

ANALYSIS OF THE INDICATORS CHARACTERIZING THE ACTIVITY OF RURAL TOURISM AND AGRITOURISM IN VÂLCEA COUNTY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TOTAL QUALITY

Jenica CĂLINA, Aurel CĂLINA

University of Craiova, Faculty of Agronomy, 19 Libertatii Street, Craiova, Romania,
E-mails: jeni_calina@yahoo.com, aurelcalina@yahoo.com

Corresponding author: aurelcalina@yahoo.com

Abstract

The paper carried out a relevant, realistic and clear image on the current situation of rural tourism and agrotourism in terms of defining quality indicators and service offering to tourists visiting Valcea County. To achieve this, ten representative indicators were studied, based on which a system of quantification of the level of total quality management (TQM) was built, of the rural tourism activities carried out in this county. From the analysis and interpretation of the data and results obtained, it was concluded that the level of supply and services provided to tourists in terms of total quality is average, this is mainly due to low tourism supply, lack of a complete inventory of tourism resources, the partial capitalization of the existing resources, the lack of initiative and a tourism development strategy adapted to the territorial reality. Finally, it was concluded that the main directions for the development of rural tourism in Valcea County will have to aim at increasing the quality of tourist services, diversifying the tourist offer and more aggressively promoting the county as a tourist destination. The implementation of the principles of total quality management (TQM) should in the future determine all tourist reception structures to give more importance to customer expectations, which will lead to increasing their competitiveness in the domestic and foreign tourism market.

Key words: agrotourism, quality, management, rural tourism, tourist resources

INTRODUCTION

As is well known, rural tourism and agrotourism drive the economic development of rural areas, because they create added value, being thus likely to participate in achieving the social goal of improving the physical and mental well-being of the population [4, 22]. Due to tourism, even declining rural or industrial regions have managed to find activity that has the power to recycle devalued objects and give them new meanings and uses [14, 6, 20]. However, it has been found that where tourism development has been influenced by Fordist principles of growth-based development, it has had negative effects, leading to the degradation of the environment and resources that favor tourism. [16, 26, 31]. This is the case of resorts that have promoted mass tourism in attractive but ecologically fragile places. They are currently going through a crisis of adaptation to new tourism practices and modern concepts of development, based on sustainable development [10, 18, 19, 32].

In the vision of sustainable development, the Romanian rural tourism requires a complex approach, which includes both the actual tourist activity (accommodation, boarding house, tourist and leisure programs), and the agricultural activity of obtaining the products necessary for tourist consumption and their processing in households [1, 3, 24]. Rural tourism and agrotourism are economic activities that, in the last two decades, have seen a wide development with the growing desire of tourists to escape from crowded and polluted cities and to spend their holidays in rural areas unchanged from a natural and anthropic point of view. [5, 7, 12].

Rural tourism with the specific form of agrotourism as found in studies can economically revitalize villages, can contribute to infrastructure modernization, can attract different investors, if the inhabitants of rural areas adopt a favorable attitude, which is correctly received by tourists who prefer this type of tourism, and whether local authorities are sufficiently involved in the development of this profitable economic activity. There

will be positive influences on the environment, agriculture, transport, construction, food and processing industries, services in various fields [7, 15, 28].

The paper started from the premise that local resources are an important engine of local economy development. In Vâlcea County the tourist potential is extremely rich and diversified and the maximum use of natural, economic and human resources can be achieved by involving local communities in the tourism sector, by supporting initiative groups for developing and promoting the local tourist offer, to protect the environment and cultural goods [2, 6, 9]. In order for the capitalization action to be efficient, it is necessary to know all the resources with existing tourist potential in the territory and to determine their tourist value, in this county being a series of resources, not promoted at their true value and known only by locals [9, 30]. For this, a tool for quantifying the tourist value must be built, which aims to determine the territorial concentration of tourist resources, based on the application of the principles of total quality in agrotourism and rural tourism in the studied county [8, 10, 27].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order for the capitalization action to be efficient, it is necessary to know all the resources with existing tourist potential at the level of the territory and to determine their tourist value. In this paper we could not focus much on this study, because we would have needed a much larger space for presentation than that allocated to such a paper. Even if in the study region there are a series of resources with tourist potential, not promoted and known only by locals, but they do not intuit their tourist value, we considered that from this point of view there is enough information so that we can get an image of overall, on the current situation of the natural and anthropic tourist potential of Vâlcea County. The study aims to determine the territorial concentration of tourist resources, allowing the further development of territorial tourism systems that allow optimal use of these resources, based on the principles applied in total quality

