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MARKETING APPROACH AIMED AT VALORIZING RURAL AREA

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Abstract. The development of marketing programs for the rural area, the creation of the organizational structures for their realization, the elaboration of the methodology to apply rural marketing and identify marketing tools would favor the development of rural localities. Thus, the concept of rural marketing offers the theoretical and methodological support to carry out these activities, which will therefore contribute to attract investment, human, financial resources in rural localities. The influence of rural marketing on the external environment (economic, social, cultural, environment) puts its mark on the general level of economic development of rural localities and favors local sustainable development. The knowledge of external environment factors, action mode and their evolution is useful in the elaboration of rural locality development strategy. The marketing approach forms a modern thinking way of local public authorities at the level of rural localities, a new philosophy of the entrepreneurial activity, including the investment one, based on the tendency to satisfy the needs of all the actors from the rural area. A permanent, planned and long-term concern regarding the marketing approach to manage rural localities will contribute to create and strengthen the image, increase the competitiveness and investment attractiveness of the rural localities, develop and implement the strategic plan for the development of the locality, as well as increase the interest towards the investors regarding the concentrated resources in the rural locality. The achievement of objectives set implies a set of practical actions, which allow to adapt to the demands and requirements of the market, in order to maximize the efficiency of the available resources. The marketing approach to valorize the rural area will favor the knowledge of rural communities market situation, the adaptation of the production manufactured in the rural territory to the market requirements, the formation of a favorable investment climate, the promotion of available resources use with maximum benefit and taking into account the interests of the population.

Key words: *rural marketing, strategic directions, price policy, marketing mix, sustainable development.*

Rezumat. Dezvoltarea programelor de marketing pentru zona rurală, crearea structurilor organizaționale pentru realizarea lor, elaborarea metodologiei de aplicare și identificarea instrumentelor de marketing ar favoriza dezvoltarea localităților rurale. Astfel, conceptul de marketing rural oferă sprijinul teoretic și metodologic pentru desfășurarea acestor activități,

cea ce va contribui la atragerea de investiții, resurse umane și financiare în localitățile rurale. Influența marketingului rural asupra mediului extern (economic, social, cultural, de mediu) își pune amprenta asupra nivelului general de dezvoltare economică a localităților rurale și favorizează dezvoltarea durabilă locală. Cunoașterea factorilor mediului extern, a modului de acțiune și a evoluției acestora este utilă în elaborarea strategiei de dezvoltare a localității rurale. Abordarea de marketing constituie un mod modern de a gândi pentru autoritățile publice rurale, o nouă filozofie a activității antreprenoriale, inclusiv cea de investiții, bazată pe tendința de a satisface nevoile tuturor actorilor din mediul rural. O preocupare permanentă, planificată și pe termen lung în ceea ce privește abordarea de marketing în gestionarea localităților rurale va contribui la crearea și consolidarea imaginii, la creșterea competitivității și a atractivității pentru investiții în localitățile rurale, la elaborarea și implementarea planului strategic pentru dezvoltarea localității, precum și creșterea interesului investitorilor față de resursele concentrate din localitatea rurală. Atingerea obiectivelor stabilite implică un set de acțiuni practice, care permit adaptarea la cerințele pieței, pentru a maximiza eficiența resurselor disponibile. Abordarea de marketing pentru valorificarea zonei rurale va favoriza cunoașterea de către comunitățile rurale a situației de piață, adaptarea producției fabricate pe teritoriul rural la cerințele pieței, formarea unui climat investițional favorabil, promovarea utilizării resurselor disponibile cu beneficiu maxim și ținând cont de interesele populației.

