

## ANALYSIS OF AGRITOURISM AND RURAL TOURISM SITUATION IN THE NORTH EAST OF ROMANIA

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### *Abstract*

*In Romania, rural tourism and agro-tourism were practiced in an unorganized way until 1989, as tourists sought a cheaper accommodation compared to the standard accommodation units. Since 1989, gamma services have been improved, so more homes for locals have been opened for tourists. Hence the need for an organization of accommodation, homologation and classification, and the first forms of organized rural tourism appeared in the Rucăr-Bran area, with the establishment of ANTREC, which was then developed at national level. As a result of these changes, as well as the tendency to improve and modernize the tourist activities carried out in rural areas, rural tourism and agrotourism have started to occupy an important place in the Romanian tourist offer, representing for the eager ones an attractive alternative in view leisure time. As a result of the development of legislation, rural tourism and agritourism have seen a significant development, increasingly aligning with European standards in this area. In this paper we propose to analyze the situation of the tourist and agro-touristic pensions situated in the largest development region in Romania, the North East Region, which has a rich history and tradition and whose tourism development could contribute to the economic growth of the area, representing at the same time a means of promoting Romania and its rich traditions.*

**Key words:** agritourism, rural tourism, rural development

### INTRODUCTION

Romania benefits from an exceptional tourist potential where two essential components are distinguished: the natural component represented by spectacular landscapes, favorable climatic conditions, varied relief, abundance of natural factors of cleanliness and the anthropic component represented by many monuments and objectives of secular art or religious museums and museum collections, ethnography and folklore elements of great beauty and originality, etc [1]. All these are attractive elements that can contribute to the achievement of the two desires that define rural tourism, namely, the production and valorisation of their own production through agro-tourism, respectively the promotion of traditional values.

Taking into account the new trend related to tourists' preferences to nature, the consumption of natural products, we consider that this type of tourism can be developed at

present and can be a development option for rural areas.

This is also found in the definition of rural tourism, being a type of tourist services practiced in rural areas and a concept that includes the organized tourism activity conducted by the local population, based on a close connection with the natural, natural and human environment [2]. It became, in the '90s, "the major branch of the tourism industry in Romania, reaching the similar phenomenon from other European countries" [5].

Agrotourism, as a particular form of rural tourism, is limited to the peasant household to the value of the natural environment, the accommodation offer and agro-tourism services, with a narrower offer than rural tourism [4].

Although agritourism and rural tourism are two concepts that identify up to a certain level, each being complemented and outlined by different elements of classification, such

as: inputs, outputs, transformation activities and the external environment [3].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Through the present paper we propose an analysis of the situation of rural tourism and agrotourism in the North - East region of Romania. The study looked at the evolution of the accommodation capacities found in the tourist and agro-tourist pensions related to the analyzed area. In this respect the statistical data that are found in the surveys carried out by the National Statistics Institute in Romania, as well as in the surveys of the Romanian Ministry of Tourism, have been analyzed. Various indicators such as: "number of accommodation places", "number of tourists - total", "number of foreign tourists", "length of stay - total", "duration of stay for foreign tourists", "number of pensions tourism and agritourism ". The methods underlying the study presupposed the calculation of the indicators as well as the interpretation of the results, as well as the analysis of the present situation, on the basis of which conclusions or suggestions were made that would lead to the improvement of the existing situation [6].

We consider that the analysis and interpretation of the indicators will contribute to the orientation of the actors involved in the management of the tourism activity in formulating the development strategies of agritourism and rural tourism in the North-East region of Romania.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From an administrative point of view, Romania is divided into eight development regions, among them the North East Region being the largest, and part of the oldest historical region of Moldova. The North East Region consists of six counties (Bacau, Botosani, Iasi, Neamt, Suceava, Vaslui), with a surface of 36,850 sq. Km (which represents 15.46% of Romania's surface), with a population of 3,734,546 inhabitants. From this point of view, the region ranks first among the eight regions of Romania (17.27%

of the population's population live in terms of population).

Geographically, the North-East region borders with Ukraine in the North, with Galati and Vrancea counties in the South, with the Republic of Moldova in the East and with the counties of Maramures, Bistrita-Nasaud, Mures, Harghita and Covasna in the West.

