

INTROSPECTION IN DYNAMICS OF AGRITOURISM IN ROMANIA DURING 2016-2018

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Abstract

In last few years agritourism sector in Romania showed a constant expansion and number of arrivals in agritourist accommodation units exceeded for the first time 1 million in 2018. Romanians still represent majority of customers accounting for more than 90% of tourists while foreigners accounted for only around 8%. Majority of foreign tourist were from EU countries by nationality were Hungarians, Germans, French, Polish and Italians. Data indicate that largest number of foreigners visited farms from macroregion I of development which corresponds to Transylvania and Crișana historical areas. Within this macroregion, Romanians preferred agritourist accommodations from county Brașov while foreign tourists showed preference for the ones from Harghita and Sibiu. Five counties display consistent positive trend between studied interval both for native and foreign tourists: Bihor, Cluj, Alba, Harghita and Covasna. Diversification of recreational and leisure possibilities provided on farms as well as outsourcing digital advertising could enhance the success of this enterprise.

Key words: holiday, traditional, foreigners, culture, advertising

INTRODUCTION

In European Union, both tourism infrastructures in rural areas as well as other gainful activities of farmers are indicators of rural development [2]. This is because activity diversification improves long-term economic viability of rural communities which EU aims to sustain [8, 9]. Agritourism operates as commercial touristic enterprise on farms by offering accommodation, meals and a range of leisure activities [4]. At functional level, agritourism is a link between urban and rural environment [10] through which biodiversity and conservation incentives can meet the economic and social ones [1, 7, 8]. The entire experience on farm provided to tourists is designed as a complex one. Besides contact with nature, this type of tourism can be combined with cultural tourism which creates a meaningful context and gives authenticity to the whole experience [8]. Motivation of urban dwellers to engage in agritourism is multi-layered. People feel drawn to agritourism from desire to get in contact with nature and agriculture, perceived as a natural and healthy

activity. In agritouristic activity guests can take part at usual activities in farm and community, traditional crafts, observe local customs, as well as enjoy local and regional authentic cuisine and food products [7, 10]. Due to cultural aspect, agritourism poses huge potential to expand towards attracting more and more people who don't have links with rural space. To achieve success entrepreneurs have first to know the dynamics of tourists and assess the market trends. Aim of this study was to gain insight into agritourism consumer dynamics in Romania, which could prove useful in optimising services offer. Emphasis is placed on macroregion I of development which corresponds to Transylvania and Crișana historical region, due to high potential agritourism has in these areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Statistical data was retrieved from Romanian National Institute of Statistics [5], reports entitled: Frequency of tourist reception structures with accommodation functions for

2016, 2017 and 2018. Data used for this study were: number of arrivals for foreigners and Romanians checking-in agritouristic units from each macroregion of Romania, as well as for twelve counties from macroregion I; total number of tourists in agritourism accommodation structures at national level by country of origin for same time interval.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

By nationality, during 2016-2018 over 90% of tourists were Romanians, with a small fluctuation from one year to another. Foreigners accounted for 7.72% of tourists in 2016, of 8.38% in 2017 and of 7.35% in 2018 [5]. By examining the ratio Romanians to foreigners' arrivals for each of the four macroregions of development from Romania can be observed some interesting trends (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Ratio Romanian/foreigner tourists arrivals in agrotouristic accommodation structures during 2016-2018.

Source: [5].

By nationality group, top ten most frequent tourists in Romania during 2016-2018 named in descending order were: Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, French, Polish, Italians, Israeli, British, Spanish and Americans (Fig. 2).

Important proportion of foreign tourists visited tourist establishments from macroregion I corresponding to Transylvania and Crişana historical regions with average arrivals ratio of roughly one foreign tourist for every 9 Romanian tourists. This one is followed by macroregion IV which corresponds to Banat and Oltenia historical regions for which was registered an average ratio of one foreign tourist to every 13 Romanian tourists.

