RURAL TOURISM IN MARAMUREŞ

TURISMUL RURAL IN MARAMUREŞ

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Abstract: *Maramureş is situated in a prominent place in the country in terms of tourism activity in rural areas, the share of this activity in the county's economy is growing.*
Maramureş tourism attracts by its exceptional natural heritage, the ethnographic, architectural and gastronomic specific, units of accommodation of those who practice rural tourism fits harmoniously among farms, preserving what is still characteristic.
Rural tourism and agro tourism exploit the surplus of existing accommodation in the peasant houses, surplus prepared and arranged for receiving guests, offering them the access to a range of activities related to rural household. In recent years the tourist accommodation capacity in Maramureş increased both quantitatively and qualitatively, however tourism potential is not used as expected.

Key words: *Rural tourism, agro tourism, boarding houses, churches and wooden gates.*

INTRODUCTION

Maramureş, this ancient Romanian hearth with significant traditional components, with significant agricultural and forestry potential, very diverse landscape, is one of Romania's counties located on a wide range between altitudes from 140 meters (Someş Valley) up to 2305 meters (Rodnei Mountains). Maramureş has a good tradition of the houses, gates and well-preserved wooden churches, which make this land blessed by God, one of the most important attractions of rural tourism in Romania.

Maramureş tourism attracts by its exceptional natural heritage, the ethnographic, architectural and gastronomic specific, units of accommodation of those who practice rural tourism fits harmoniously among farms, preserving what is still characteristic of Maramureş.

We can define rural tourism as an economic factor of rural development, by specific services provided to customers to meet their

desires to relax themselves as close as possible to the nature.

Just as rural tourism, agro tourism is a complex economic activity with a large coverage area through the hosting services and the capitalization of their own products, agro tourism providing a profitable gain solution for individual rural households.



Rural tourism and agro tourism exploit the surplus of existing accommodation in the peasant houses, surplus prepared and arranged for receiving guests, offering them the access to a range of activities related to rural household.

The fact that most of the food consumed come from own production, determine a high profitability of this type of activity, and the prices of agro touristic services, are well below other forms of tourism. The explanation lies in the price of agricultural products consumed in agro touristic house, price which does not include mark-ups, VAT, excise, transport and storage expenses etc.

Meat, eggs, milk, cheese, butter, pickles, wine, palinka and even bread and various pastries etc. prepared according to their own recipe, get directly on the table of tourist consumer. Also, the tourist accommodation services do not include additional indirect costs, kings, commissions etc.

Therefore, to support rural areas, economic policies must stimulate the rural tourism benefits, reducing fiscal pressure, the beneficial effects being on two directions:

- providing decent additional incomes to people with agro households
- allowing to those with modest incomes from city to spend

with children a pleasant and helpful vacation, also instructive in rural areas.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURISM IN ROMANIA AND MARAMUREŞ

Tourism has contributed in recent years with 2-2.5% to the GDP of Romania, there exists the concern and hope of its development in the coming years, by attracting a growing number of tourists. The fact that only 0.1% of Romania's rural economy comes from agro tourism, compared to 4.4% EU countries, represent the potential development (*I.P.Otiman-2006*).

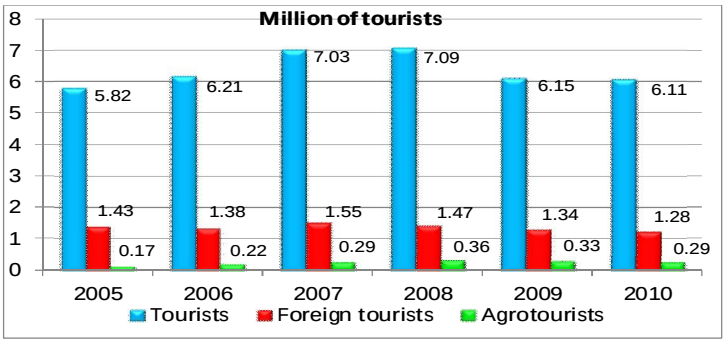
The evolution of the tourists' number in Romania, including foreign tourists and those who opted for agro tourism registered in the period 2005-2010 is shown in the following table:

Table 1

The evolution of the tourists' number in Romania (million)

Million	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Tourists	5.82	6.21	7.03	7.09	6.15	6.11
Foreign tourists	1.43	1.38	1.55	1.47	1.34	1.28
Agrotourists	0.17	0.22	0.29	0.36	0.33	0.29

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2011



With reference to the number of tourists in 2005, we have the next evolution of tourists who used "our" services in 2006 - 2010:

Table 2.

