

ASPECTS REGARDING AGROTOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *People's desire to return to nature, to origins, to rural areas is a reality today. The population of large urban agglomerations that is under daily stress and pollution wants to spend their free time in a clean environment.*

Rural areas attract tourists by simplicity, peacefulness, fresh air, gastronomy, history, culture, the opportunity to escape routines and to participate in various activities. Agro-tourism takes place in farmhouse accommodation in rural areas, being adapted to realities in every state.

Romania still has unpolluted rural areas that can become oases of greenery and tranquility, of physical and mental recovery of tourists. Some of the Romanian villages, especially those in the mountain areas have not yet been touched by the process of industrialization and modernization, presenting a traditional, even archaic world. The development of agro-tourism in such areas offers potential tourists a return in time, a unique experience, especially for people who have not had contact with the rural area, or with the Romanian space.

The legislation in force allows and supports the development of Romanian agro-tourism, and this can be observed in the evolution of the number of accommodation facilities and the number of tourists.

At present, accommodation units function according to a classification established by current legal regulations. Thus, a minimum of conditions are guaranteed for tourists according to the category they choose. In Romania, the symbol used to classify the accommodation units in rural areas is the "daisy".

There are some measures that support the development of rural areas and agro-tourism in Romania and in the European Union.

Keywords: *rural tourism, agro-tourism, legislation, agro-tourism facilities*

1. INTRODUCTION

The need to spend free time outside people’s main residence has become, over the years, a necessity in urban areas. The polluted, crowded and stressful environment induces the need for clean air, escape from everyday life, relaxation, but also the need for knowledge, business, or treatment of diseases is something that matters.

Tourism in rural areas is increasingly appreciated by tourists from around the world, as it offers a new experience, or reminds tourists of their childhood, bringing peace and harmony in their lives.

Agrotourism is also practiced in rural areas, a form that has evolved and developed in a particular way.

Rural tourism means the tourist activity of accommodation, food and agreement that takes place in rural areas. This type of tourism offers tourists an approach to nature and the local population, but also a fairly wide variety of the tourist offer. At the same time, rural tourism is based on hospitality from locals and respect from tourists. Several forms of tourism can be found in rural areas, namely agrotourism, curative tourism, leisure, cultural, sports, wine, gastronomy, religious.

Agrotourism is presented as a particular form of rural tourism, which can be practiced by farmers and guesthouse holders, being a secondary activity, agriculture remaining the main occupation and source of income.

Agrotourism involves accommodation in the peasant household (boarding house, etc.), in an under-occupied space, consumption of agricultural products from that household, participation to a greater or lesser extent in at least one specific agricultural activity.

Given these definitions, there are some differences between classic tourism, rural tourism and agrotourism (see Table 1).

Table 1 Characteristics of classic tourism, rural tourism and agrotourism

Classic tourism	Rural tourism	Agrotourism
- it has space problems – there is a shortage of space	- it has sufficient space	- it has sufficient space
- in the urban area	- in the rural area	- in the rural area
- agglomeration of population	- reduced population	- reduced population
- part of the leisure activities are carried out indoors	- tourist activities take place in open air	- tourist activities take place in open air

- necessary tourist infrastructure is well-defined	- necessary tourist infrastructure is less developed	- necessary tourist infrastructure is less developed
- national or international level businesses	- family businesses that develop both at local and at national level	- family businesses that develop at local level
- self-contained tourist activity	- self-contained or seasonal tourist activity	- supplementary and seasonal tourist activity
- it generally offers more expensive accommodation and services for a higher comfort level	- it offers medium priced accommodation and services	- it offers less expensive accommodation and services for a lower comfort level
- accommodation is mainly in accommodation facilities like hotels, villas, guesthouses, chalets, bungalows, etc.	- accommodation is mainly in accommodation facilities like guesthouses, villas, chalets, motels, small-scale hotels, camping sites	- accommodation is mainly in accommodation facilities like guesthouses, farms
- large accommodation capacity	- medium accommodation capacity	- low accommodation capacity
- it is centralized, facilities are grouped close to one another	- facilities are generally scattered	- facilities are generally scattered around the community and the region
- it needs important investment and often public funds for infrastructure	- it needs more modest investment	- it needs more modest investment, essentially individual.
- contributes to landscape alteration	- does not alter landscape	- does not alter landscape
- more vulnerable to economic conditions and fluctuations, its use being for one purpose	- supple usage and improvement of accommodation and leisure time norms at local level	- supple usage and improvement of accommodation and leisure time norms at local level
- all income, except that from family businesses, get into the normal circuit and the local population does not benefit from it. The income leaves the locality and even the country.	- the income can go straight to the inhabitants and stay in the locality or get into the normal circuit	- the income go straight to the householders and stay in the locality