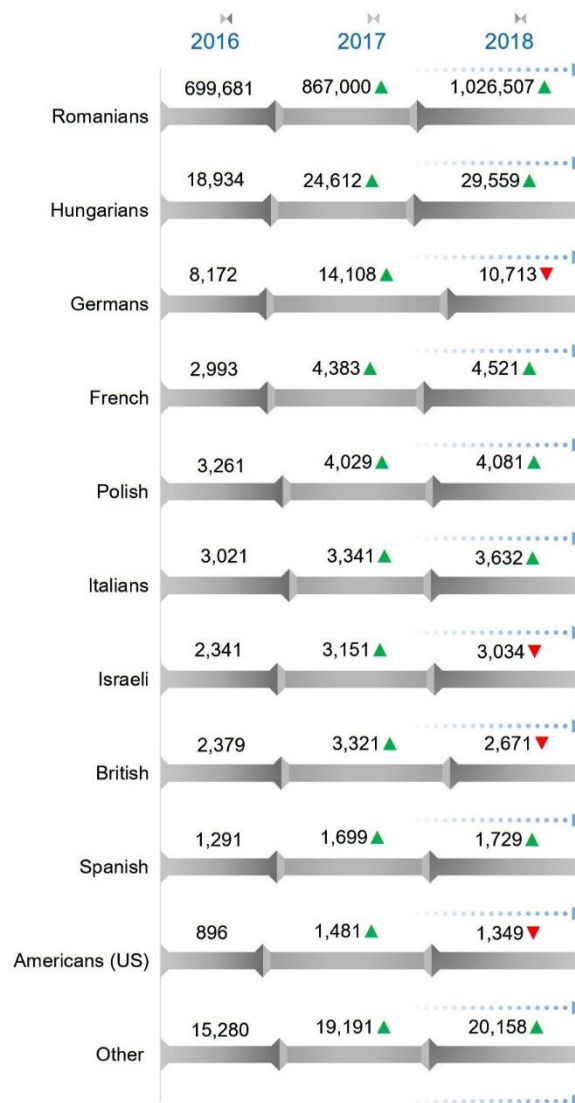


Fig. 2. Nationality profile of tourists in agrotouristic accommodation structures from Romania between 2016-2018.

Source: [5].

For the other two macroregions, average arrivals ratio for interval 2016-2018 was higher, of one foreign tourist to >20 Romanian tourists (Fig. 1). This suggests

foreigner's preference for agritouristic establishments from macroregions I and II. In 2016-2017 interval, all of top ten nationality groups of tourists presented a positive trend, while between 2017-2018 four of them show a decreasing trend. Thus, in 2018 were less German, Israeli, British and American tourists in Romania compared to 2017. On the other hand, in 2018 the number of Romanian tourists exceeded 1 million at national level (Fig. 2). This could be due to introduction of holiday vouchers for public

employees starting with 2018. Holiday vouchers are a new government measure introduced in 2018 to stimulate local tourism and because of this can be used only in Romania.

Average stay was 1.9 nights for Romanians and 2.0 – 2.2 for foreigners [5].

In macroregion I of development, the Romanian tourists versus foreign ones show different preference for county of choice (Fig. 2, 3).

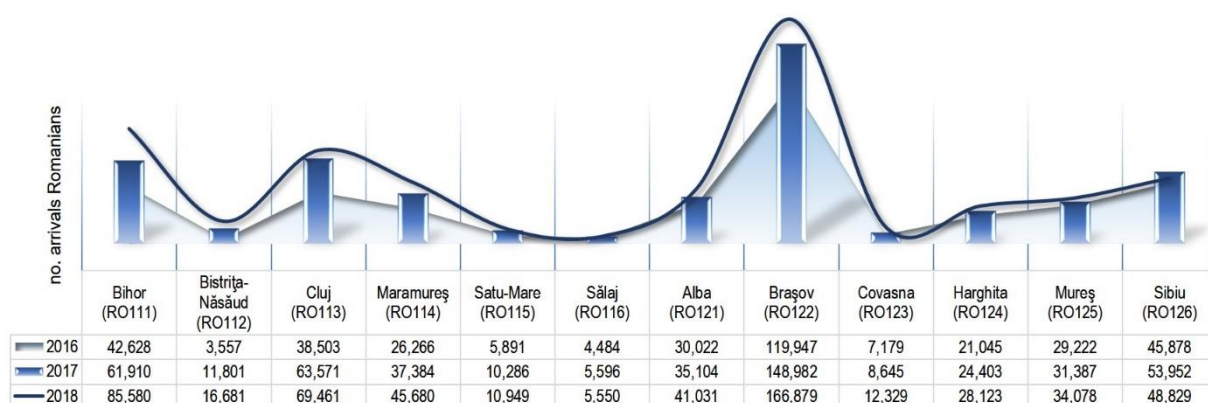


Fig. 3. Dynamics for number of Romanian tourists in agrotouristic accommodation structures from 12 counties of Macroregion I of development, for the interval 2016-2018, Source: [5].

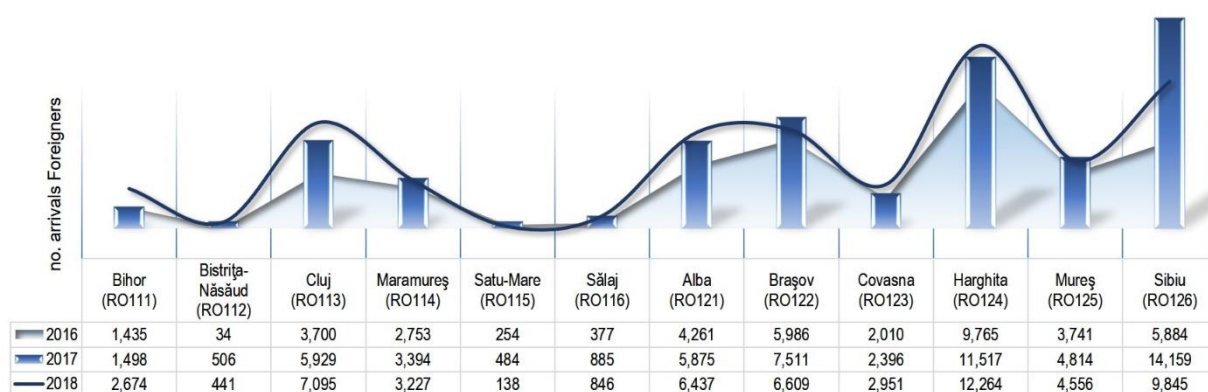


Fig. 4. Dynamics for number of foreign tourists in agrotouristic accommodation structures from 12 counties of Macroregion I of development, for the interval 2016-2018, Source: [5].