management (TQM) [11, 13], which will ensure future growth the quality of rural tourism products and services in this county.

In order to obtain relevant data on the physical and economic components of rural tourism in the researched area, data was collected from all rural tourism associations in the county, with the most accurate being that from the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (A.N.T.R.E.C), from owners, employees and tourists [2, 3, 33,17]. Also, in order to form a real picture about the current situation of rural tourism from all points of view (natural, economic and social), many publications about the county were studied (monographs, works of county and local authorities, web pages, etc.), the normative acts that regulate the development of the activity at local and national level, as well as many specialized studies published at national and international level [7, 8, 12, 20, 22, 30, see references]. From a methodological point of view, in this research were used various statistical methods and procedures, among which the most important ones are: Index and indicators method, monograph procedure, statistical report method, scalar method, and also records, and methods utilized by [7, 23, 29].

In order to make a comparative analysis, the following system of specific indicators was used regarding tourism offer: accommodation capacity in terms of the number of places, and tourism demand: number of arrivals at the guesthouse, number of overnight stays at the guesthouse. Also, other indicators reflecting the quality of the tourist activity and of the tourist circulation were taken into consideration [7, 8,13, 17]. These indicators helped form a clear image of the quality in the rural tourism activity in Vâlcea County.

The other methods such as statistical monographs, selective surveys, consultation of statistical reports and the method of direct and occasional registration were applied by consulting leaflets, tourist guides, magazines, etc., and conducting interviews / discussions with all actors involved in this complex and beautiful, the activity rural tourism in Vâlcea County [3, 9, 21, 30, 33]. Following these discussions and interviews, a complete and

well-documented study on the current stage of development of the rural tourism activity in terms of the application of total quality management took shape and the ability to formulate a series of principles and directions, which should be followed in the future by the development of tourism in general, in the researched area [7, 8, 13].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Vâlcea County has an enormous tourist potential, now in a process of resuscitation. Due to its geographical location, Vâlcea benefits from a great variety of landforms: mountains, sub-Carpathian hills, plateaus, meadows with the appearance of plains, gorges and depressions, as well as a rich and diverse flora and fauna [25]. In addition to the rich natural tourist potential, Vâlcea County also has an anthropic nature that brings together a wide range of major objectives: historical tourist objectives; religious tourist attractions; cultural tourist objectives; tourist buildings proper; anthropic activities with tourist functions [2, 9, 30]. This category includes a wide range of constructions and material evidence from millennia and centuries past. They address exclusively cultural tourism, recreation through knowledge, having at the same time an important educational function. In Vâlcea County, the elements of material and spiritual culture have created a distinct personality, which greatly increases its tourist value [2, 9, 30].

From the study of the area it was observed that the tourist offer of the county is reduced in comparison with the rich natural and anthropic tourist potential held with other tourist regions in Romania. In addition, a series of resources that, through tourism capitalization, could attract tourists to Vâlcea County and would represent a source of income for it is degraded due to the lack of capitalization initiatives.

In order to determine to what extent the tourist potential of the existing resources in Vâlcea County can be capitalized, we resorted to building a system for assessing their tourist value, which has the role of evaluating not

only the quantitative aspects of tourist resources, but also qualitative.

Based on the study, the data obtained, were calculated and interpreted the statistical indicators mentioned in the methodology, which characterizes the activity of rural tourism and agrotourism in Vâlcea County, from the perspective of total quality. The level and dynamics of the tourists arriving in the rural tourist boarding houses in the county were highlighted. More than half of the existing communes in Vâlcea County have tourist potential, presenting a significant degree of tourist attractiveness, making it opportune to develop rural tourism. However, only 3.5% of all rural localities have tourist pensions.