- national and international cuisine	- national cuisine, even international cuisine in few cases	- local traditional cuisine
-	-	- offers the possibility to participate in traditional household activities;
- by the lifestyle it offers, it is likely to create tension between tourists and the local population.	- it could foster a better understanding between tourists and the local population.	- it could foster a better understanding between tourists and the local population.
- also suitable for mass tourism	- incompatible with mass tourism	- incompatible with mass tourism
- the tourist offers is diverse, but often it is not authentic.	- varied offer with aspects of authenticity	- the tourist offer is authentic, diverse, multiple in its diversity

Source: Buciuman, E. – Rural economy (*Economia rurală*, original name in Romanian) Pro Transilvania Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 1999, p. 39- adapted by the authors

The development of agrotourism in an area can have positive effects, but can also generate negative effects in the event that some principles of sustainability are not observed (see Table 2).

Table 2 Advantages and disadvantages of agrotourism development in an area

Advantages	Disadvantages
- stabilization of population;	- pressure on the environment;
- supplementing and diversifying the way of obtaining income;	- pollution;
- increasing the degree of culture;	- socio-cultural pressure;
- increasing the standard of living;	- changes in the way of life of the local population;
- promoting and preserving folk art, crafts and traditions;	- possibility of kitsch appearance;
- promoting and preserving local gastronomy;	
- rehabilitating and preserving the heritage;	
- stimulates the development of other branches of the economy.	

The interest for agrotourism is manifested both among domestic tourists and among foreign tourists. Its development in less industrialized

countries is much easier since here old occupations, traditions, crafts, and stress-free lifestyle are still preserved.

2. AGROTOURISM IN ROMANIA

According to the European Charter for Rural Areas, the rural area is “a portion of the inland or coastal rural area, including towns and villages, where the main part of the area is used for:

- agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fish farming;
- economic and cultural activities of the inhabitants of the region (crafts, industry, services, etc.);
- non-urban areas for recreation and rest (or nature reserves);
- other purposes like housing construction.”¹

In Romania, the main form of settlement in the rural area is the village, which knows, according to some criteria, several classifications (see Table 3).

Table 3 Classification of Romanian villages

Criterion	Village type
Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - large (2000-3000 inhabitants); - medium (500-1500 inhabitants); - small (300-500 inhabitants)
Geometrical shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with isolated houses; - valley; - scattered; - crowded; - liniar, along the road; - rectangular; - compact; - circular; - radial.
Main preoccupation of inhabitants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - agricultural; - pastoral-forest; - tree-growing-wine-growing; - with annex occupations;
Geographical position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - plain; - hill; - mountain; - pond, deltaic.

Source: <http://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Sat>

¹ RECOMMENDATION 1296 (1996) regarding the European Charter for Rural Areas, Part I, art.1, https://www.acor.ro/files/acor/rel_internat/CPLRE/carta_europeana_zonele_rurale.pdf

The Romanian village, in its majority, has preserved a good part of the archaic style, of crafts, occupations, traditions, folk costumes, folk architecture, thus being able to support the development of tourism.

The Romanian tourist village can be:²

- ethno-folkloric;
- of artistic and handcraft creation;
- climatic and landscape;
- viticulture and orchards;
- pastoral;
- for practicing sports.

Agrotourism in Romania sees its beginnings in 1973, when Order 744/1973 of the Ministry of Tourism experimentally declared 13 localities villages of tourist interest, named "tourist villages" (Lerești, Rucăr, Fundata, Sirnea, Sibiel, Rășinari, Tismana, Vaideeni, Hălmațiu, Bogdan-Vodă, Vatra Moldoviței, Murighiol and Sfântu-Gheorghe), but its development began only after 1990. Thus, the Romanian Federation for Montana Development (1990), aimed to support the inhabitants of the mountain area, including through the promotion, organization and development of agrotourism. Later on, the National Association for Ecological and Cultural Rural Tourism in Romania (ANTREC) - 1994 -, member of the European Federation of Rural Tourism (EUROGITES) and the Romanian Agency for Agrotourism (1995) joined to support Romanian agrotourism and connect to the international agrotourism system.

The Romanian Mountain Area Commission, within the Programme on the organization and development of agrotourism in the mountain area, defines agrotourism „as a particular form of rural tourism, more complex, including both the actual tourist activity: accommodation, boarding house, tourist circulation, programs, the provision of basic and additional services, as well as the economic activity, usually agricultural, practiced by the hosts (productive activities for obtaining and processing agricultural products in the household and their marketing to tourists, or through commercial networks, as well as the way of spending free time)”³

The interest of the Romanian state for the development of agrotourism is seen in Law no. 187/1998 regarding the establishment of facilities for the development of rural tourism, Tourism Law (2019) where this form of

² Alecu, I.N., Constantin, M., Agrotourism and agrotourist marketing (Agrotourism și marketing agroturistic, original name in Romanian), Ceres Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, pp.162-164.