As observed in Fig. 3, between 2016-2018 the preferred county by Romanian tourists was Brașov. As for agritourism establishments from other counties, second most visited by Romanians were the ones from Sibiu in 2016, Cluj in 2017 and Bihor in 2018. Positive increase in number of arrivals followed by negative trend was observed for Sibiu county

which showed 9.49% decrease of Romanian tourists check-ins in 2018 compared to 2017 and Sălaj county with 0.82% decrease in 2018 compared to 2017. All the other 10 counties showed positive trend of Romanian tourists arrivals between 2016-2018. Some noticeable increase was registered for counties Bistrița-Năsăud, Bihor, Maramureș and Covasna. The

most constant trend was found for number of arrivals in counties of Alba and Harghita (Fig. 3). Further analysis of trend between 2016-2018 across counties from macroregion I, revealed that foreign tourists preferred county of Harghita in 2016 and 2018 and Sibiu in 2017. Second most visited county by foreign tourists were Braşov and Sibiu in 2016, Harghita and Braşov in 2017 and Sibiu and Cluj in 2018. Increase of foreigner's arrivals in agritourism establishments in 2017 compared to 2016 followed by decrease in 2018 compared to 2017 was observed for none less than 7 counties. The steepest increase followed by steep decrease was registered for counties of Bistriţa-Năsăud, Sibiu and Satu-Mare. Other counties which showed decrease in number of foreign tourists arrivals during 2018 compared to 2017 were Maramureş, Sălaj, Braşov and Mureş. Five counties maintain a positive growing trend between 2016-2018 for number of foreigners arriving in tourist accommodation units: Bihor, Cluj, Alba, Harghita and with most constant growth: Covasna.

Overall it was observed that regarding the number of arrivals, foreign tourists have a more fluctuating trend compared to Romanians. In addition, preference for a certain county can show slight variation from one year to another. By comparison, based on number of arrivals, the increase of Romanian tourists maintains a positive trend with few exceptions, and consist the bulk of agritourism consumers. Abundance of foreigners in certain counties can exercise influence over services portfolio offered in certain counties. Higher number of foreign tourists implies that staff must have communication skills in other languages in order to ensure optimum guest-host interaction. In order to overcome unstable market trends tourist accommodation providers could engage third parties for advertising offers abroad as well as for booking services. Some authors remarked that demand for experiencing the rural world through wine and food tours, tasting and cooking courses shows an increase [10]. Thus, autochthonous agritourism providers should

be prepared to expand services range in order to secure constant flow of guests by offering such activities. In current context, success of agritourism enterprise relies heavily on the owners - consisting most often by a handful of family members who run the farm and the accommodation unit. But complex market structure and constant changes can pose considerable strain on this small-business model. Nowadays, the owner of an agritourism enterprise needs to be equipped with vision and flexibility. As mentioned in previous works, farmer has to be aware of trends and find means to adapt to new consumer preferences, to build a strategy in order to overcome pressure from competition and make sustained efforts to increase quality and diversify services, all this while managing farming activity as well [4]. In this light, the role of education provided by agronomic institutions, training centres and entrepreneurship programs, might prove pivotal in assisting future and current farmers to remain relevant on the market. Possibilities to increase training level of staff keep farmers informed and instruct them on possibilities for marketing on-farm leisure services would ensure a more sustainable rural development, well-connected to international context in which they operate. Because urban-rural linkages are foreseen to promote sustainable development within EU [3] the role agritourism could play is worth studying as well. Agritourism is an economic activity that contributes to regional development and to overall economic growth [6], but its success depends on a set of factors which remain to be more clearly defined. In Romania, geographical location as well as proximity to mass touristic attractions has influence over density of agritourism enterprises in given regions [4] suggesting the existence of suitability hot spots conditioned by consumer behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

Agritourism can serve as transition path from agrarian to service-based economy in rural space. It can also act as instrument for

achieving rural development and economic stability of small family farms which lack other options to increase their income.

In Romania, large majority of agritourism consumers are comprised by Romanians which in the case of macroregion I, display preference for county of Braşov. Most frequent foreign tourists are from Hungary and Germany and they exhibit preference for counties Harghita and Sibiu.

Agronomic education institutions could improve their curricula and provide future farmers with more ideas and options for diversification of activities including how to successfully manage an agritourism activity on their farms.

V., Streifeneder, T. (eds.), FrancoAngeli Milano, p. 242.

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