The evolution of tourists compared to 2005

%	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Tourists	100	106.7	120.8	121.8	105.7	105.0
Foreign tourists	100	96.5	108.4	102.8	93.7	89.5
Agrotourists	100	129.4	170.6	211.8	194.1	170.6

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2011

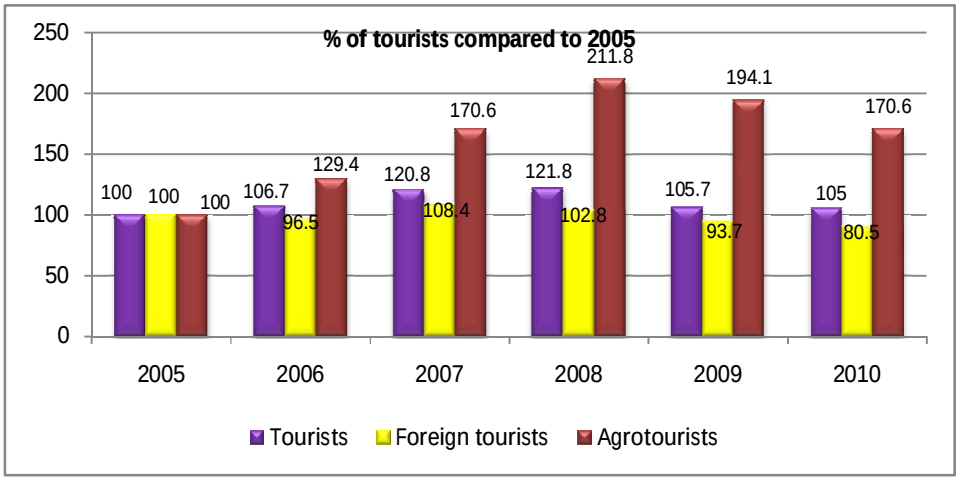


Fig. 3. The evolution of tourists compared to 2005

Thus we see that the influx of tourists has reached its maximum in 2007-2008, the largest growth occurring in the rural tourism / agro tourism, and in terms of foreign tourists, with all the "verbal efforts" we find that Romania fails to become an attractive destination.

In terms of accommodation, foreign tourists prefer the services with more stars, usually 3-4 stars, while Romanian tourists due to the lack of financial possibilities use 2-3 star services (daisies). According to 2010 data, the tourists' accommodation was: 70 % in hotels and motels, 8.6 % in boarding houses, 7.7% in rural locations. Boarding houses and rural locations provide also conditions of preparing and serving meals.

Total overnight stays was 16.5 million, of which 2.8 million foreign tourists and 13.7 million Romanian tourists, resulting an average of 2.2 nights for foreign tourists and 2.8 nights for Romanian tourists.

The origin of foreign tourists, who used our services in 2010, is in order: Hungary, Moldova, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Austria, France and Poland (top 10 sources of tourists).

In terms of tourism revenues, the contribution of this field of activity to achieve GDP in recent years was 2-2.5%, the contribution of rural tourism and agro tourism being 0.05 - 0.06% (*SYR - 2011*).

In Maramureş county rural tourism offers the following accommodation possibilities (see table 3), the tourist influx was 16,446 tourists in 2010, revenues amounted to 1.468 million lei (www.romanian-

universe.ro).:

Table 3.

Accommodation possibilities and their number in Maramureş

	Number	Number of places
Hotels	9	492
Motels	5	172
Boarding houses	264	3830
Forest cottages	15	294
Private homes	198	963
TOTAL	491	**5751**

Source: (http://www.discover-maramures.com/ro/cazare-rurala)

The number of boarding houses and their size has increased especially after 2000, being located as expected in zone of historical Maramureş: Săpânţa - Ocna Sugatag - Botiza - Borşa (see Figure 3).

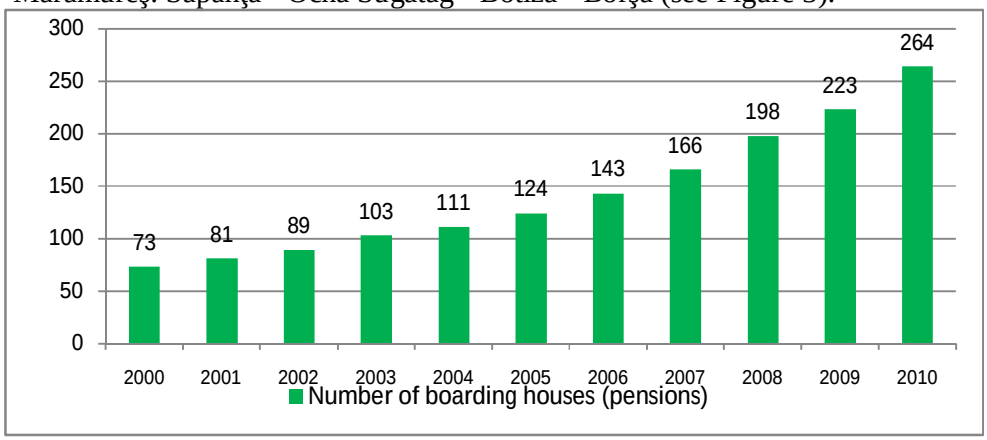


Fig. 3 - Number of boarding houses (pensions)

Many of these pensions are built by those who left to work abroad in Italy, Spain, France or England, with the money earned there, starting here, at home their own business, hoping to attract a growing number of tourists.