This area is characterized by the fact that it benefits from a harmonious combination of the relief forms, so that the mountains represent 30%, the subcarpathian relief is 30% and the 40%. The plains represent more than 70% of the surface belonging to the counties of Iasi, Botosani and Vaslui. In the Siret and Trotus basin lies in the eastern half of Romania, the county of Bacau, which has its important cities Targu Ocna and Moinești. These cities have grown as a result of having rich natural resources (salt mountains). Tourist resort Slanic Moldova has curative natural waters, which are rich in salts.

Botosani is the county located in the northeastern part of Romania, being among the Siret and Prut rivers, being recognized by the personalities of the Romanian culture that have come from here: George Enescu, Mihai Eminescu, Nicolae Iorga, etc.

Iasi is the county located in the central-eastern part of Moldova, between the middle basin of the Prut River and the Siret River. The largest city is Iasi, which was the historical capital of Moldova and has 307,377 inhabitants. It is an important university center with 7 higher education institutions. Also in Iasi there is the most important orthodox cult site in Romania, the Metropolitan Cathedral.

Neamt is the county located in the northern central area of Moldova, being part of the Bistrita basin, the Siret basin and the Moldavian basin. The largest city is Piatra-Neamt, which is located near the Ceahlau massif and was historically certified in 1392. It is considered to be an "Olimp of Moldova", being one of the most important industrial objectives, but also tourist.

Suceava County is located in the northern part of Moldova, located in the upper part of the Siret and Bistrita basins, where some of the most beautiful churches are found, 11 of

which are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Vaslui is the county that is in the eastern part of Romania. It is located in the Middle Barlad area, with a rich history, but not many monuments. Among the natural riches are the vineyards, being also known for the cognacs obtained from the wine and which have a very good quality.



Fig. 1. North-East Region, Romania  
 Source: INSSE.

As we can see, the North-East Region is remarkable because it has many developmental opportunities in terms of rural tourism, and especially of agritourism, given that its rural areas have both a picturesque natural setting, more slightly polluted and offering tourists multiple options to recreate, but which also has potential from a cultural and historical point of view. The North-East Region has an impressive number of churches, monasteries (Varatec, Voronet, Putna, Agapia, Sucevita, Moldovita, etc.), memorial houses and mansions, museums, inns or courtyards. Many of the cult objectives are unique in the world due to their beauty. In these rural areas there are many traditions and traditions, as well as handicrafts or customs, which materialize in works of art (ceramics, curtains, hand-woven rugs, fabrics, masks, folk instruments).

In the North-East Region the accommodation capacity in 2016 was 28,763 thousand seats, the largest share being owned by Suceava County with almost 37% of the total, followed by Neamt County with 24% and the counties of Bacau and Iasi close 16%.

Regarding the average length of stay, it was 1.94 nights / tourist, registering the lowest value in recent years. It was caused by the diminishing of long stays in the region, evidencing a shift to a weekend, occasional or transit tour. At the same time, however, the number of foreign nights / tourists was 2.18. Taking into account the existing tourism potential, we consider that this level is inferior to the existing possibilities. The number of tourists' arrivals at the level of the region was 1,084,045, of which the share of foreign tourists was almost 13%.

Table 1. Situation of accommodation capacity and tourist activity in the North - East Region, at the level of 2016

County	Accommodation capacity (thousands of places - days)	Arrivals (no persons)	Of which foreign tourists	Average length of stay	Of which foreign tourists
Bacau	4,686	134,550	13,196	2.53	3.11
Botosani	1,118	43,972	1,957	1.77	2.53
Iasi	4,284	298,657	50,800	1.82	2.12
Neamt	7,072	224,105	14,220	1.91	1.82
Suceava	10,610	342,710	51,750	2.22	1.64
Vaslui	993	40,051	3,196	1.43	1.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,763</b>	<b>1,084,045</b>	<b>135,119</b>	<b>1.94</b>	<b>2.18</b>

Source: Data processing from the TEMPO database - online, INS [8].

Analyzing the situation of the tourist and agrotourist pensions existing in the area there is a number of 869 boarding houses. The largest number is found in Suceava County, followed by Neamt and Bacau counties. A smaller number is found in the counties of Iasi, Vaslui and Botasani.

