

## NEW CHALLENGES FOR RURAL TOURISM. SPECIALIZATION OF AGRITOURISM GUEST HOUSES

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### Abstract

*As an alternative of Romania's sustainable development, rural tourism is considered to be an assembly of product-price- consumption, which awards the country multiple opportunities for integration into European structures. Taking into consideration the Government Decision no. 20/2012 on the approval of multi-annual programmer for destinations, forms and tourism products development, the 3rd article, the 1st line, e item "actions regarding a specialized ranking of reception structures with accommodation in the hydropathical (spa) and rural tourism in Romania", as well as the measures covered in the Strategic and Operational Marketing Plan for Romania during 2011-2015, the National Authority for Tourism together with the National Organization for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism, The Partnership Federation in Romanian Tourism and the Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development at the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Bucharest launch the pilot project: "A thematic specialization of tourism and agritourism guest houses in Romania".*

**Key words:** agritourism, innovation, management, strategy, sustainable development

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the economic sectors that have experienced the most rapid expansion in recent decades.

The economic benefits of the tourism industry are manifold.

The tourism industry generates a significant number of jobs and investment in this area has a relatively short amortization period.

Local economy as a whole benefits as a result of tourism development (Cretu, 2012). [3]

Tourists create additional demand for consumer goods and services, stimulating the tertiary sector (services, trade, craft industries, etc.).

Meanwhile, rural tourism infrastructure tends to have more developed urban infrastructure and services.

Transport and real estate are two major branches that have earned through tourism development.

Should be considered, indirect benefits obtained by increasing the visibility and interest in those regions of Romania which records a large influx of tourists.

If you currently share of tourism in GDP is low at both national and regional level (about 2-3%), medium term this can easily double, even without expansion of tourist reception by adopting projects innovative and sustainable.

In this paper, the main purpose was to propose several criteria useful to identify sustainable and specialized agro guesthouses.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Because of the tourism potential of Romania, in 2007 it was developed a master plan for this area for the period 2007-2026, which is a necessary tool in the long-term development of tourism, providing a framework for policy support at the national level to develop a sustainable management in the tourism industry. [7]

According to the Statistical Yearbook 2012 of Romania, National Institute of Statistics, the main tourism industry is presented in table 1. [5]

In Romania, the first two positions are occupied by South-East and Central, where tourism attractions are well represented.

Table 1. The main indicators of the tourism industry in Romania, by region (31 July 2011)

Indicators/		Regions							
		North-West	Centre	North-East	South-East	South-Muntenia	Bucharest-Ilfov	South-West Oltenia	West
1.	Tourist reception – no.	650	1,197	604	974	533	155	377	513
2.	Tourist accommodation capacity - seats	28,459	45,388	21,927	95,587	24,111	21,086	18,274	23,671
3.	Existing accommodation capacity - thousand places - days	8,830.6	12,867.4	6,423.5	14,336.2	7,199.8	7,644.1	4,761.2	6,354.5
4.	Arrivals of tourists - thousands	799,8	1435,8	696,2	1134,8	615,9	1282,6	426,8	639,7
5.	Number of overnights - thousands	2,084.6	3,311.6	1,556.4	4,050.3	1,677.9	2,129.6	1,486.2	1,682.8

Source: INS – (2012), pp. 230-235[5]

With a very generous nature and cultural heritage of great value, Romania has a high tourism potential and diversified.

Without attempting a clear separation between the forms of tourism in Romania, we consider useful a differentiated analysis of them [Antonoaie, 2002]. [1]

Most research studies concluded that the forms of tourism with the highest growth potential in Romania are: mountain tourism, health tourism, cultural tourism and rural tourism.

Net use index of accommodation capacity decreased from nearly 55% in 1990 to about 23% in 2010, which means that, in average, it remains unfilled accommodation capacity for nine months a year.

