

THE ANALYSIS OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES INVOLVED IN THE RURAL TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

Rural tourism is one of the most important types of tourism in Romania and have the highest growing potential. For those who live in the rural areas, developing the tourism means improving their social, cultural and economical situation. This research aimed to analyse the evolution of human resources that are involved in the rural tourism activities. The main purpose was to identify and review the main trends and challenges related to human resources involved in rural tourism and agro-tourism. The main source of statistical information used is the INSSE databases related to occupied population in general and rural areas, total employees in hospitality services in rural areas, total tourists accommodation establishments in rural areas and their capacity. The research methods used in this research are documented study, empirical analysis and logical synthesis of information. The last couple of years were the proof that the exploitation of cultural and natural habitats is the best solution to boost the economy, to create new jobs and to help promote Romania abroad, all at the same time. Rural tourism is an alternative to the well known traditional tourism. By spending time in the rural area, people can engage in different sorts of activities such as: hunting, fishing, walking, bird watching and many other enjoyable activities. The main findings revealed an increase of all the statistics indicators that are related to agro-tourism pensions and the human resources involved in the rural tourism. The total number of agro-tourism guesthouses increased by 39% and the number of accommodation places almost doubled. Also, the quality standards of agro-tourism pensions increased significantly. This growth has generated a 65.8% increase of the number of employees involved in hospitality field in rural areas.

Key words: agro-tourism, development strategy, employment, human resources, rural tourism, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

In Romania, the rural tourism is one of the most important type of tourism and has the highest growing potential. For those who live in the rural areas, developing the local tourism means improving their social, cultural and economical situation [14, 17].

From tourism perspective, the rural areas can fulfil a large mixture of interests and ways to spend the time off: leisure and relaxation, cultural

activities, hiking, climbing and other sports, exploring, hunting and fishing [9]. Rural tourism represents an alternative for the classic and traditional tourism that takes place in noisy cities and crowded resorts [7].

The agro-tourism represents the main element of the rural tourism. In the last 30-40 years, agro-tourism has growing rapidly in European

countries, where there is an estimated market of over 370 million tourists [4].

As a general definition the agro-tourism represents a concept that includes tourism activity organized and led by rural population, and is based on a close connection with the natural and human environment. Agro-tourism is directly related to agricultural activities, supported by small farmers, their own household activity remaining the main source of income [13].

Agro-tourism is a form of rural tourism where accommodation and other hospitality services take place in tourists boarding houses that are integrated in the local farms. The tourists are benefiting from an unpolluted environment, quality food, beautiful natural landscape, natural and cultural-historical values, traditions and customs of the rural areas, and other various tourist attractions [12].

The statistics revealed that touristic exploitation of natural and cultural rural environment represents an important chance for economic recovery and a solution that generates new working places in rural area therefore, prospects for a sustainable development. Also the rural tourism represents an important opportunity to promote Romania at international level.

In this context, the paper aimed to analyse the dynamics of human resources involved in the rural tourism and agro-tourism activities in order to identify the main trends and challenges in this area. The empirical data collected from National Institute of Statistics regarding occupied population in general and in rural areas, total employees in hospitality services in rural areas, total tourists accommodation establishments in rural areas and their capacity were dynamically studied and interpreted.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to the National Institute of Statistics, the indicators used in this paper can be defined as following:

- employment comprises all persons aged 15 and over who carried out an economic or social activity producing goods or services for at least one hour during the reference period (one week) in order to get income in the form of wages, payment in kind or other benefits. In the rural areas, the indicator for employed people implies that the minimum length used in the production of agricultural products for own consumption is a minimum of 20 hours per week. [9]

- agro-tourism guesthouses are establishments of tourist accommodation with a capacity of up to 8 rooms, operating in the homes of citizens or in independent buildings, which provide tourist accommodation and conditions of preparation and catering, as well as the possibility of participating in household activities or handicraft, in special places.[9]

- the existing tourist accommodation capacity (installed) represents the number of tourist beds for use included in the final act of reception, approval, classification of tourist accommodation unit, excluding extra beds

that can be installed if necessary.[9]

Rural areas can be defined by considering the following criteria: morphological criterion (number of inhabitants, density, type of environment), structural and functional criterion (type of activities and relationships).