Maramureş is ranked 7 in the country regarding agro touristic activity, share this activity represents still under 1 % out of rural economy in this county. A ranking of 10 agro touristic destinations by county is in order: Braşov, Cluj, Sibiu, Alba, Vrancea, Bistriţa, Maramureş, Gorj, Vâlcea and Constanţa.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism allows to those with modest incomes from city to spend with children a pleasant and helpful vacation, also instructive in rural areas. Thus, agro tourism development can have an increasingly important educational component allowing to children from the city to know the values, cultural and historical traditions of the countryside. They can get in touch with the realities of agriculture, their trips in nature being in the same time a source of health, a way to strengthen their bodies away of concrete spaces characteristic to our cities, where green spaces are shrinking, being abused by some greed in pursuit of gains in all conditions.

Among the most common motivations for rural tourism are:

- desire to leave the stressful and polluted environment of large cities
- spending a short vacation, even a weekend with trips into the fresh air of forests, near the clear and "flowing well" rivers, fishing or enjoying ourselves with unbelievable songs of birds
- opportunity to eat fresh food and to participate in specific activities of these areas
- knowledge of traditional crafts, art of woodworking, wool processing or pottery,
- participation in Christmas, at Easter and a number of folk and traditional events etc.

In Maramureş county we have the following traditional events which attract many tourists:

- *Sâmbra oilor*, the first Sunday in May, on Huta hill, at the border of Maramureş, celebrating the sheep going out to pasture,
- *Tânjaua from Hoteni* (near Ocna Şugatag) - celebrating the most hard-working citizen of the village,
- *Cherry Festival*, June 6, at Coruia,
- *Hora la Prislop*, on the second Sunday in August at nearly 1,500 meters altitude of "Prislop Pass", being part of the song and costumes festival of the inhabitants of the mountain,
- *Marmaţia*, Winter Festival of customs and habits, in the last week of December, at Sighetu Marmaţiei

Wooden churches are the most important tourist attractions, Maramureş is considered the center of this much appreciated craft, with the "gates of Maramureş" - true masterpieces of art in wood, famous worldwide. Wooden Churches of Ieud, Budeşti and Şugatag Village are creations of anonymous craftsmen kept of 600-700 years (*Bilţiu P., 2000*).

TOURISTIC TRAILS

- **wooden churches trail:** Ieud, Budeşti, Sat Şugatag, Bogdan Vodă, Poienile Izei, Şurdeşti, Rogoz şi Plopiş – all these are UNESCO momuments;, new wooden churches: Săpânţa, Şurdeşti, Bârsana, Dragomireşti etc.

- **monasteries trail:** Rohia, Bârsana, Moisei, Nera, Habra etc.

- **mineral waters and treatment baths trail**: Ocna Şugatag, Cărbunari, Botiza, Borşa, Stoiceni, Valea Borcutului,

- **crafts trail** at: Săpânţa, Şugatag Village, Bârsana, Breb, distinguishing „Happy Cemetery" from Săpânţa, and wool processing (clothing and famous wool rugs) using vegetable dyes, at Botiza, Bârsana and Mara (*Cristea G., 2000*),

- **Natural Reservation and National Parks trails:** Pietrosul Rodnei National Park, Maramureş Mountains Natural Reservation and Rooster Crest Natural Reservation – Gutâi Mountains.

Nature Monuments are also Limpedea Columns, "Vălenii Şomcutei" Cave, Blue Lake, and Daffodils Glade.

Mills for corn, wheat and whirlpools for washing rugs and carpets: Budeşti and Sârbi on Cosău Valey, Botiza Sas Valey, Săpânţa on Săpânţa Valey and Chiuzbaia on Chiuzbaia Valey.

CONCLUSIONS

Maramureş is situated in a prominent place in the country regarding the agro tourism activity, the share of this activity in the county's economy is growing. Maramureş tourism attracts by its exceptional natural heritage, the ethnographic, architectural and gastronomic specific, units of accommodation of those who practice rural tourism fits harmoniously among farms, preserving what is still characteristic of Maramureş.

In Maramureş county rural tourism offers good accommodation possibilities, the touristic influx was 16,446 tourists in 2010, revenues amounted to 1.468 million lei.

However rural tourism in Maramureş does not exploit the potential of this rural area. Among the measures to be taken for developing the rural tourism can be considered:

- a more efficient activity of promotion, using the Internet, the media, leaflets distributed to travel agencies,
- keeping traditions and architectural specific in rural areas,
- preserving traditional cuisine,

- creating conditions for practicing sports in other areas too: like skiing, swimming, golf, paragliding etc.,

- acces la puncte de belvedere, mult agreate mai ales de către turiştii străini pentru a se delecta cu peisajul oferit de zonele rurale mai ales cele din spaţiile montane,

- access to belvedere points, especially liked by foreign visitors in order to enjoy the scenery offered by rural areas especially in the mountain

- and not least, it is necessary that the serving personnel in touristic pensions to be specialized / qualified.

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