Rural tourist pensions in Vâlcea County

Until December 31, 2019, Vâlcea County had 78 rural localities in which 79 rural tourist pensions and 78 agrotourism pensions were identified, of which only a small part of them are classified (Figure 1). The refusal of the classification of these pensions by the owners leads to the realization of an unfair competition with the classified pensions and induces certain doubts regarding the quality of the tourist services provided and implicitly of the rural tourist product offered.

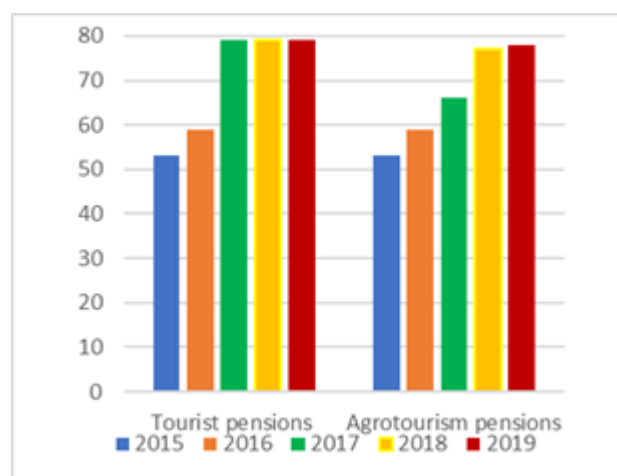


Fig. 1. The evolution of rural tourist boarding houses with accommodation functions in Vâlcea County
Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

The trend of increasing the number of rural tourist pensions in Vâlcea County in the period 2015-2019 is highlighted. This is the result of the development of rural tourism in

general, the preferences of potential tourists being oriented towards diverse, recreational activities, carried out in a less polluted space. This is due to the fact that most of them were developed on the already existing homes of entrepreneurs. Pensions classified in higher comfort categories (4 and 5 stars/daisies) are in very small numbers due to the low financial strength of those who want to invest in this field.

Accommodation capacity in rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County

In the period 2015-2019 there was a continuous growth in the existing accommodation capacity as a result of the increase in the number of rural tourist guesthouses in the county (Table 1).

In the tourist pensions in the county, the accommodation capacity in terms of places days increased from about 336 thousanda in 2015, to 498 thousands in 2019, and in the agro-tourist pensions it increased from 281 thousands in 2015, to 382 thousands in 2019 (Table 1). The increase is explained by the desire of the locals to start their own business in order to obtain additional incomes to the

basic ones, as a result of the increase of the requirements for practicing rural tourism.

Arrivals in rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County

From the above it is clear that the demand for this specific form of tourism has increased considerably due to the relatively low prices charged by rural reception facilities, which are accessible especially to the population with low to medium incomes, who are able to use the income they have as efficiently as possible for recreation.

Table 2 shows that an increasing number of tourists prefer to stay in tourist and agritourism pensions in the county, the number of arrivals in tourist and agritourism pensions in 2019, practically doubled compared to 2015, reaching 39,506 in tourist pensions and 26,536 in agritourism pensions. This phenomenon viewed from the point of view of classification by comfort categories is due in the first place to the financial situation faced by tourists and the good quality / price ratio, offered especially by agritourism pensions.

Table.1. The capacity of tourist accommodation in operation in the rural tourist pensions from Vâlcea county between the years 2015-2019

No. places days in:	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Tourist pensions - total country	9,416,908	9,706,739	10,413,485	10,644,927	10,454,735
Pensions Vâlcea county	335,769	389,628	471,735	499,380	497,679
Agrotourism pensions-total country	9,079,901	10,336,702	11,787,897	12,498,050	12,615,982
Agrotourism pensions Vâlcea county	280,718	284,523	338,437	361,844	381,505

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

Table 2. Arrivals of tourists in tourist reception structures in Vâlcea County

Year/ No. of arrivals	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Tourist pensions	21185	29751	36884	37502	39506
Agrotourism pensions	13525	17029	20635	23476	26536

