijevan, Goris and Gumri cities and also in Lori marz. After implementation of planned programs the Association of touristic households can become a separate organization that is able to plan and implement programs for further development. Good example of development of the new type of tourism in Armenia is relationship between two “brother” cities French city Roman where 250 Armenian families live and Armenian city Vardenis that is located on picturesque shore of high-mountain Lake Sevan. Programs of collaboration are developing in five directions but it came out that French side is interested in rural tourism the most. In terms of the program French language learning center was launched in Vardenis to ease immediate contact of local population with French tourists. Also with in Vardenis-Roman collaboration small farm was founded, currently it produces and sells dairy products in Armenia and in nearest future export to France and USA is planned. Agro tourism experts from France conducted seminars on business running for local population. The example of rural tourism development in Vardenis demonstrates capability of creation and strengthening economic and cultural links of Armenia with other countries.

For recent years several projects were implemented for development of sustainable tourism in mountainous regions of South Caucasus. NGOs of three south Caucasian countries implemented “Development of eco-agro tourism in South Caucasus” project. Project partners are: Armenian Eco touristic Association, Georgian Association of Agro tourism, “Pilgrim” NGO Azerbaijan. Financial support is done by Eurasia foundation. Following activities were performed by foundation itself as well as consulting and technical support was provided to relevant private organizations: investigation of agro touristic potential, creation of common advertising platform and marketing of agro touristic product of South Caucasus (common website and promotional magazine), development and promotion on internal and external market of joint eco-agro touristic routes.

Government of Armenia approved the “Tourism

Development in Regions of Armenia” program that was presented by tourism development department of ministry of economics. The program intends definition of places that has special touristic value in terms of nature and culture and relevant communities. This data should be base for touristic zoning and creation up to 40-45 touristic centers in different regions of the country. Those centers would develop our is tic infrastructure, prepare educational, interpretive, promotional materials and maps, as well as conduct training for personnel.

In 2014 “Innovational promotion of rural tourism” program was officially presented in Yerevan, program is financed by Eurounion. The goal of the program is support for development of unified initiative of tourism and particularly rural tourism in term of regional collaboration in four countries, members of the Black Sea Economic Collaboration: Armenia, Georgia, Turkey and Bulgaria. During the presentation program was announced as a new approach for promotion of rural tourism development on regional level. Consolidation of interregional collaboration, new partnerships, integrated use of touristic resources, experience exchange and, as a result increase of quality of provided services and creation of highly competitive touristic product are expected results of implementation of the program. Program is planned to be implemented gradually. First priority is work with service providers, training on marketing, business planning and management. Than, it is expected to attract some of effectively functioning touristic agencies to collaborate with service providers for development of united tour product and further promote it on touristic market. There is also intended work with educational institutions of participant countries; this would assure more effective collaboration in future. Educating of qualified staff in area of rural tourism in terms of the program would allow providing services on new higher level. In participant countries it is planned to create network of touristic agencies for joint development of unique touristic product “Single touristic package for region visitors” this would attract flow of tourists to region and thus have important role for economics of mentioned countries, also it would be important input for inter country relations in terms of rural tourism. The goal of touristic product creation is a regional level long term result, economic and social development of Armenia.

The following conclusions were made about geographic aspects of rural tourism development in Armenia as a mountainous country:

Urbanization that leads inhabitants of big cities to rural regions, closer to nature is the main prerequisite of rural tourism development in Republic of Armenia as in other mountainous regions.

Armenia and particularly mountainous regions poses huge

potential for development of rural tourism and agro tourism as its component

Rural tourism promotes diversification of economic activities and incomes of rural population, particularly in more vulnerable mountainous regions of Armenia.

Development of rural tourism improves social level and standard of living for population of mountainous and border regions of Armenia.

Development of agro tourism allows promoting targeted regional policy in the country.

Despite the use of huge experience of countries that pioneer in rural tourism and investigation of all prerequisites and

factors necessary for development of this new branch of tourism in Armenia, development of local complex model for restoring and development of potential that rural territories of Armenia have is the main issue. Besides natural resources creation of such model should take into account the main treasures of Armenian nation - initiative, readiness to work hard and hospitality.

Authenticity of geographical environment becomes more and more valuable. People sated with comfort and civilization and discovered their disadvantages seek back to their roots to nature.

ГЕОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ СЕЛЬСКОГО ТУРИЗМА В ГОРНЫХ СТРАНАХ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ РА)

А.Х. Потосян, К.В. Шахоян

Сельский туризм как новое направление туризма в РА является перспективным сектором экономики. Одним из основных факторов быстрого развития сельского туризма в Армении является соответствие его концепции новым общемировым тенденциям туристского спроса, наметившихся на мировом туристском рынке в последние годы. Этому способствует богатое историко-культурное наследие и традиции, которые в большей мере сохранились в сельской местности, и носителями которых в основном являются жители сел. Активное развитие этого нового для страны сектора туризма могли бы помочь в решении многих социально-экономических задач в марзах Армении, особенно в наиболее проблемных и уязвимых горных районах страны, которые обладают значительными ресурсами для развития сельского туризма. Необходима согласованная деятельность правительственных, коммерческих и общественных организаций в развитии этого нового для РА сектора туризма.