

TULCEA COUNTY - LATENT AGRITOURISM POTENTIAL

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Abstract

This paper intends to present the concrete situation in the South East Region of Romania, respectively in Tulcea County. In this paper it is presented data about the structure of the population, by ethnicity and gender, on the residence environment, distribution by age group, the accommodation units structure and the number of Romanian and foreign tourists who has visited the studied county. The development of agritourism in the area is laid in this paper, in close connection with the physical-geographic framework, the tourist objectives in the area and implicitly its economic development. National Institute of Statistics data were used and processed according to the objectives of the paper. The paper is finalized with a SWOT analysis that sets out conclusions and tries to be the reason why an investor would set up an agro-tourist hostel in the area taking advantage of the rare natural beauty and offering somewhat unusual accommodation conditions - but warm and welcoming - more especially for foreign tourists

Key words: agrotourism, agrotourism boarding houses, tourists, macroregion, Romania

INTRODUCTION

The rural tourism phenomenon is not a new one. “The desire to expand and spend leisure time and holiday in the country is a preoccupation, especially of the nature enthusiasts. New is how this form of tourism evolved both quantitatively and qualitatively in the last decades, and it tends to become a mass phenomenon” [2].

This type of tourism has as a specificity its development in a particular natural environment, including a large variety of activities such as: various sport competitions and events, festivals and other cultural activities related to traditions, many types of units with accommodation function suitable to the tourists' preferences and their budget allocated for travel. „It is a concept that encompasses the tourism activity organized and managed by the local rural population and which is based on a close connection with the natural and human environment” [5].

Taking into account that the local population employed in the agricultural sector was deeply affected by the economic crisis, agrotourism has become an opportunity for professional reconversion in order to obtain profit with

minimal investments, using the already existing infrastructure. „But equally true is that agrotourism can be a good opportunity to make a business and for those who, tired of the stressful life of the city and willing to make a change, may be interested in the idea of moving to the country, along with their own family, to work the land and provide hospitality to tourists” [7].

„In terms of entertainment, agritourism is a form of tourism with a wide variety and uniqueness in delivering services to people who love nature, culture and peasant art” [3].

Being located in the south-eastern extremity of the country, in Dobrogea region, Tulcea County is crossed by Parallel 45, being bordered to the north by the Danube River and to the east by the Black Sea. [8]. Having a surface of 8,499 square km that represents 3.5% of the total area of the whole country, Tulcea County comprises of 51 administrative-territorial units. There are 4 cities, 46 communes and the county residence, Tulcea City that accommodates one third from the county population. (Fig.1.).

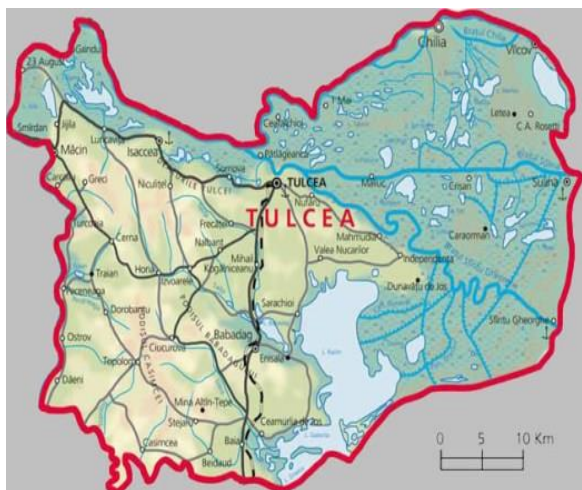


Fig.1. Tulcea County
 Source: <https://bit.ly/2RFP2OU>

The territory of Tulcea County is the oldest and most complex of Romania's land plots. Its altitude is maintained between 100 m in the central part and 467 m at the highest peak in the north. The plateau has a varied geological composition from the green shale, dating from the beginning of the Paleozoic to the neogene formations and the quaternary loess that covers all the others. The area of the county comprises two well-defined physical-geographic units: Horst Dobrogean and Danube Delta. Dobrogean Horst is characterized as a typical plateau relief, having characteristic features: Măcinului Mountains, Niculițel Plateau, Babadag Plateau, Casimcea Plateau and Tulcea Hills. This relief determines the existence of 3 biogeographical areas (steppe, silvostepa and forest). Steppe fund is the most typical biogeographic unit of the county. Silvostepa and forests develop on more restricted portions.