Table 2. The situation of tourist pensions on 31.12.2017

Category	Bacau	Botosani	Iasi	Neamt	Suceava	Vaslui	The region N-E
Tourist guesthouses	98	13	53	185	342	15	<b>706</b>
Agrotourist hostels	6	4	11	29	101	5	<b>156</b>
Tourist stops			2	5			<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>869</b>

Source: Data processing from the Ministry of Tourism database (www.tourism.gov.ro) [7]

As a result, the largest share of hostel accommodation units in the North East region is owned by Suceava County with 51%, Neamt county by 25%, Bacau county by 12%,

Iasi county by 8% and Botasani and Vaslui counties by 2% of total.

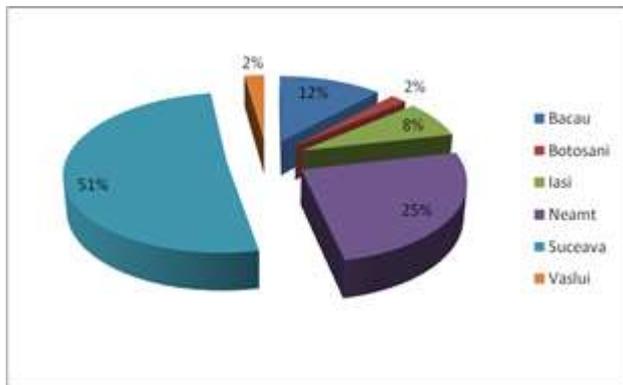


Fig.2. Breakdown by counties, accommodation units  
 Source: Data processing from the Ministry of Tourism database (www.turism.gov.ro) [7].

It is also noted that of the total of 869 accommodation units 81% are tourist hostels, 18% agritourist hostels and 1% tourist stops.

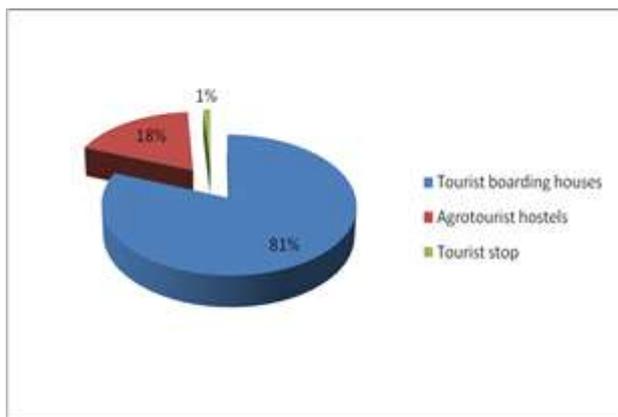


Fig.3. Structure of accommodation units  
 Source: Data processing from the Ministry of Tourism database (www.turism.gov.ro) [7].

In Romania, tourist and agritourist pensions are classified by number of flowers. Thus, the units can have 1 flower, 2 flowers, 3 flowers, 4 flowers or 5 flowers.

Table 3. The classification of tourist boarding houses on 31.12.2017

Category	Bacau	Botosani	Iasi	Neamt	Suceava	Vaslui	Area N-E Total
1 flower	4		2	5	6	3	20
2 flower	32	3	10	60	112	7	224
3 flower	61	10	46	131	233	9	490
4 flower	7	4	8	22	86	1	128
5 flower				1	6		7
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>869</b>

Source: Data processing from the Ministry of Tourism database (www.turism.gov.ro) [7].

From the analysis of the situation of the tourist and agritourist pensions, according to their classification there are 56% of the accommodation units classified with 3 flowers, 26% classified with 2 flowers, 15% classified with 4 flowers, 2% units classified with 1 flower and 1% units with 5 flowers. (Figure 4).

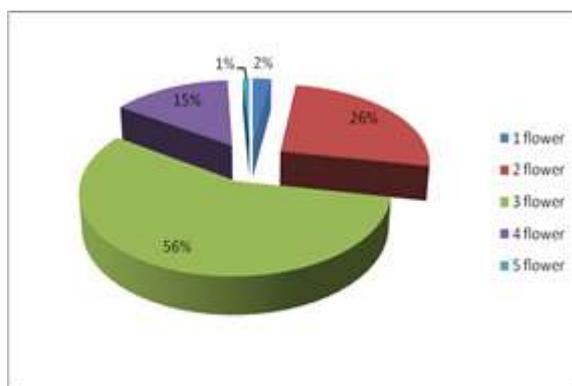


Fig.4. Distribution of accommodation units in relation to their classification  
 Source: Data processing from the Ministry of Tourism database (www.turism.gov.ro) [7].