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

Overnight stays in rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County

In the period 2015-2019 there is an upward evolution of the number of overnight stays at the level of all comfort categories. Thus, as shown in Table 3, overnight stays in tourist boarding houses registered a maximum in July and August, these being 9,608 in July 2015 and doubling in August 2019, reaching 18,662, due to leisure affected by the

population of our country to tourism in these summer months, when most people take their vacation, spending their holidays in mountains or at sea. Also, there is a doubling of the number of overnight stays in 2019, compared to 2015, reaching 88,544. The same phenomenon of significant growth is found at the level of agritourism pensions, increasing from 22,961 in 2015 to 56,909 in 2019.

Table 3. Overnight stays in rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County

Tourist pensions Year/month	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
2015	1,128	1,154	2,690	2,403	3,832	4,887	9,608	4,820	4,583	3,169	3,355	4,379	46,008
2016	3,590	4,179	3,408	5,044	4,458	6,524	11,160	12,097	6,582	5,950	5,920	6,359	75,271
2017	3,658	2,330	3,844	5,077	5,468	9,274	13,814	13,862	7,942	7,078	6,310	5,969	84,626
2018	3,565	3,177	3,478	5,180	6,404	7,653	13,148	15,971	10,430	6,594	4,611	4,668	84,879
2019	3,745	3,655	3,256	4,813	5,675	9,180	16,334	18,662	11,182	6,122	4,145	1,775	88,544
Agrotourism pensions Year/month	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
2015	1,707	1,702	1,456	1,534	2,057	2,143	4,450	1,935	1,427	1,124	1,775	1,651	22,961
2016	2,265	2,407	2,119	1,662	2,221	2,888	4,970	6,848	3,548	1,878	1,651	2,923	35,380
2017	2,664	2,091	1,729	2,138	2,333	3,843	5,729	7,069	3,288	2,321	1,900	3,092	38,197
2018	2,899	2,326	1,964	2,373	2,568	4,078	5,964	7,304	3,523	2,556	2,135	3,327	41,017
2019	4,223	4,668	3,228	3,697	3,892	5,402	7,288	8,628	4,847	3,880	3,459	4,651	56,909

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

Tourism demand indicators

From the analysis it was found that the highest tourist demand in the research period was in rural tourist pensions classified at 2 daisies, so a lower category of comfort, followed by those classified at 3 daisies, at an average category of comfort. This is due to the fact that the largest segment of tourists come from the population with modest incomes and that the offer of these pensions in relation to quality/price, is an attractive one. The noticeable demand for the average comfort category is a result of the increase of tourists' demands for a better quality of the rural tourist product and services, materialized in the degree of comfort (Figure 1).

Indicators of tourist traffic

In order to highlight the tourist traffic, the total number of tourists (ΣT) arriving in the area researched was inventoried in Table 4: of these, in 2019, approximately 39,506 arrived at the rural tourist pensions, while in the agritourist pensions the number was 26,536. Furthermore, the average number of tourists who arrive daily at the pensions in the rural area was taken into consideration, this being 108, in 2019, and in the agrotourism pensions it was lower, 73 tourists.

The intensity of the tourist traffic

The quantification of tourist traffic was performed by tracking the number of days per tourist (ZT) (Table 4) and the average length

of the stay (D) (Table 5), based on which the density of tourist traffic (f1) was obtained, which was 0.1898 in the year 2019/inhabitant, i.e. approximately 19 tourists/100 inhabitants.

Indicators of the tourist offer

The following indicators were studied:

A) *Total number of rural tourist accommodation units/pensions (places)*
Accommodation capacity comes in two forms:

a) existing accommodation capacity Cext

The existing accommodation capacity at the rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County in 2019 was 2,409 places in 157 boarding houses.

b) accommodation capacity in function Cf

Following the study and the discussions with the owners of boarding houses in the localities in the county, it is found that they operate seasonally, different depending on the geographical location, season and leisure possibilities. At the county level, in 2019, the total number of places available in rural tourist structures with accommodation function is the highest for those with a lower comfort category (2 daisies/stars). One of the factors that generated this is the low financial potential of pension owners who have arranged their accommodation in their own homes, with a minimum of investment.

