

THE NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM - A CHANCE FOR AGROTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE SUCEAVA COUNTY

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Abstract

Since the 1950`s, the tourism industry played a very important role for the global economic development. In 2017, tourism contributed with a fare of around 10% at the worldwide level. For the European Union, tourism has a very high significance for the market. Half of the tourist international arrivals are taken over by the European region and the economic contribution is similar for the rest of the world. Beside this, tourism has a high relevance for employment, with a contribution of around 12%. Unfortunately, for Romania, a country with a very high tourism potential, its resources are not exploited as appropriate, and the tourism contribution represents half of the European average. Our country occupies the 159th position out of 185. Besides this, the agrotourism for the Romanian market does not have a very high share, as it is still a developing segment of tourism. It started to take amplitude from 2000, when Romania received accession funds through the SAPARD support program. Since 2007, agrotourism received financing through the National Rural Development Program (NRDP) in the two multi annual financial frameworks: 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. The present study aims to analyse the situation in the N-E region and Suceava County from an agrotourism perspective by taking into consideration the effect of the rural development program on the number of agrotouristic structures, number of beds and employment. By the number of agrotouristic structures, the county occupies the third place in Romania, passed by Harghita County (281) and Brasov County (200) in 2007.

Key words: agrotourism, rural development, measures, N-E Region, Suceava County

INTRODUCTION

The transition to the market economy made the tourism sensitive to the economic and social sector, stimulating the demand and the offer of Romania tourism products, [14] Romanian economy being closely linked with the possibility of meeting the needs. [15] Statistics conducted by World Tourism Organization determinates that rural tourism is growing at a higher speed than international tourism as a whole. [8] Agrotourism is the segment of tourism practiced in rural areas, based on the provision of accommodation, meals and recreation within the household. [11]

Tourism represents a huge marketplace where there is demand for a large variety of products and services. [4]

For the EU economic development tourism plays a very important role, with a contribution of 10.3% in 2017, and with an employment rate in the above-mentioned sector of 11.7%. The European region plays the most important role in terms of international tourist arrivals; in 2017 according to the World Tourism Barometer (WTB) the region received 671 million foreign tourists which represent 50.7% of the whole market - 1,323 billion tourists. The total amount of bed places in EU is 31,747 million, from this 13, 49 million, which represents 42.5%, are in rural areas.

In Romania's case, the total bed places is almost 333,000 in 2017, which represents 1% of the total European capacity, according to Eurostat (Common context indicators for rural development programs 2014-2020 – Tourism

infrastructure). The accommodation places that Romania has in the rural areas is of 104,000, which represents 0.77% of the total rural accommodation capacity that exists in European Union. In the North-Est region, which the analysed County Suceava is a part of, there are a total of 30,000 places, of which 40% are in rural areas - about 12,000. In order to obtain these values, at EU level, there are almost 11 million employees (10,973,000), which represent 4.8% of the total of almost 228 million employees in all the economic sectors. Romania has an occupied population in the tourism sector of 203,000 persons from a total of 8.671 million employees in all the economic sectors. This represents 2.3% of the total of employees and 1.85% of the total number in tourism, in EU. In the N-E region, the tourism sector has a 1.7% employment rate, more specifically 26,400 people work out of a total of 1,580,000.

During 2007 and 2013, respectively 2014 and 2020, NRDP supported the development of agrotourism through measures 3.1.3. and its predecessor, 6.4 of the current financial framework.

According to the NRDP report on Measure 3.1.3. from December 31, 2015, 3,703 projects (with a total value of approx. 570 million euro) were submitted from 2008 to 2012, of which only 2,586 projects were selected, in the end being contracted only 1,289 (with a value of approx. 180 million EUR).

At the level of sub-measure 6.4, which had a public allocation of NRDP funds of 166 million EUR, 2,512 projects were submitted, of which 985 were selected (with a value of approx. EUR 163 million). Concerning the contracted projects, the total number was 877, of which only 224 were completed on April 11, 2019, according to MADR. At the same time, there were also 297 transition projects, out of which 238 were completed. The payments to date consisted of 54.1 million EUR and of 11.8 million EUR for the transition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology is based on the study of the specialized bibliography, the compilation of the database, the data processing, the analysis and the interpretation of the results, as well as the formulation of the conclusions and recommendations.

The working methods used are those specific to such a study, namely: monographic method, analysis of the statistical data provided by Romanian National Institute of Statistic, Eurostat, National Rural Development Program (NRDP) and The Agency for Rural Investments Financing (ARIF), graphical method and diagnostic analysis, as well as the using of STATA SE14 program.