It is found that at the level of Suceava county, best represented as number of boarding houses, the share of pensions classified with 3 flowers is 53%, out of the total of 443 accommodation units. Pensions with 2 or 4 flowers hold 25%, respectively 19% of the total number of accommodation units.

At the level of Neamt County of the total of 219 guesthouses, 60% are classified with 3 flowers, 27% with 2 flowers, 10% with 4 flowers and 2% with 1 flower, and at the Bacau county out of the total of 104 pensions 59% with 3 flowers, 31% with 2 flowers, 7% with 4 flowers and 2% with 1 flower.

At the level of Iasi County, out of a total of 66 guesthouses, 70% are classified with 3 flowers, 15% with 2 flowers, 12% with 4 flowers and 3% with 1 flower. The other 2 counties, Botasani and Vaslui, are less represented by the number of tourist accommodation units.

Given that many homeowners who can be converted into tourist boarding houses are skeptical about opening a business because of the legislative and fiscal "desis" that they need to interact with, we felt fit to make a presentation of the form the organization that

the owners have chosen for the opening of their business. It is worth mentioning that individual enterprises, family businesses, authorized individuals are united with no legal personality, and the tax they pay is 10% of net income or income from January 2018, compared to 16% was paid until December 31, 2017. At this tax rate, self-employed individuals also pay social security contributions of 25% of net income earned, 10% health insurance contribution, insurance contribution for work 2.25%, if it achieves cumulative incomes that are at least equal to 12 gross minimum wages per country. There is also a 1% insurance option for holidays and social security indemnities, and the calculation base can not be lower than the country's gross minimum wage.

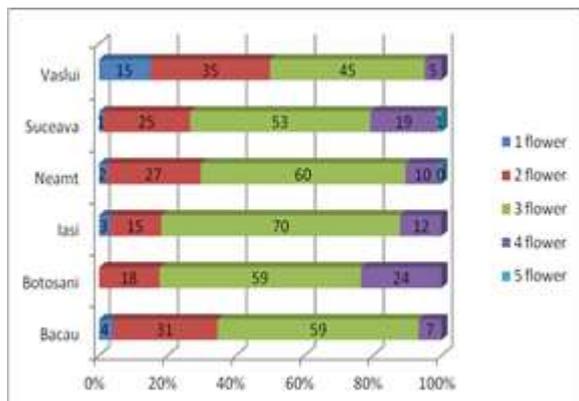


Fig. 5. Share of tourist pensions, after classification  
 Source: Data processing from the Ministry of Tourism database (www.tourism.gov.ro) [7].

Table 4. The situation of the tourist pensions, according to the form of organization, on 31.12.2017

Category	Bacau	Botosani	Iasi	Neamt	Suceava	Vaslui	N-E Zone
Individual enterprise	19	3	10	52	1	5	240
Authorized person (PFA)	5		5	22	44		76
Associations and foundations			1	3	6		10
Limited liability company (SRL) Corporation (SA)	76	1	4	14	23	15	527
Autonomous administration				2	7		9
Museu	4				3		3
							4
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>869</b>

Source: Data processing from the Ministry of Tourism database (www.tourism.gov.ro) [7].

Regarding the other forms of organization (limited liability company, joint-stock

company), according to the turnover, they pay either a turnover tax of 1% (if the turnover is less than 1 million Euros) or the specific tax for those businesses in tourism with a turnover of more than 1 million Euros.

Thus, out of the total of 869 tourist and agrotourist boarding houses, 61% are companies with limited liability, 27% are individual enterprises, 8% are authorized natural persons, while other forms of organization hold less than 1%.