Table 4. Number of tourist days in 2019 at rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County

Pensions	No. of tourists (Xi)	Overnights (Yi)	No. tourist days (ZT)
Rural tourism	39,506	88,544	3,498,019
Agrotourism	26,536	56,909	1,510,137
Total	66,042	145,453	5,008,156

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

Table 5. Evolution of the average duration of tourists' stay (days) at rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County during 2015-2019

Pension/Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Rural tourism	2.17	2.53	2.29	2.26	2.24
Agroturism	1.69	2.07	1.85	1.96	2.14
Total	1.98	2.36	2.13	2.14	2.20

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

Out of the total accommodation capacity in operation at the rural tourist pensions, by comfort categories, in Vâlcea county, in 2019, the first place is occupied by those classified at 2 daisies/stars, so those with a low degree of comfort, followed by 3 daisies/stars, with a medium degree of comfort. This ranking has as main factors, in addition to the financial potential of entrepreneurs in those localities and many other factors related to quality/price and the financial possibilities of the low-income population who prefer to practice such tourism, factors that have repercussions on the number of days of operation of tourist and agritourism pensions (Figure 2). Also in this category are: infrastructure that in certain seasons makes it impossible to access certain tourist routes, no snow or its existence for a short period of time, which makes it impossible to practice winter sports, insufficient promotion due to lack of funds allocated etc.

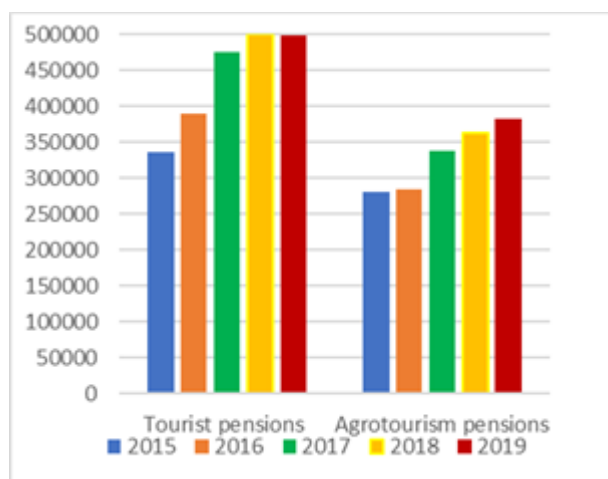


Fig. 2. The structure of the accommodation capacity in operation (places - days) at the rural tourist pensions and the agrotourism pensions in Vâlcea county in the period 2015-2019

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

B) Maximum theoretical offer in units-days

The high values of the maximum theoretical offer registered in the lower comfort categories, of three and two daisies, outline the idea that entrepreneurs in this field had minimal financial potential to set up such reception structures, not particularly pursuing a high quality level of the tourist product offered (Figure 3).

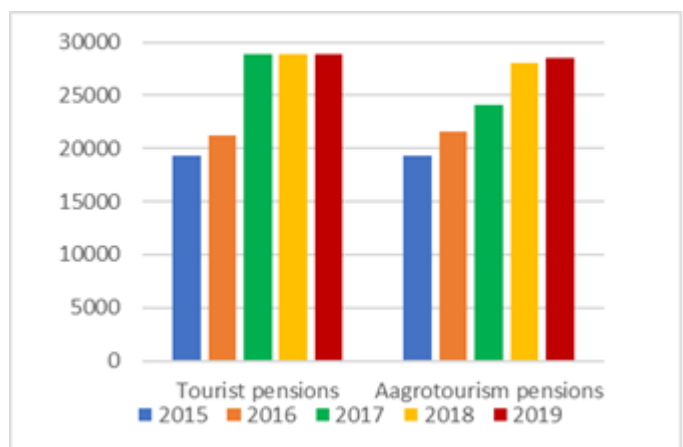


Fig. 3. The structure of the theoretical offer of rural tourist pensions and agrotourism pensions in Vâlcea County in the period 2015-2019

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

C) Actual (real) offer in units-days

The largest effective offer of rural tourist pensions classified by localities and comfort categories, in Vâlcea County, in 2019 stands out in the lower comfort category, respectively in the two daisies guest house. The fact that most pensions in the county are in this category of comfort, as well as the large number of days of operation of those pensions, have influenced in this regard the actual offer. At the county level, the actual offer does not aim at a high degree of comfort, it being reduced to a lower quality level.