The second physical-geographic unit of Tulcea County, the Danube Delta is an alluvial plain in full swing and represents the youngest accumulation relief in our country, to which the rivers and the sea participated and participate equally.

According to the 2011 census, the ethnic composition of the Tulcea County population consists of 17 different groups, summing 213,083 people, out of which: 180,496 persons (84%) of Romanian ethnicity and 32,587 (16%) of other ethnicity, most representative ethnic groups being:

- Russians and Lipovans - 10,342 people (4.85%)
- Roma – 3,423 people (1.6%)
- Turks and Tatars - 1,793 people (0.84%)
- Greeks - 1,181 people (0.55%)
- Ukrainians - 1,083 persons (0.50%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Population structure by ethnicity and gender (thousand people)

	Romanians	Russians and Lipovans	Roma	Turks and Tatars	Greeks	Ukrainians	Other nationalities	TOTAL
	180.5	10.3	3.4	1.8	1.2	1.1	14.8	213.1
M	90.3	5.0	1.8	0.9	0.6	0.6	7.0	106.2
F	90.2	5.3	1.6	0.9	0.6	0.5	7.8	106.9

Source: NIS data processing.

According to the number of inhabitants per unit area, the density of inhabitants / square km is the lowest in the country, being only 25.07 inhabitants / square km, compared to the average of 84.4 inhabitants / square km per country. The low population density is explained by the fact that the Danube Delta and the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe occupy an area of 3.446 sq. Km, which represents 40% of the area of the analyzed area.

At the end of 2017, the number of unemployed [6] was 3,951 persons, of which: 1,027 in the urban area, of which 330 women. In the rural area, there were 2,924 persons of which 1,160 women (Fig.1). The unemployment rate at December 31st, 2017 was 4.70%.

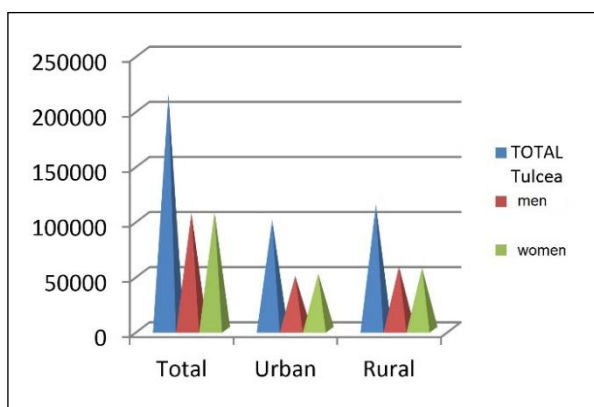


Fig.1. Structure of the unemployed by residence area and gender

Source: own data processing.

According to the census data from 2011, the population of Tulcea County has the following structure by age group (Fig. 2):

- 0-5 years - 10,908 people (5.11%)
- 6-9 years - 11,650 persons (5.46%)
- 10-14 years - 12,053 persons (5.65%)
- 15-19 years - 11,172 persons (5.24%)
- 20-64 years - 133,713 people (62,75%)
- Over 65 years - 33,587 people (15.79%)

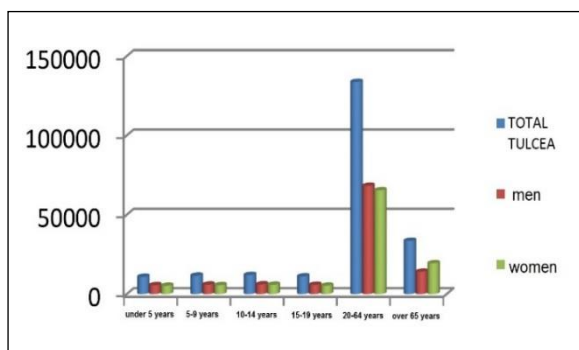


Fig.2. Population structure by age groups
 Source: own data processing.

The poverty rate at the level of the Southeast Development Region experienced an average increase of 1.55 percent from year to year in 2010-2016, with statistical data showing a poverty rate of 27.80% in 2010, 34% in 2014 and 31.20% in 2016 (Table 2).

Table 2. Poverty rate in the SE Region

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Poverty rate [%]	27.80	29.20	31.90	32.20	34.00	32.40	31.20

Source: NIS 2010-2016.