Table 5. Festivals and artistic events

County	Events
Bacau	The Plateau Festival - Oituz; Sanzii Holiday - Bacau Winter Festival of Bacau - Bacau County International Nava Art Camp - Berzunti International Fine Art Festival - Tescani
Botosani	Flamengo Mountain - Flamanzii The feasts of the forest - Vorona The Humor Festival - Botosani
Iasi	National Festival "Rose from Moldova" - Strunga Festival "Winter customs and customs" - Iasi; The fair of the craftsmen "Cucuteni 5000" - Iasi; Flower Festival of Cherry - Iasi
Neamt	International Folklore Festival "Ceahlraul" - Neamt; Parade of customs and traditions of the New Year - Targu Neamt Serbarile sneezing -Neamt Hanus Festival - Hanul Ancuteii; Festival of Fruits - Piatra Neamt Serbian Camping "Silver Forest" -Agapia Bear Festival - Piatra Neamt Fair of Crafts and Tourism - Neamt Theater Festival from Piatra - Neamt Days "Ion Creanga" - Targu Neamt
Suceava	International Folklore Festival "Arcanul" Mount Forasti National Festival of Ovalor Incondeiate - Ciocanesti Folk Festival of Acacia - Arbore The Flowers Festival of Bucovina - Vatra Moldovitei National Fair of Olari Crafts - Peacock Eye - Radauti "Flowers of Dorna" Festival - Poiana Stampei "La hora satului" Festival - Fundu Moldovei The Fair of Folk Craftsmen - Falticeni International Folklore Festival "Bucovina Meetings" - Campulung Moldovenesc National Trout Festival - Ciocanesti Festival of fruits and mushrooms - Sucevita Celebrating the Hrib - Customs Autumn Poienarilor - Poiana Stampei
Vaslui	International Festival " Mount of the Elders " Village Celebration on the Racovei Valley The Vaslui flute Flower Festival on Prut - Vetrisoara The humor festival - Vaslui

Source: Own results.

The analysis shows that although the North-East region is quite well represented in terms of the number of tourist and agrotourist pensions existing at the level of Romania, there is still potential for development in this area, especially due to the multiple

possibilities of capitalizing on the local potential.

In the area there are many artistic events and traditional folk celebrations organized throughout the year that bring to the attention of the public the living, authentic spirit of the region, through the popular harbor, songs and dances, ancient customs (Table 5).

The leisure offer in rural tourism and agritourism is well represented in the counties of the North-East region and involves the organization of pedestrian hikes, cycling, riding, fishing and hunting, visits to tents, tasting products specific to peasant cuisine, organizing festivals geographic areas specific to trout, salsa, cheese, wine, etc.

A successful example is the "National Trout Festival" that takes place in the commune of Ciocanesti, Suceava county, where activities such as: rafting, traditional occupation in the area, as well as extreme sports demonstrations, rafting, bow, fishing competitions, gastronomy, but also parades of the popular harbour, riders, carts.

Another example is the "Plateau Festival", organized by ANTREC Branch in Bacau in various rural areas of the county, which combines the traditional Moldovan gastronomic presentation, ecological products and traditional handicraft art with folk performances and parades of the popular harbor.

Eco-tourism can also be developed in the North-East Region, which owns over 1,500 ha of forest, fauna and flora reserves, as well as monuments of nature specific to the mountain sector.

## CONCLUSIONS

The North-East Region is one of Romania's best-represented areas for rural tourism and agritourism. The advantages of these forms of tourism are low costs compared to other forms of vacation, the originality of travel, the absence of agglomeration, intimacy, the stimulation of the economy of rural areas, the creation of new jobs, especially for women, the incomes from using the surplus of agricultural products, traditional gastronomy,

environmental protection and preservation of traditions.

These forms of tourism militate for the development of the Romanian rural tourism, for encouraging the ecological preservation and preserving the traditional Romanian culture and which, through a good relationship with small rural entrepreneurs, can promote a quality rural tourism that highlights the traditional characteristics of the each ethnographic region

Although well represented, tourism and agritourism can be further developed, but they also face numerous problems that hinder their development.

One of the problems faced by those arriving by plane in the North-East Region is that the three airports in the region do not benefit from public transport lines connecting the airport and the city center of which they belong.

Another issue related to the tourism promotion is related to the organized public transport to the important tourist attractions, and in the situation where it exists, there is not enough promotion of the tourist objectives. Road infrastructure, railways are another aspect that does not come to support tourists and to encourage travel in this area.

However, we think that important steps have been taken in this directive and that if the Romanian tourist pensions would benefit from the appropriate promotion, then the number of tourists, both Romanians and foreigners, would increase.

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