In this definition of the rural areas, the main characteristics highlighted are the following ones: [11]

- the low population density in the rural areas;
- villages are the human establishment forms characterized by individuality and discontinuity of the built space;
- the productive activity includes predominantly agriculture and forestry but this does not exclude rural tourism and the processing industry and trade areas;
- the relations between people rely primarily on mutual recognition from all points of views;
- the environment is much less polluted than in urban areas.

The methods used in this research were the following ones: the documented study, the descriptive statistic analysis and logical synthesis of information.

This type of documentation aimed to identify and review the main trends and challenges related with human resources involved in rural tourism.

Defining the rural environment, the human resources, and the accommodation capacity were analyzed using a set of synthetic indicators relevant to resources and results as follows:

- occupied population in rural areas
- employment in rural areas
- agro-tourism boarding houses as reception facilities
- accommodation capacity
- the total number of tourists arrivals and overnight stays (total and foreign tourists).

The present study attempts to synthesize the situation of human resources involved in tourism in rural areas, starting from statistical databases published by the NIS in the period 2007-2014 concerning: the total employed population, employment in rural areas, total employees nationwide, employees in rural areas, reception and accommodation facilities, accommodation capacity in agro-hostels.

Index method was used to point out the differences from a year to another, taking into account that the figures registered in 2007 were considered a fixed basis.

The index with fixed basis, I_{FB} , was calculated according to the formula:

$$I_{FB} = (X_n/X_0)*100 \quad (1)$$

where, X_n is the value of the indicator in the n year of the chronological series and X_0 is the value of the indicator in the year 2007.

The share of a sub indicator in the total value

of the indicator was calculated according to the formula:

$$S_{\%} = (X_n/\sum_{i=1}^n X_i)*100 \quad (2)$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Romania's future is strongly related with the rural development because rural areas account for 87% of the total area of the country and 45% of total population. [11]

Table 1. The evolution and structure of occupied population at national level and in rural areas

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
A.Total occupied population at national level (Thousand persons)	9,352.5	9,259.0	8,952.4	8,712.8	8,528.1	8,605.1	8,549.1	8,613.7
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	99.0	95.7	93.2	91.2	92.0	91.4	92.1
B.Occupied population in the rural areas (Thousand persons)	4,341.5	4,376.4	4,235.7	4,108.2	3,905.0	3,987.3	3,962.0	3,945.0
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	100.8	97.6	94.6	89.9	91.8	91.3	90.9
Share of occupied population in the rural areas (%) (B/A%)	46.4	47.3	47.3	47.2	45.8	46.3	46.3	45.8
C.Total occupied population in hospitality services at national level (Thousand persons)	133.6	145.5	151.2	161.9	169.2	172.1	175.0	180.6
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	109.0	113.2	121.2	126.6	128.8	131.0	135.2
D.Occupied population in hospitality services in the rural areas (Thousand persons)	25.3	28.2	34.7	33.9	35.9	38.4	41.1	41.7
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	111.2	136.8	133.9	141.7	151.4	162.2	164.4
Share of occupied population in the rural areas (%) (D/C%)	19.0	19.4	22.9	21.0	21.2	22.3	23.5	23.1

Source: Own calculation based on NIS Database, 2007-2014 [9].

Rural population is not evenly distributed across the country. Thus, the rural population has a high level in the following regions: South Muntenia - 58.6%, North East - and South-West Oltenia 56.8% - 51.9%, [9] while in the Western part of the country, rural areas are less populated. These disparities are

reflected in the socio-economic development of the areas and quality of life in rural areas. During the analyzed period, rural population experienced a demographic decline caused by social mobility, low birth rate and aging. Between 2007 and 2014, rural population decreased by 3%, respectively, by 230,442

people. According to the demographic forecasts, the decline will continue in the period 2016-2050 [3].