From an occupational point of view, the local economy relies almost exclusively on the primary semi-subsistence sector. The active population in Tulcea County registered a maximum in 2012 (89,700 persons), decreasing continuously in the following years to the value of 84,100 registered in 2016 (Table 3).

Table 3. Structure of the active population in Tulcea County

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
TOTAL	87,200	84,900	89,700	88,100	87,300	85,600	84,100
Men	46,500	45,300	48,400	46,200	45,900	45,100	44,800
Women	40,700	39,600	41,300	41,900	41,400	40,500	39,300

Source: NIS 2010-2016.

Analyzing the population in terms of the structure of employees by economic activity, out of the 39,294 persons employed in Tulcea County, in 2010, only 3.06% worked in the field of tourism and agritourism. A relatively constant trend can be observed, during the analyzed period, with a minimum registered in 2013, when a value of just 2.83% persons were employed in the tourism and agritourism field. The maximum value of the percent of persons occupied in this field was 4% in 2015. Corroborating the data presented so far, we conclude that only "agritourism exploits the natural potential of the area, highlighting both the tourist attractions and the hospitality of the inhabitants, introducing into the economic circuit novelties such as landscape, hospitality, solicitude, geographic information, cultural-historical information, gastronomic, artistic, etc." [2].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the characterization of agro-tourism in Tulcea County, during the period from which the paper refers (2012-2016), indicators were selected and analyzed regarding the structure of accommodation units and its share. Also the share of foreign tourists versus Romanian tourists was one of the analyzed indicators. For this purpose, National Institute of Statistics data were used. To conclude on the issues concerned, the paper ends with SWOT analysis regarding the stage and the level of touristic and agrotouristic activities in the county.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Rural tourism and agritourism have become particularly important in the last decade as more and more tourists come to settle in the homes of locals, attracted by the possibility of discovering the environment, changing the way of life, as well as sports activities in nature. The recreational offer in rural tourism is represented by horseback riding, pedestrian walking, cycling, fishing and hunting, tasting products specific to peasant cuisine.

Rural tourism is an exciting alternative, especially for teambuilding programs, for groups not exceeding 30 people because it offers a much wider range of entertainment such as campfire, outdoor grill, food flavour "home like", practicing various sports, excursions and hiking. As in all countries of the world, the economic crisis has also affected Romania. This has particularly affected the agricultural sector, with the population having to shift to other areas of activity. Various aspects are considered in the pursuit of regional development in Romania. The most important factors considered for the above purpose are related to the increase of the professionalism of the staff engaged in tourism services, the high efficiency use of the existing natural resources and, last but not least, the increase of the living standards of the inhabitants of this region.

The data regarding the number of units with accommodation function in Tulcea County have been selected from the N.I.S. [4] and then have been processed and designed in Fig. 3.

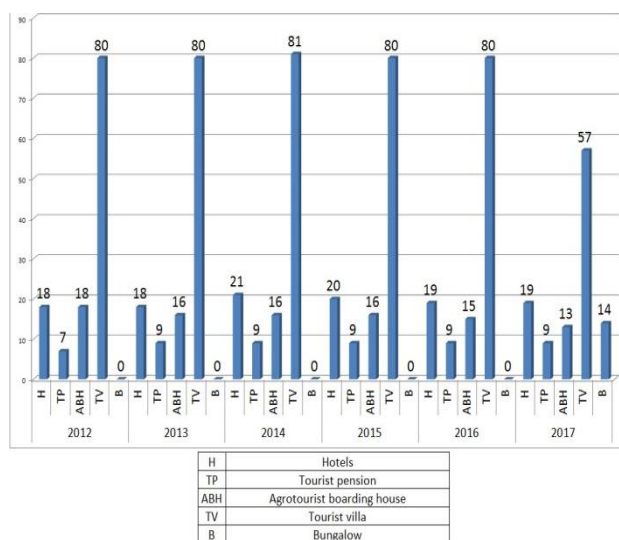


Fig.3.Number of accommodation units in Tulcea County

Source: own data processing.

The analysis of existing accommodation units in Tulcea county, shows the following:
 -at the county level the highest share is the tourist villas (65%);

-the second place, in equal proportions of 14%, is the agro-tourist boarding houses and the hotels;

Starting from 2017, another type of accommodation units - the bungalows - are developing in Tulcea County by turning some tourist villas, representing 12% of the total units of accommodation (112).