Indicators that characterize the efficiency of using the technical-material base of accommodation

A) The index of utilization of the accommodation capacity in operation

At the level of Vâlcea county in 2019 only 54.5% of the accommodation capacity in operation was used. The highest efficiency of using the accommodation capacity in operation is at the pensions with a lower quality level of comfort, respectively three and two daisies/stars. This is also due to the large number of pensions owned by Vâlcea County in this category, but also to the fact that most tourists came from the category of low-income social strata, who could not afford to pay higher accommodation rates, from pensions with a high quality level.

B) Occupancy rate of the accommodation unit

There is a low occupancy rate in Vâlcea County in 2019, i.e. only 16.32% of the accommodation capacity was occupied. The highest percentage in terms of occupied accommodation capacity is held by rural tourist pensions classified at 2 daisies/stars, so those with a lower quality level in terms of comfort, followed at a great distance by those of 3 daisies/stars. There is a trend of encouraging an increase in the accommodation capacity occupied in boarding houses with a medium degree of comfort. So, there has been a segment of tourists, with average incomes, who want to spend their free time in boarding houses with a medium quality level, in terms of comfort, which should boost pension management in reconsidering the quality of services provided.

Indicators of the quality of rural tourism activity

Among the indicators of the quality of rural tourism activity were subjected to the study:

A) Offer quality indicators

In order to determine the quality of the offer, the degree of comfort and endowment of the existing rural tourist pensions in Vâlcea County was taken for analysis. There is a timid annual increase in the quality of accommodation services, viewed in terms of comfort, by the appearance and increase in the number of rural tourist pensions classified at 3, 4 and 5 daisies/stars.

B) Indicators of social effects

In this study, only the following parameters were taken into consideration: number of rural tourist reception structures per 10,000 tourists and the structure of the accommodation capacity by comfort categories. Based on the data presented above, it can be estimated that the number of rural tourist reception structures, per 10,000 tourists in 2019 is 24.

The level and dynamics of tourists arriving in rural tourist boarding houses in Vâlcea County

The highest average level is noticed at the tourist pensions, respectively 32,966 people, out of the total number of tourists accommodated in the rural tourist pensions from Vâlcea county. The total number of tourists accommodated in rural tourist pensions in Vâlcea County in the period 2015-2019 increased on average by 6,266 tourists annually. This is influenced by the large accommodation capacity existing in these pensions and not particularly by the qualitative factor (Table 6).

Table 6. Dynamics of the number of tourists in rural tourist pensions in Vâlcea County during 2015-2019

Rural tourist pensions	Medium level (y)	The average index (I)	The average rate (R%)
Tourist pensions	32,966	1.169	16.9
Agrotourism pensions	20,240	1.184	18.4
Total	52,216	1.1765	17.65

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021

Table 7. Estimated values of the number of tourists according to the linear trend for the period 2015-2019

Pensions/Year - no. people	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Tourist pensions	21,185	29,751	36,884	37,502	39,506
Agrotourism pensions	13,525	17,029	20,635	23,476	26,536
Total	34,710	46,780	57,519	60,978	66,042

Source: processing the field observations and data from National Institute of Statistics, 2021.

The highest value of the average dynamic rhythm is signaled at the agritourism pensions, which means an increase of the tourist segment towards this type of tourism. Values of the number of tourists according to the linear trend for the period 2015-2019 are increasing for both types of tourist and agrotourism pensions, which means an increase in the quality of services (Table 7).