The main factors of population decline are low birth rates and migration. Through its cumulative effects, migration contributed to

increased regional and community disparities. The total population decline is also reflected in the evolution of occupied population at a national level and in rural areas as presented in Table 1.

Table 2. The evolution and structure of employed population at national level and in rural areas

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
A.Total employees at national level (Thousand persons)	6,145.0	6,149.8	5,940.9	5,648.6	5,697.2	5,734.5	5,743.5	5,850.3
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	100.1	96.7	91.9	92.7	93.3	93.5	95.2
B.Employees in the rural areas (Thousand persons)	1,545.3	1,670.3	1,630.7	1,473.5	1,470.6	1,506.7	1,531.0	1,554.4
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	108.1	105.5	95.4	95.2	97.5	99.1	100.6
Share of employed population in the rural areas (%) (B/A%)	25.1	27.2	27.4	26.1	25.8	26.3	26.7	26.6
C.Total employees in hospitality services at national level (Thousand persons)	126.0	136.9	145.2	155.4	162.3	163.3	165.4	170.9
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	108.6	115.2	123.3	128.8	129.6	131.3	135.7
D.Employees in hospitality services in the rural areas (Thousand persons)	23.7	26.8	34.3	32.6	34.4	37.5	38.7	39.3
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	113.0	144.9	137.6	145.0	158.1	163.3	165.8
Share of employed population in the rural areas (%) (D/C%)	18.8	19.6	23.7	21.0	21.2	23.0	23.4	23.0

Source: Own calculation based on NIS Database, 2007-2014 [9].

The analysis of national occupied population in the period under review shows a reduction by approximately 8% on the total period under review. The largest decrease took place in 2008-2009, and has been influenced by the exodus of labour force to the developed countries from Western Europe.

The occupied population in rural areas accounted for about 45-46% of total national occupied population and throughout the review period, the indicator was reduced by around 9 %.

At national level, population occupied with hospitality services increased by 35 %. The population occupied in hospitality services in rural areas rose to 64.4% over the period under review and this led to an increase in the

share of total employment in hospitality, from 19% in 2007 to 23.1% 2014.

The evolution and structure of employees at national level and in rural areas is presented in Table 2.

The analysis of the indicators referring to employees reflects the following: the total number of employees nationwide experienced a period of decline (2008-2010), when during the economic crisis, the number of employees was reduced by 8.2%.

After the economic crisis, between 2011 and 2014, the total number of employees increased slightly. In 2014, the total number of employees was 4.8% lower than the base year, 2007.

Employment in rural areas increased by 8.1%

in the first two years of the analysis. After that, because of the economic crisis, the number of employees was reduced by 4.8%. In the period 2011 and 2014, the number of employees started to increase, therefore in the last year of the analysed period the number of employees was by 0.6% higher compared to

the reference year.

The share of rural areas employees in the total number of employees varied between 25.1%, the lowest level recorded in 2007 and 27.4% of all employees, the highest level registered in 2009.

Table 3. The evolution and structure of touristic accommodation units and their capacity at national level and in rural areas

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
A. Touristic accommodation units	4,694	4,840	5,095	5,222	5,003	5,821	6,009	6,130
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	103	109	111	107	124	128	131
Accommodation capacity-Places	283,701	294,210	303,486	311,698	278,503	301,109	305,707	311,288
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	104	107	110	98	106	108	110
B. Agro-tourism guesthouses	1,292	1,348	1,412	1,354	1,210	1,569	1,598	1,665
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	104	109	105	94	121	124	129
Share of Agro-tourism guesthouses in the total touristic accommodation units (%) (B/A%)	28	28	28	26	24	27	27	27
Accommodation capacity-Places in agro-tourism pensions	15,448	16,906	19,783	20,208	20,683	27,453	28,775	30,480
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	109	128	131	134	178	186	197

Source: Own calculation based on NIS Database, 2007-2014 [9].