In the analyzed period the number of tourists who visited Tulcea County ranged between 66,242 in 2014 and 100,430 tourists in 2017, reflecting a parabolic trend of variation.

More and more tourists like to visit Tulcea County and their number is unexpectedly high. The difference between the minimum and the maximum registered during the analyzed period was 34,188 tourists, that is 34% (Fig.4).

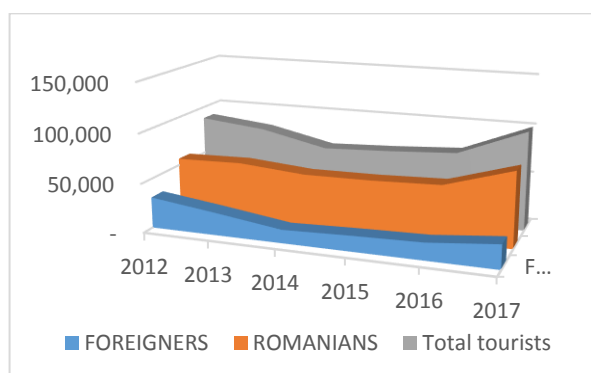


Fig.4.Number of Romanian and foreign tourists in Tulcea County

Source: own data processing.

As can be seen in Fig.4, the share of Romanian tourists varied between 64.44% in 2012 and 79.65% in 2014, the share of foreign tourists falling accordingly.

For business development, any investor needs to make a SWOT analysis of the situation. SWOT analysis is a research method used in the business environment to help design an overview of the company. It functions as a radiography of a company / ideas / business and assesses both the inside and outside determinants which have a high influence on it.

It also considers the position on the market or in relation to the competitors of the firm in order to highlight the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats existing at a certain moment in the market. As a first

phase of a project, SWOT analysis is generally carried out in order to form the basis of the project plan and its purpose is to be used in the later phases of project development, if it has difficulties in terms of planning, deliverables or budget assigned and must be returned to the waterline. Assuming that some of the unoccupied persons in the county want to develop an activity in the field of agritourism they should consider the following:

Strengths:

- clean environment, due to its location in an unpolluted area;
- varied geological structure, which generated types of relief with a special tourist function;
- rich hydrographic network (the Danube and its tributaries);
- varied and rich vegetation and the presence of appropriate fauna;
- existence of the Danube Delta biosphere reserve;
- traditions and customs are spiritual continuity and further forward habits, technologies and various information, including historical;
- the culinary diversity of traditional cuisine;
- the existence of a developed network of tourist reception facilities;
- welcoming and hospitable hosts;
- the existence of unoccupied workforce that can be re-qualified in hospitality.

Weaknesses:

- lack of access roads in all areas of the county and poor maintenance of existing ones;
- Inter- and intra-county public transport is deficient, because there are few routes, high waiting times and outdated conditions;
- the lack of an international airport for the access of foreign tourists who are increasingly interested in this tourist area;
- tourist attractions left to deteriorate;
- poor tourist information;

Opportunities:

- adapting existing accommodation structures to market requirements;
- major interest in the allocation of funds for the development and modernization of transport infrastructure;
- tourism development through European funding;

- increased interest in agritourism;
- the adoption at local level of norms for new constructions that can be executed according to the traditional type, thus the architectural style at the county level would have a constructive and decorative function;
- the existence of a minimal number of architectural models for "main street" constructions;
- the progressive functionality of traditional buildings, souvenir shops, exhibition halls;
- transfer of valuable objectives in the context of open-air museums;

Threats:

- the flow of tourists decreased due to the road infrastructure;
- the lack of promotional materials in international languages;
- tourism offers below the level of the international market;
- migrating locals into countries with a different standard of living and returning to them during holiday or definitive holidays strongly marked the typology of rural households by importing foreign architectural patterns into rural areas borrowed from Western countries, which led to the loss of authenticity of the area.

CONCLUSIONS

As a complementary solution to agricultural activities, agritourism can directly support the social and economic development of an area.

„Thus, agritourism was an opportunity for locals who are willing to try other activities to ensure their livelihood by receiving tourists in their homes” [1].

It can also be a good business for those living in big cities who want to give up stressful life in favor of the quiet rural environment. For those who love nature, art and peasant culture, agrotourism can provide services of great variety and uniqueness.

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