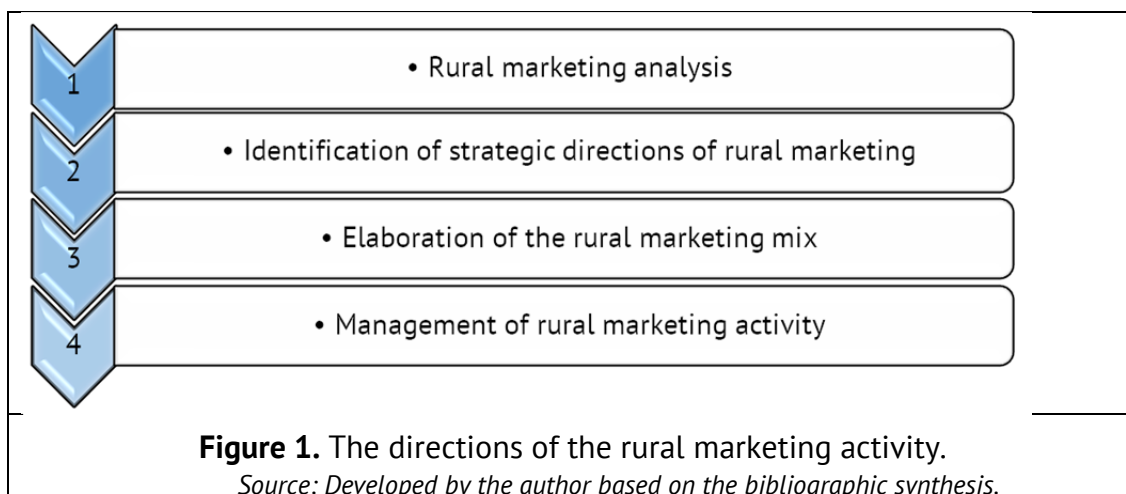
Cuvinte cheie: *marketing rural, direcții strategice, politică de prețuri, mix de marketing, dezvoltare durabilă*

Introduction

Territorial marketing is a strategy that aims to develop a certain region. It integrates activities to develop resources and values specific to an area, as well as to promote them abroad. The main results attract investments (not only in tourism or other commercial activities, but also in cultural and social fields), develop an attractive image, as well as increase internal cohesion and economic functionality [1].

Rural marketing involves the process of developing, pricing, promoting, distributing rural specific product and a service leading to exchange between rural and urban market which satisfies consumer demand and also achieves organizational objectives [2]. Rural marketing is a compilation of the developed product, reasonable price, appropriate placing and right awareness. The marketing rule states that, the right product, at the right price, at the right place, at the right time should reach the right customer. This same rule stands good for rural marketing also [3]. Rural marketing presents itself as an economic, social and administrative process, necessary to sustain or change the attitude of market actors at the level of the concrete locality, directed towards satisfying the needs and necessities of the individual, a group of consumers and / or social communities, by using, realizing and reproducing efficient resources of the territory [4]. Rural marketing being a serious affair for any brand, marketer; needs a long term strategic planning keeping all the business objectives on the table including well thought-out execution plan with integrated approach. Rural planning can not be a copy-paste approach of urban planning and needs dedicated and concerted exclusive rural mindset plan without any dilution of urban ecosystem [5]. Among the main objectives of rural marketing, in the context of the development of rural localities, the following are highlighted: increasing the level of welfare and employment of the population in rural areas [6, p. 163]; improving the dynamics of investment activity; the

emergence of new industrial sectors and the reorganization of existing enterprises; business and communications infrastructure development; development of social, educational and health institutions. The marketing approach in order to achieve these objectives requires the involvement of both local and public administration, as well as national and foreign investors. The directions of the territorial marketing activity, argued by the prism of the marketing theory and practice, successfully applicable in rural localities are presented in figure 1.



I. Rural marketing research

Marketing as a concept involves market analysis, understanding customers and competition, developing marketing objectives and strategy, conducting market and marketing research, creating strategies for product-line extensions, and ensuring financial support and return on product investments [7]. To talk about territorial marketing involves the idea of considering that there is a market, in which, on the one hand it represents supply, the sites of implantation, events and / or urban and territorial projects that must be made attractive in relation to a represented demand, represented itself by a target audience: the resident population, tourists, enterprises, investors or even public entities [1]. The research, analysis and forecasting activity of the local market includes the study of the external marketing environment. Among the main directions of marketing research in the rural localities there have been highlighted: studying the potential of markets; portfolio analysis of the product policy of the locality; studying the needs and necessities of the resident population; the study of the local price policy; studying the strengths of rural localities with a high level of investment attractiveness (benchmarking); studying the internal marketing environment of the rural locality.