At national level, the total number of employees in hospitality industry grew by 35.7% compared to 2007, while the number of employees in the rural areas increased by 65.8% in 2014 compared with year 2007.

The reduced share of the population employed in agriculture is an opportunity for human resources to work in non-agricultural sectors like rural and agro-tourism. This involves a proper and permanent information and training of the human resources [1].

The proportion of employees working in hospitality in the rural areas in the total number of employees in hospitality services increased from 18,8% in 2007 to 23% in 2014.

The increase of number of employees in hospitality services is related to the increase of the number of reception facilities and their accommodation capacity.

Although tourism in Romania has a small share in GDP, around 1.5%, well below the global media of 5 %, [5] in the analysed period, Romanian's businessmen made important investments in the development of tourism facilities and accommodation capacities.

An important element of the development process was based on the absorption of European funds [8]. A significant share of these funds targeted investments in reception facilities in rural areas.

The situation for reception facilities and accommodation capacity is shown in Table 3. The analysis shows that between 2007 and 2014 the total number of accommodation units in Romania increased by 31%, and the accommodation capacity rose by 10%. The difference between the 31% increase of touristic accommodation units and the 10%

increase of total capacity is caused by the fact that most of the boarding houses built in the analyzed period have small or medium accommodation capacity.

The number of agro-tourism pensions increased by 39 % from 1,292 in 2007 to 1,665 in 2014. The tourist pensions have continuously increased their share from 15.7 % in 2007 to 22.4 % in 2015, occupying the 2nd position after agro-tourist pensions [10].

The agro-tourist pensions accommodation capacity almost doubled, increasing from 15,448 places in 2007 to 30,480 places in 2014. The share of rural reception facilities in the total units accounted for about 27%.

Fig. 1. presents the evolution of the total accommodation capacity in Romania compared to the evolution of agro-tourism pensions accommodation capacity, taking 2007 as a reference year. The representation reveals the high increase of the number of accommodation places in agro-tourism boarding houses. Even if the agro-tourism pensions accommodation capacity almost doubled, its share in total accommodation capacity is still small, of slightly under 10%.

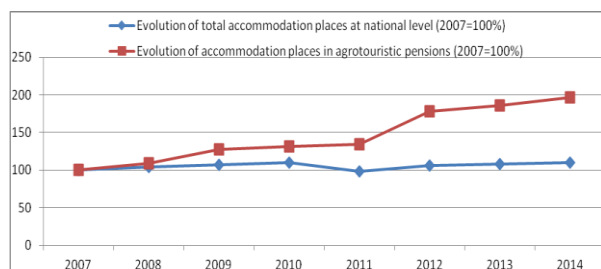


Fig. 1. Evolution of total accommodation capacity and the agro-tourism pensions capacity in terms of beds/places, considering 2007 as a reference year
 Source: Own calculation based on NIS Database, 2007-2014 [9].

In Table 4 it is presented the evolution of arrivals in reception facilities at national level and in agro-tourism pensions, and the share of foreign tourists accommodated in the touristic facilities.

The total number of tourists arrivals in touristic boarding houses increased by 21.4% in the analysed period. In year 2009, due to economic crisis, the number of total arrivals decreased by 11,9% compared to 2007. The tourists arrivals continued to decrease in 2010,

representing only 87.1% compared to the reference year. Since 2011, the number of tourists arrivals started to increase and the trend remained the same for the rest of the analysed period [16].

The foreign tourists arrivals increased by 23.4% in the analysed period. They represents around 22% from total number of tourists arrivals. The number of foreign tourists arrived in agro-tourism pensions doubled during the analysed period and their share in total tourists arrivals in agro-tourism pensions represented 7% in average.

In Table 5, it is presented the evolution of overnight stays in touristic accommodation units at national level and in agro-touristic pensions, and the share of foreign tourists that stayed overnight in the touristic units.