Our database includes records at a national, regional and county level on arrivals, overnight stays, average duration of stays, the evolution of net usage of accommodation capacity, number of employees for Suceava County and agrotourism structures, number of beds for Suceava County and Romania. At the same time, we use indicators provided by NRDP for projects on Measure 3.1.3. in 2007 and 6.4. in 2017.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since 1990, the interest for tourism grew. Rural tourism in Romania has an old tradition, but was never organised, always sporadic, spontaneous, and accidental. [12]

In order to better understand the evolution of the distribution of the number of beds for Agroturistic holdings in Romania, we generated two maps, one for 2007 and one for 2017. The program used to create the maps is STATA SE 14 using the command “.spmap”, a module used for drawing thematic maps.

We can see a concentrated distribution in Braila (2,396 beds), Harghita (2,273 beds), Suceava (1,267 beds). There are some counties where agrotourism is not developed - Teleorman, Olt, Galati, Brasov, and Botosani.

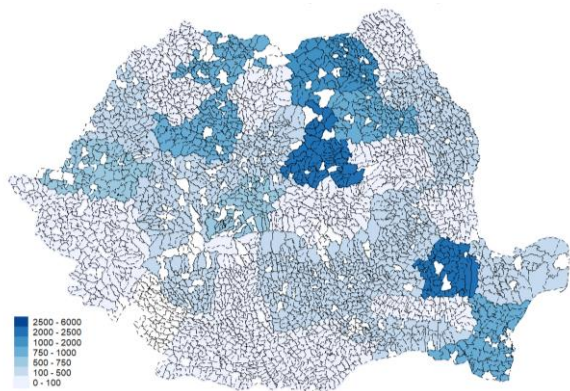


Fig. 1. The distribution of number of beds for Agrotouristic houses in 2007

Source: Projected by author after INS – Tempo online, 2019

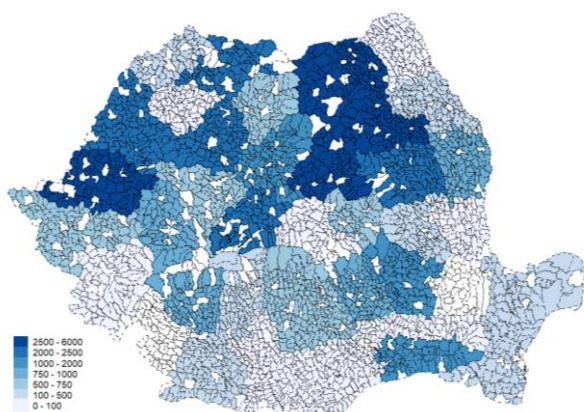


Fig. 2. The distribution of number of beds for Agrotouristic houses in 2017

Source: Projected by author after INS – Tempo online, 2019.

In 2017, we can see an upward trend in growth compared to 2007.

Overall, the number of beds for the two analysed years have increased with 21.16% from 283,701 in 2007 to 343,720 in 2017. At the same time, the number of touristic structures increased from 4,694 to 7,905 in 2017, which represents around 70%. The agrotourism in Romania was supported by the rural development measures present in the two multiannual financial frameworks for the 2007 – 2013 period, with measure 3.1.3., when a number of approx. 1,300 projects and were financed, and 2014-2020 when over 1,800 projects were supported. In 2007, Romania registered 1,292 agrotourist boarding houses, after having benefited from the SAPARD Program support during the pre-accession period, and in 2017 the number of

agrotouristic pensions almost doubled, reaching 2,556 structures.

The N-E Region was created in 1998, the main reason being the coordination of European Union fund absorption of regional development projects. [1] The N-E region has one of the lowest GDP per capita. [10] Also during the 2007 – 2017 period, the North – Est region (formed from Bacau, Botosani, Iasi, Neamt, Suceava and Vaslui counties) recorded a growth of 70%, from 18,414 to 31,328 accommodation places. Regarding the situation of touristic structures, the region registered an increase, having more than doubled the number, from 459 in 2007, to 985 in 2017. If in 2007, the number of agrotouristic structures was of 196, which represented about 43% of the total number in the region, in 2017 their number is of 451 and it represented about half (46%) of the total number of existing structures. The agrotourism sector in Romania can be improved by accessing the EU funds that can assure better accommodations and agreement conditions, qualified personal in tourism, better promotions on national and international markets. [13] The local authorities, together with the citizens from the N-E regions understood the importance of the promotion of rural areas and their beauties. [7] In economic terms, the main advantages over other areas of activity are the low use of raw materials (a low rate of imports for this sector), eco-friendly energy consumption, domestic consumption, ensuring a balanced development of all areas. [2] An alternative of economic activities diversification is represented by rural tourism and agrotourism. Tourism, more than any other field of activity, is dependent on the environment. [5] Romania has plenty of natural and entropic elements (archaeological sites, libraries, churches), [6] but the percentage of beds in tourist accommodation is lower in rural areas comparing to EU-28. Although Romania has a great potential for the developing of rural tourism, putting it into practice represents a necessity. [9] A minus is determined by the lack of infrastructure (direct road access, internet connection,

sewerage, natural gases, water supply). A clear solution for rural areas is the agrotourism development, which can ensure an economic growth by creating new jobs, attracting local and foreign investors, as well as young people into rural communities that are facing aging population. [3]
 Suceava county, part of the North-Est region, recorded a rhythm of growth in the above-mentioned period of almost 74%, from 6,831 to 11,883 accommodation places.