As a result of marketing research, according to the mentioned research directions, it is possible to estimate the investment attractiveness of the rural locality, including, the production and financial potential, the ability to organize the investment processes, the professionalism of the local public administration to attract investments in the territory.

It is also possible to identify the threats and opportunities to carry out investment activity, as well as strengths and weaknesses of the rural locality.

In this order of ideas, it is considered appropriate to support the local public administration to carry out rural marketing research, an activity possible to be carried out with its own forces by creating a marketing department within the rural mayoralty or through marketing consulting firms.

II. Identification of strategic directions of rural marketing

An important function of the rural marketing activity consists in the elaboration of the rural development strategies, oriented towards the creation of favorable conditions to achieve the objectives. It should be noted that, in addition to the general development objectives of rural localities, it is recommended to set marketing objectives, such as the penetration of new markets, attract additional investments, increase the share on the external markets of products manufactured by local businesses. The design and implementation of territorial marketing strategies involves a complex set of initiatives, which involves a large number of public and private actors, assembled in a network -type system, which gradually coagulates. The general framework may vary from region to region, taking into account certain local variables, such as level of development, types and characteristics of actors, involvement of local communities, political and cultural contexts, etc. All these aspects must be taken into account when planning a territorial marketing strategy. The tools integrated into the territorial marketing strategy may also differ. The proposed strategies are operationalized through a variety of tools, such as strategic plans, territorial marketing plans, urbanization, environment and tourism projects [1].

The strategic directions of development of rural localities, according to the marketing concept, are recommended to be established from the perspective:

- market segmentation of rural localities and positioning strategies;
- results recorded by the rural localities with a favorable investment climate;
- choose the strategy to increase or maintain the dimensions of rural development;
- identify the most profitable areas of activity.

The elaboration and implementation of strategies for rural locality development through marketing approach will help to obtain the competitive advantages and the increase of investment attractiveness, possibly wished to be achieved by:

- ✓ occupy the leading position in the design and modernization of products manufactured by local businesses;
- ✓ occupy the position of leader in the effective application of marketing tools, both at the enterprise level and at the locality level as a whole;
- ✓ expand the markets for products manufactured in the rural locality;
- ✓ strengthen the image of the rural locality in order to attract investments.

III. Elaboration of the rural marketing mix

Marketing involves designing and implementing processes and strategies related to finding what the public (consumers) wants, and then providing what they want. It mainly involves four essential elements, known as marketing mix or 4P model: product, placement (distribution), price and promotion. In the case of territorial marketing, the 4P model is not always valid as such. The components of the marketing mix may vary, taking into account the context in which the strategy is developed, the organization that develops and implements the strategy and the relationships with the "subject" of the strategy, the possibilities to effectively create and distribute the "offer" and others. However, whatever the accepted marketing mix, the purpose of the territorial marketing strategy remains: optimal consumer satisfaction (in this case being local communities and organizations) [8]. The practical implementation of the strategic guidelines is possible through the elaboration of the rural marketing mix, which includes: product policy, price policy, placement policy, promotion policy and people policy.