The results have a similar trend with the evolution of arrivals. Compared to the year 2007, the total number of overnight stays decreased by 22.1% in 2010. After 2010, the number of overnight stays started to increase but in contrast with the number of arrivals, the overnight stays did not even reach back the value of the reference year. In 2014, the total number of overnight stays was by 1.5% smaller compared with year 2007.

During the analysed period, the proportion of tourists accommodated in agro-tourism pensions was small, but its trend was a positive one. The proportion increased from 2.9 % in 2007 to 5.3 % in 2014.

This could be explained by the low prices per night and the consumer preference for traditional food prepared from organic local products produced in the agro-touristic farm. Urban population uses to visit the agro-tourism pensions because of the healthy food which can be found there [2].

Foreign tourists overnight stays increased by only 5.1% in the analysed period. They represented around 18% from total number of tourists overnight stays. The number of foreign tourists who slept in agro-tourism pensions increased by 56.2% during the analysed period and their share in total overnight stays in agro-tourism pensions represented 8% in average.

The evolution of agro-tourism pensions regarding the level of comfort is shown in Fig.2.

Table 4. The evolution of arrivals in reception facilities at national level and in agro-tourism pensions in total and on foreign tourists

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
A.Total number of arrivals	6,971,925	7,125,307	6,141,135	6,072,757	7,031,606	7,686,489	7,943,153	8,465,909
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	102.2	88.1	87.1	100.9	110.2	113.9	121.4
B.Foreign tourists' arrivals	1,550,957	1,465,891	1,275,590	1,346,343	1,516,699	1,656,436	1,717,355	1,914,570
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	94.5	82.2	86.8	97.8	106.8	110.7	123.4
Share of foreign tourists' arrivals (%) (B/A)*100	22.2	20.6	20.8	22.2	21.6	21.5	21.6	22.6
C.Arrivals in agro-tourism pensions	288,508	357,617	325,686	289,923	360,696	447,113	501,746	549,302
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	124.0	112.9	100.5	125.0	155.0	173.9	190.4
Proportion from total arrivals (%) (C/A)*100	4.1	5.0	5.3	4.8	5.1	5.8	6.3	6.5
D.Foreign tourist arrivals in agro-tourism pensions	20,443	19,856	19,282	19,677	24,691	30,174	38,183	41,434
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	97.1	94.3	96.3	120.8	147.6	186.8	202.7
Foreign tourists' proportion (%) (D/C)*100	7.1	5.6	5.9	6.8	6.8	6.7	7.6	7.5

Source: Own calculation based on NIS Database, 2007-2014 [9].

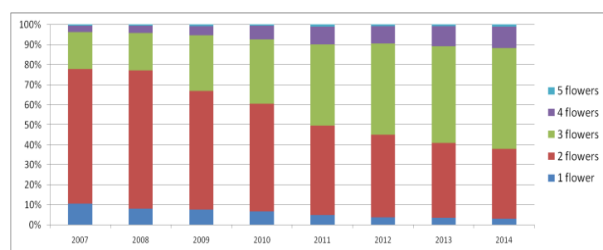


Fig. 2. The evolution and proportion of the comfort level in agro-tourism pensions

Source: Own calculation based on INSS statistics [9].

In 2007, the agro-tourism pensions from category '2 flowers' had the largest share, 67%, but in 2014, it was reduced to 35%.

The agro-tourism pensions from category '3 flowers' increased their share from 18% in 2007 to 50% in 2014.

The share of agro-tourism pensions with a high degree of comfort, classified at the category '4 flowers' and at the category '5 flowers' tripled from 4% in 2007 to 12% in 2014.

Therefore, the agro and rural tourist pensions managers are more and more focused to increase the comfort level according to the quality standards and to increase clients' satisfaction degree [6].

The repartition of agro-tourist pensions in developing regions is shown in Fig.3.