In order to increase the number of tourists in pensions with a high degree of comfort, an orientation towards the total quality is needed, which must also take into account the quality of life and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, total quality management provides a broad framework for action leading to a process of continuous improvement by extending quality requirements, from products to processes, and further in relationships, attitudes and beliefs that it leads to success.

our results proved that in order to face much better to the market competitiveness and pressure, the administrators of tourist and agritourism guesthouses look to be more and more interested in constantly monitoring the needs of tourists in order to fully effectively cover their needs.

The methodical aspects of TQM in rural tourism from the perspective of the two principles and to propose solutions that can contribute to ensuring the efficient functioning of rural tourism reception structures were researched in the rural tourism activity of Vâlcea County.

Following this, it was observed that the non-existence of a complete inventory of tourist resources in the study region hinders the development of tourism. The tourist products developed in the study region capitalize only a part of the existing resources. The tourist offer of the county is reduced compared to other tourist regions in Romania. In addition, a number of resources that, through tourism capitalization, could attract tourists to the area and represent a source of income, are degrading due to the lack of capitalization initiatives. The absence of a system of observation of tourists visiting the study region does not allow the realization of a tourism development strategy adapted to the territorial reality. The tourism development

strategies of the cities and communes in the region are based on theoretical results, observed at national and global level, rather than on data reviewed at territorial level related to the movement of tourists and their practices.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of rural tourism in Vâlcea County and the calculation of the indicators specific to rural tourism in terms of quality based on the principle of total quality management were "argued with data", and highlighted the aspects of rural tourism in close relationship with the managerial aspects based on "total quality management" focused on "customer orientation". Also, a theoretical-practical tool was developed to boost the approach to quality management, to increase economic efficiency and ensure a stable development of rural tourism in Valcea County, which consisted in calculating indicators for the quality of rural tourism in Valcea County and their importance in the implementation of pensions, by comfort categories.

From the data analyzed in the paper, it was concluded that more than half of the existing communes in Vâlcea County have tourist potential, presenting a significant degree of tourist attractiveness. The analysis of the evolution of the indicators - number of classified rural tourist pensions, existing accommodation capacity, number of arrivals and number of overnight stays registered in Vâlcea County, in the period 2015-2019, highlights their clear growth trend. The most significant increase of the indicators mentioned above is noticeable in the pensions classified at 2 daisies/stars, so in a lower category of comfort, for the whole period 2015-2019, because they address a segment of tourists with a low level of pretensions, but who know well the importance of the quality/price ratio.

The analysis made on the tourist demand in the area showed that the highest demand was registered at the tourist structures rated with 2 daisies/stars, the attraction towards nature and the unchanged environment being the main

motivation for tourists. In the studied area it was also observed that the average length of stay is short, and the low values of the indices of use of accommodation capacity in operation indicate a low efficiency, especially in 2018.

The low efficiency is mainly due to the short length of stay, only 3 days, a phenomenon manifested due to the lack, for most pensions, of leisure and recreation programs, complementary to accommodation services and dining. Of all the rural pensions in the county, the highest annual growth rate of the total number of tourists was registered at the 3 daisies / stars level, and the number of tourists according to the linear trend for the period 2018-2019 increased the most at the 2 and 3 daisies/stars pensions, indicators that reflected the trend of preferences for a tourist consumption based on the practice of a quality management is in a continuous progress.

The main directions for the development of rural tourism in Vâlcea County will have to aim at increasing the quality of tourist services, diversifying the tourist offer and more aggressive promotion of the county as a tourist destination. This involves investments for the development of human resources and the level of tourist service in boarding houses.

Those who work in county rural tourism have very little information about quality management in general and total quality management in particular. The implementation of the total quality management proposed in this paper must lead to a remodeling of the structure of existing and new accommodation capacities, according to the requirements of tourists, with great adaptability to the purchasing power of the population. The continuous improvement of the quality of rural tourism products and services, by implementing the principles of total quality management, would determine all tourist reception structures to give more importance to customer expectations, which will increase their competitiveness in the domestic and foreign tourism market.

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