In this case, it is needed the adoption of several measures to attract domestic and foreign tourists in the tourism accommodation unit for increasing the accommodation rate, job offer and employment as well. [6]

Given the potential of the Romanian agritourism, it was proposed a marketing tool to promote hostels and attract tourists [CEDES 2009], [2]

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. The Pilot project objectives

The Pilot Project “A thematic specialization of tourism and agritourism guest houses in Romania” requires the volunteer participation of tourism economic agents and it does not replace the present classification by degree of comfort in reception structures with accommodation, being complementary to it.

The project’s goal lies in public recognition, encouragement and economic agents stimulation which make efforts and obtain important results to develop their own competitively through quality [Eurostat 2010]. [4]

The goals of the pilot project “A thematic specialization of tourism and agritourism guest houses in Romania, are the following ones:

- A customization of the tourism offer highlighting the quality, variety and uniqueness of products related to the rural tourism;

- The improvement of tourism economic agents competitively by an increase of

products and services quality;

-An increase of the awareness on offer's diversity and quality in Romanian rural tourism, by promoting a good example of quality.

**2. The project target group**

Eligible applicants may be: economic agents who have tourism and agritourism guest houses authorized by the current law.

The proposals of thematic specialization categories for tourism and agritourism guest houses in Romania as well as the criteria are presented in the Appendix 1, which were subject to public debates by the National Authority for Tourism during June the 10<sup>th</sup> and July 30, 2013.

Any comments or suggestions for improving the criteria will be taken into consideration, analyzed and utilized for improving the project procedures and solutions.

The benefits for taking part at the project are:

-The accomplishment of a bilingual material (brochure and CD) to present specialized guest houses;

-The promotion of specialized guest houses on the Ministry web page;

-Granting a diploma where in one may write "Tourism guest house recommended by the National Authority for Tourism that is specialized"

**3. Product touristic and agrotouristic innovation**

Marketing research was conducted by applying questionnaires among owners of hostels in Romania and tourists.

As a result of research, there were emerged different types of pensions which are presented in Fig.1.

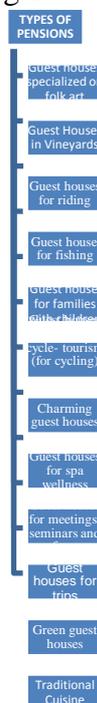


Fig. 1. Types of pensions (personal contribution)

The types of pensions by classification criteria are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of pensions and criteria for the classification

Nr. crt.	Types of pensions	Criteria for the classification
1.	Guest houses specialized on folk art	The structure should be classified; The structure has a specialized workshop, where one may practice/ evidence the folk art (by example: popular painting craft; clay craft; wood carving craft; folk craft); At the tourists demand, the guest house owner may hold work sessions to show the craft process of product; It is recommended that the owner to hold and present information about craftsmen in the area; The structure has an available parking; The structure has a special area for the display of products related to folk art; The road to guest house should be signposted;
2.	Guest Houses in Vineyards	The structure should be classified; The structure should be situated in a winegrowing area; The vineyard environment is reflected into the internal and external design of the structure; Free informational materials to discover details about wine and grape varieties are available to guests; The structure is equipped with dedicated spaces to keep and taste own wine varieties; At guests request, the owner should arrange visits to the cellars where the wines are kept, at some mansions ore castles in the area; the owner should also organize tasting sessions, trips to vineyards, especially during the harvest season and so on; The internal design should be appropriate to the area and it is recommended to use in decorating the rooms, products and materials related to rural live (rustic wooden tables, chairs and so on); The road to guest house should be signposted.
3.	Guest houses for riding	The structure should be classified; The internal design should be appropriate to the area and it is recommended to use in decorating the rooms, products and materials related to rural live (rustic wooden tables, chairs and so on); The guest house should have horses, stables, horse feed, specific tools for taking care of the horses and riding equipments, or it should be placed at a distance of about 5 km of a herd of horses; At the guest house should be at least a person trade in riding and can provide information to clients ; At guests request, the owner should assure the clients lessons for teaching and training the riding; The road to guest house should be signposted.
4.	Guest houses for fishing	The structure should be classified; The structure should be placed in areas where one may practice fishing (near the rivers and lakes). They have spaces for keeping boats, fishing tools, spaces for fish processing and storage; The internal design should be appropriate to the area and it is recommended to use in decorating the rooms, products and materials related to rural live; The structure has available parking; It is recommended the guest house to have specialized magazines for tourists; The road to guest house should be signposted.