Product policy

The main characteristics of locality as a product are the resources of the territory, very important for its consumers, namely, the geographical location, population, infrastructure, the possibility of applying advanced technologies, raw materials, labor force; quality of life (cultural, educational, sport activities, etc.); the business climate expressed by the existing conditions for the support of small and medium business, the investment policy supported by the Local Public Administration of the locality, etc. The assortment and quality of the product mix is determined according to the requirements and needs of local and external consumers (including potential ones) of the local resources. A complex territorial marketing strategy takes into account all the development opportunities, exploiting them in different markets. For example, natural resources can be exploited industrially, commercially or in a recreational context, as well as socio-culturally. Local traditions can be exploited both in a tourist context and in a socio-cultural one. Heritage properties can be considered as attracting investments for both companies and non-profit organizations, taking into account not only the commercial but also the socio-cultural use [8]. As part of the product policy, the project policy can also be mentioned. In the context of the research, the projects are of interest as in order to successfully achieve them, investments are needed, which will be attracted both from the state budget and from foreign investors. As a product of the rural locality, cultural projects (construction or repair of cultural houses, libraries, museums, recreation areas), social projects (construction or repair of schools, kindergartens, institutions for disabled children, asylums for the elderly, hospitals, sports fields), investment projects (development of rural tourism, investments in the extension of vineyards, infrastructure development, creation or development of processing enterprises, etc.), can be presented.

Price policy

The price in rural marketing represents the expenses borne by the consumers of the local resources and is accepted differently by each of the categories of consumers. Thus, for the resident citizens, the price is primarily the cost of living as a general indicator, the level of wages, pensions, facilities, the value of using the land for housing construction, as well as the price of commercialized goods and services provided. For non-resident citizens - from the cost of vacation voucher, transport, accommodation, daily allowance, pocket expenses, cultural activities, leisure, etc.). For legal entities, the price includes expenses related to transportation, food, accommodation, time and effort of the experts involved in collecting information about the locality, the veracity and accessibility of the information obtained, as well as the costs determined by the location of the new economic activities (taxation, aid for investments, expenses regarding project development, land preparation and construction itself, etc.).

Politics of promotion

The elaboration and implementation of the promotional policy, as an element of the rural marketing mix, plays an important role in the management of the rural localities. The promotional communication policy of rural localities includes: organizing promotional campaigns, public relations activities, „training and strengthening the favorable image of the locality” [9, p. 150]. Marketing means more than advertising or trying to build a positive image. Promotional activities have expanded and improved over time and have become highly appreciated. Their main purpose is to encourage localization by providing an

attractive image to potential users. The fame and good reputation of the locality is also reflected on the local entrepreneurs and the population. However, success will be short-lived if the promoted image does not conform to reality [10]. It is worth mentioning that, the image of the locality is an indispensable component of its competitiveness and investment attractiveness. Unfortunately, nowadays, there are multiple gaps in the field and rarely are they included in the general strategy of developing of the rural locality and objectives related to strengthening the image of the locality. It is recommended to elaborate an image of the place, as we want to see it in 5-10 years. Precise, harmonized measures must be taken. If we want to develop rural tourism, then we will first need roads and facilities. If we want to attract investors then we must develop the infrastructure [11].

Creating the image of the rural locality is a complex and multilateral process and includes the following basic components:

1. Establish the principles and strategies for developing the rural locality, attractive to investors.
2. Create the image of the rural locality abroad, i.e. the way the locality is perceived by society, media, foreign investors, etc.
3. Form the image of the rural locality inside: the cultural values of village inhabitants, the state of mind, attractiveness of locality.

The creation of the locality positive image is based on the formulation of the fundamental principles of rural development, the strategic directions of development and the clear determination of the objectives.

Placement policy

An important component of the rural marketing mix is the elaboration of the policy for the placement of the rural locality, which involves carrying out activities related to the selection of markets for the sale of local businesses products, (network of agents, commercial networks, etc.), training of personnel involved in the commercialization of these products, by offering the resources of the locality to the interested consumers (attracting investments by sector of activity). The activities in this category involve the "delivery" of the products and services in an efficient and accessible way to the current and potential beneficiaries. Unlike the case of the marketing of a certain product, in which case the distribution involves the transport of the product to the beneficiary, in the case of the marketing of the places the "distribution" means to transport the beneficiaries to the place in question or to make a connection between the beneficiaries and the offerers of products and services of that place, in the most appropriate / efficient way. In this sense, accessibility plays a very important role, this being determined by the transport infrastructure of the place. At the same time, the connection between the beneficiaries and the suppliers of products and services of the place is favored by the development of a modern and functional telecommunications and Internet infrastructure or by organizing or participating in fairs and exhibitions of profile (tourist, business, studies, etc.) [12]. In order to successfully implement the placement policy, it is recommended to establish the relations between the representatives of the rural localities and the investors and / or the consumers. The way the information about the locality is communicated influences the investor's decision to participate in the implementation and / or development of the projects proposed by the local representatives. It is recommended to create a favourable information environment for making investment decisions. The information regarding