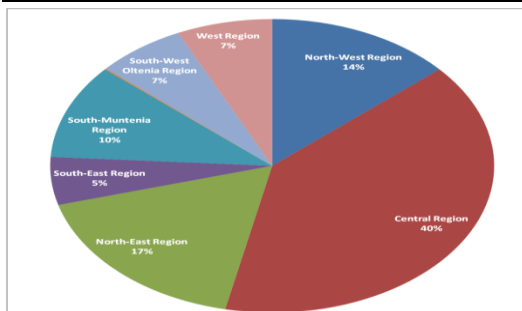


Fig. 3. Distribution of agro-tourism pensions by development regions
 Source: Own calculation based on NIS Database, 2014, [9].

In 2014, the highest share of agro-tourism pensions was located in the Central region, 40%, followed by the North-East and North-West regions with 17% and 14% of the total agro-tourism pensions. South-Muntenia accounts for 10% and other regions have a share below 10% each. Some regions from Romania have a high potential for agro-tourism. As an example, the Danube Delta region is highly appreciated and gained worldwide recognition. [15]

Table 5. The evolution of overnight stays in reception facilities at national level and in agro-tourism pensions in total and on foreign tourists

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
A.Total overnight stays	20,593,349	20,725,981	17,325,410	16,051,135	17,979,439	19,166,122	19,362,671	20,280,041
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	100.6	84.1	77.9	87.3	93.1	94.0	98.5
B.Foreign tourists' overnight stays	3,596,439	3,359,244	2,667,666	2,766,581	3,066,882	3,297,433	3,477,854	3,768,104
Evolution (%) 2007=100	100	93.7	74.4	77.1	85.5	91.9	97.0	105.1
Share of foreign tourists' overnight stays (%) (B/A)*100	17.4	16.2	15.4	17.2	17.1	17.2	18.0	18.6
C.Overnight stays in agro-tourism pensions	592,327	743,444	673,188	604,606	741,350	906,504	996,475	1,081,521
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	125.5	113.7	102.1	125.2	153.0	168.2	182.6
Proportion of overnight stays in agro-tourism pensions (%) (C/A)*100	2.9	3.6	3.9	3.8	4.1	4.7	5.1	5.3
D.Foreign overnight stays in agro-tourism pensions	58,467	53,721	55,421	56,592	61,149	77,963	86,342	91,342
Evolution(%) 2007=100	100	91.9	94.8	96.8	104.6	133.3	147.3	156.2
Foreign tourists' proportion (%) (D/C)*100	9.9	7.2	8.2	9.4	8.2	8.6	8.7	8.4

Source: Own calculation based on NIS Database, 2007-2014 [9].

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the technological progress achieved in the Romanian agriculture in the period under review, the share of population employed in agriculture reduced, this resulting in availability of human resources

for non-agricultural sectors of rural entrepreneurship, such as rural tourism.

In conclusion, the rural labour force must be redirected towards other activities, particularly towards services like agro-tourism, through proper and permanent information and training of human resources.

Human resources strategies in rural areas can include measures focused on: upgrading rural population education and training systems; promoting occupational mobility of human resources in rural areas in order to move towards non-agricultural occupational areas; promoting entrepreneurship in rural areas and providing support services in agro-tourism.

The total number of agro-tourism pensions increased by 39% and the number of places almost doubled. This growth has generated a 65.8% growth of the number of employees involved in hospitality field in rural areas.

One of the key element explaining the positive evolution of agro-tourism in Romania is related to the development of hosting services and tourists reception with high quality standards. Regarding quality standards, the trend of the agro-tourism pensions comfort level, in the analysed periods showed that the share of agro-tourism pensions with one and two flowers decreased from 78% in 2007 to 38% in 2014. The difference up to 100% in represented by agro-tourism pensions with 3 flowers (50%) and pensions with 4 flowers representing 11%.

Another growing trend with a positive influence on the agro-tourism development is related to the consumer increasing demand for the organic products. Urban population uses to visit the agro-tourism pensions because of the healthy food which can be found there.

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