5.	Guest houses for families with children	The structure should be classified; The guest house should have a playground; The menu must be suitable for children needs The furniture should be proper for developing some indoor games for children, but also other activities such as painting or colouring; In the guest house there should be high chairs for children, a surrounded playground with at least four elements, T.V and so on ; The road to guest house should be signposted.
6.	Guest houses specialized in cycle- tourism (for cycling)	The structure should be classified; The guest house is recommended to provide the possibility to rent bicycles, free of charge or surcharge; The structure should offer the clients a parking for bicycle, bike repair services, information about routes and cycle lanes and so on; The guest house offers maps, informative materials and information about tourism routes; The road to guest house should be signposted.
7.	Charming guest houses	The structure should be classified; The design is innovative, harmonious, spectacular in using forms, materials, colours, light and space without functions neglect; Gardens are designed in a particular way, using attractive furniture The road to guest house should be signposted.
8.	Guest houses for spa wellness	The structure should be classified; The guest house should have certain facilities including sauna, herbal baths, massage, swimming pool or it should be placed on a distance of about 5 km away of a treatment or wellness base ; Into the accommodation rates are also included pool and sauna access; At the guest house there is at least a person trained in wellness and available for answering the clients questions about health; The menus are very well balanced and there is at least a vegetarian one; Into the rooms should be displayed information about health and wellness philosophy; There are at least 50% of rooms for non- smoking people; The road to guest house should be signposted.
9.	Guest houses for meetings, seminars and conferences	The structure should be classified; The structure should have a conference hall with a minimum of 25 seats; In the conference hall should be tables, chairs, computers, a flipchart, a screen for video projection, free internet access; The structure should have access to public transportation; The structure should have a space that can be used as office work and be properly equipped with fax, internet access; The road to guest house should be signposted.
10.	Guest houses for trips	The structure should be classified; The structure is situated in regions where one may go into trips; Trails are well marked around the structure; Tourists will find information about cabins, huts, weather, public transport and so on ; The structure provides clients the opportunity to serve a healthy breakfast, and those who leave early in the morning, coffee at thermos and possibly a package; The road to guest house should be signposted.
11.	Green guest houses	The structure should be classified; The structure should be placed into a distinct, natural, quiet and private; The structure should have a yard, with a well-designed garden; The structure should use alternative energy sources; The structure has own plant and animals production; The road to guest house should be signposted.
12.	Traditional Cuisine	The structure should be classified; At the guest house are offered local and traditional menus and drinks; The house speciality, the ingredients it contains and its history are presented into the guest house promotion brochure; Regarding the tourists' demand, the guest house owner should organize activities for harvesting medicinal plants, forest fruits or mushrooms; Regarding the tourists' demand the guest house owner should organize a picnic at the edge of the forests; The guest house menu must provide clients at least five categories of specialities; The guest house should provide new and old cookery books, receipts or literature; The road to guest house should be signposted.

Source: Personal contributions

## CONCLUSIONS

For Romania, tourism is one of the branches of the economy, which together with agriculture could contribute to increase of GDP per capita.

For this purpose, there are needed innovative and sustainable strategies in these sectors [Cretu R, 2012].

The pilot project presented in this paper is an innovative and durable solution, its role is to identify the types of touristic and agroturistic guesthouses which meet in a much larger market, based on consumer demand for tourism products and bidders.

In this paper, there were identified several criteria for sustainable and innovative agro guesthouses and specialized subject areas, depending on supply and demand.

The Pilot Project "A thematic specialization of tourism and agritourism guest houses in Romania" requires the volunteer participation of tourism economic agents and it does not replace the present classification by degree of

comfort in reception structures with accommodation, being complementary to it.

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