the opportunities existing in the locality (social, cultural, investment projects) must be provided directly, convincingly and professionally to the people who make the direct investment decisions. Establishing mutually beneficial relationships helps to strengthen investor and / or consumer confidence, and increase the investment attractiveness of the locality.

The politics of the people

The fifth element of the rural marketing mix represents a development perspective of the rural localities. The population is regarded as an important resource of the locality, which can be used within the competition with other communities . In order to increase the competitive advantage, the communities would be better to contribute to the education and professional training of the population, the investments in this direction being distributed over time. The skilled and motivated work force contributes to the creation of opportunities for attracting investors to the territory, and as a result the increase of the employment rate of the population from the rural areas , the reduction of the phenomenon of village-city migration. Among the objectives of the persons policy can be mentioned: the professional training of the locals; ensuring the access of the population to education services; the inclusion of children in the educational process; supporting the health and teaching staff who want to settle in the rural area; campaigns to inform and promote business opportunities in rural areas; material and non-material remuneration of the population involved in the development of the locality, etc.

IV. Management of rural marketing activity

The fourth direction of marketing activity is management marketing activity areas, which includes the following activities:

- strategic planning, and namely the choice of strategic directions for the marketing activity to increase the investment attractiveness of the rural locality;
- organization, including coordination, management of the marketing in order to attract investments and their efficient use;
- motivation of the people involved in the process of attracting investments in the locality in order to achieve the established development objectives;
- execution control of the rural marketing activity, which includes the control of the resources, the monitoring of the daily activities, the monitoring of the planned activities.

Thus, rural marketing management represents the process of analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring of programs aimed at creating, maintaining and improving favorable relations with internal and external investors in order to achieve the development objectives of rural localities. In order to solve concrete situations in the development of investment activity in rural localities, it is necessary to know the principles of rural marketing, which depending on the marketing goals and objectives can be grouped into three categories. The first category includes principles related to the formulation of rural development objectives and aims to improve the life quality of population from rural localities. This category includes the following principles: orienting the managerial activity of the local public administration, including the management of the investment processes towards meeting the needs of the population of the rural locality; training and knowledge of consumers' preferences in evaluating and planning investment projects; studying the local and foreign market to identify the competitive advantages of the rural locality; ensuring the conditions for the development of investment processes in the

locality, etc. The second category includes the principles of organizing, coordinating and regulating the investment activity in rural localities, namely: the principle of organizational design and regulation; the principle of delegation of powers; the principle of professional management of the locality; the principle of timely orientation of the investment activity, etc.

The third group includes the principles regarding the analysis and design of the investment activity based on the concept of rural marketing: creating the competitive advantages of rural locality in order to attract investors; regulating the institutional behavior to increase the investment attractiveness of rural locality; reduce the investment risk; sufficient information of local and foreign investors, etc.

Conclusions

The marketing approach aimed at capitalizing the rural area, allows to reach the objectives set by the local public administration of rural locality in optimal conditions and contributes to the formation of clear rules for all the departments of local public administration, as the marketing techniques contribute to the increase of the efficiency of the management and development of the rural localities. In the context of the presented ones, it is recommended to the local public administration to use the principles of marketing, as a technology to ensure the competitive advantages of the rural localities. The use of marketing principles and tools allows to achieve the objectives set by the local public administration of the rural locality and contributes to the creation of competitive advantages, to increase the investment attractiveness and the efficiency of the management and development of the rural localities.

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