Table 1. Accommodation structures

	Years		%
	2007	2017	2017/2007
Total	Structures		
Romania	4,694	7,905	168.41
N-E	459	985	214.60
Suceava	236	441	186.86
Agrotouristic structures	Structures		
Romania	1,292	2,556	197.83
N-E	196	451	230.10
Suceava	120	225	187.50

Source: Projected by author after INS – Tempo online, 2019.

In the N-E region, Suceava County plays an important role regarding the tourist structure because it owns about 52% of the total of the six component counties. In 2017, the county maintains its power, recording 441 structures out of the 985 existing in the region. At agrotouristic structures, the number registered in 2007 was 120, reaching 225 accommodation units in 2017 (it owns about 52% from the total of 6 component counties). In 2017 in the UE-28 were reported 317,470,000 accommodation places, from which 43% were in the rural areas, according to Eurostat.
 Comparing the rhythm of growth of accommodation capacity in Romania, the accommodation capacity for agrotourism holdings almost tripled, from almost 15,500 to 44,500 in 2017. At the N-E regional level, the registered growth was of 265% from 2,857 to 7,562 in 2017.

Table 2. Accommodation capacity

	Years		%
	2007	2017	2017/2007
Total	Accommodation capacity		
Romania	28,3701	343,720	121.16
N-E	18,414	31,170	169.27
Suceava	6,831	11,883	173.96
Agrotouristic structures	Accommodation capacity		
Romania	15,448	44,499	288.06
N-E	2,857	7,562	264.68
Suceava	1,627	3,711	228.09

Source: Projected by author after INS – Tempo online, 2019.

At Suceava County level, the rhythm of growth regarding the accommodation capacity was a little lower, the value being around 230%, compared to the whole region, from 1,627 in 2007 to 3,711 in 2017.

In Fig. 3 is presented the rhythm of the evolution of beds capacity, having 2007 as the base year. We can see a positive growth for the analysed indicator.

Table 3. Average accommodation places/unit

	Years		%
	2007	2017	2017/2007
Total	Average accommodation places/unit		
Romania	60.44	43.48	71.94
N-E	40.12	31.64	78.88
Suceava	28.94	26.95	93.09
Agrotouristic structures	Average accommodation places/unit		
Romania	11.96	17.41	145.61
N-E	14.58	16.77	115.03
Suceava	13.56	16.49	121.65

Source: Projected by author after INS – Tempo online, 2019.

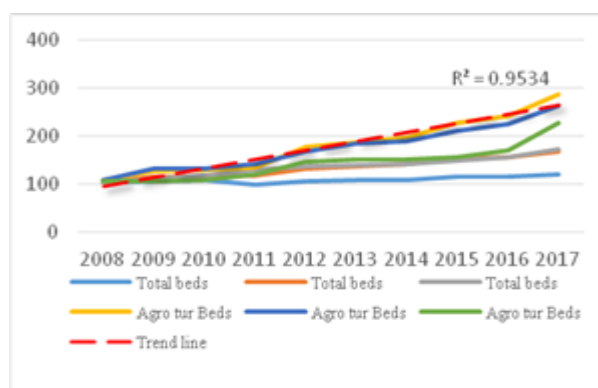


Fig.3. The rhythm of the evolution of beds capacity having as base year 2007

Source: Projected by author after INS – Tempo online, 2019

CONCLUSIONS

Agrotourism is an important source of revenue growth. It has a number of peculiarities, and agrotourism production includes both natural values, as well as cultural and social values.

National Rural Development Program played and will continue to play the most important role for rural development. For the Romanian Agrotourism, the second Pillar of Common Agricultural Policy supported the development of almost 1,300 projects, which have been implemented in the 2007 – 2013 framework, and around 1,100 projects in the current financing program of which around 500 are already implemented. At the same time, NRDP contributed to increase promotion, provided support from local authorities, developed infrastructure, maintained the Romanian cuisine and conserved the rural traditions. The N-E region registered a significant growth regarding the agrotouristic accommodation capacity, which almost tripled. This trend was maintained at the level of overnight stays, which almost tripled, reaching 330,000 overnights, which is 280% over the base period of 2007, followed by tourist arrivals, which recorded a 278% increase, reaching about 180,000 tourists in 2017. Suceava County maintained its growth rate at the level of its region, with increased tourist arrivals from just over 25,000 in 2007 to 77,000 in 2017, and booked nights following the same trend, the increase being of 290%, reaching around 165,000 overnight stays in 2017. In conclusion, the decade spent by Romania in the EU has brought significant positive changes especially at agrotourism level. For the property owners, at the Suceava County level, this decade has contributed to the increase of the receipts, the argument being that in 2007 the index of net using the agrotouristic accommodation capacity was 15.5%, rising in 2017 to 22%.

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