³ Melinda Cădea et al., 2003 from the Romanian Mountain Area Commission - "Programme on the organization and development of agrotourism in the mountain area", 1991.

tourism is specified, as well as in ORDER No. 1051/03.03.2011 for the approval of the Methodological Norms regarding the issuance of classification certificates, licenses and tourism patents.

Currently, in Romania, the accommodation facilities for the agrotourism activity, the agrotourism guesthouses have an accommodation capacity of up to eight rooms. They operate in the citizens' houses or in independent buildings. The spaces in the agro-tourist guesthouses are specially arranged for the accommodation of tourists, the preparation and serving of meals, as well as for the participation in household or craft activities.

Always, in these accommodation facilities, tourists are offered food prepared from natural products, mainly from the household or from authorized local producers, and the hosts take care of the reception of tourists and their program throughout their stay at the guesthouse.

Because it is about agrotourism, inside these guesthouses "there is at least one activity related to agriculture, animal husbandry, cultivation of different types of plants, orchards of fruit trees or there is a craft activity, with a workshop, from which various handicrafts result. The activities in question must be continuous or, depending on their specificity and seasonality, they should be repeatable."⁴

The classification of accommodation facilities is mandatory, it offers the guarantee of comfort and quality services to the tourist, and in the case of agrotourism accommodation units, it is expressed in the number of flowers, more precisely, daisies, between one and five. The minimum criteria considered are largely technical in nature and cover:

- the general condition of the building;
- the organization of spaces;
- the facilities;
- the maximum number of beds in a room;
- the sanitary equipment;
- the endowment of the rooms;
- the endowment of kitchens;
- the telephone available to tourists;
- other criteria.

⁴ ANNEX no. 1.5 to the methodological norms for mandatory criteria regarding the classification of tourist structures with the function of tourist guesthouse and agrotourist guesthouse accommodation facilities – from ORDER No. 1051/03.03.2011 for the approval of the Methodological Norms regarding the issuance of classification certificates, licenses and tourism patents – Ministry of Regional development and Tourism.

For the smooth operation of tourist activities, the specialized bodies periodically check the condition and functioning of the equipment, the quality of the services provided, the observance of the hygiene norms and of the other criteria necessary for the classification of the facility.

There are numerous natural and anthropogenic resources able to support agrotourism in Romania. Therefore, the most well-known areas, at national and international level, where tourists have authentic experiences are Bucovina, Transylvania, Maramureş and the Danube Delta.

The evolution of agrotourism in Romania is fairly obvious through the number of specific accommodation facilities, the accommodation capacity and the number of registered tourists (see Table 4).

Table 4 The evolution of agrotourism in Romania

Indicator	U.M.	Year 2000	Year 2005	Year 2010	Year 2015	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Agrotourist guesthouses	number	400	956	1354	1918	2800	3022	3460
Existing accommodation capacity	beds	3544	11151	20208	35188	49053	52389	55778
Tourist arrivals in agro-tourist accommodation units	Number of persons	28152	170164	289923	672756	1272878	755436	1087327

Source: www.statistici.insse.ro8077/tempo-onlineTUR101A,TUR102A,TUR104A

The number of agritourist guesthouses has become more than eight times higher than in the last twenty-one years, which can be seen in the evolution of the number of existing beds, where the increase has been more spectacular.

The response of tourists to this offer was appropriate, with 1244726 more tourists in 2019 than in 2000.

In 2021, the number of accommodation facilities in Romania was 9146 (according to the statistics), which means that agrotourism guesthouses counted for 37.83% of the total accommodation facilities in the country.

The total number of tourists registered in 2021 was, according to the statistical data published by the National Institute of Statistics, 9370232 people, so the number of tourists staying in agrotourism guesthouses accounted for only 11.60% of the total number of tourists.

3. EUROPEAN FUNDS FOR AGROTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The increase in the number of agritourism accommodation units was largely possible due, initially, to the European SAPARD program. The SAPARD program is a financial instrument offered by the European Union to help candidate countries to become members of this organization in the pre-adhesion process in the field of agriculture and rural development.

The European Union supports the development of rural areas, and agritourism is one of the activities that can have this effect, by providing non-reimbursable support to all Member States.

The development of Romanian agritourism is among the priorities of Romania, a fact that can be seen in its inclusion in the National Rural Development Program (2007-2013 and 2014-2020), which supports investments in this sector. The National Rural Development Program (NRDP) is the document on the basis of which the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development can be accessed and which complies with the strategic guidelines for rural development of the European Union. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development supports this program and considers it important for agritourism in the mountainous area of the country. The money needed to invest in this activity comes from the EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL FUND FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (EAFRD).

Within this fund there are two sub-measures focused on agritourism activities, namely:

- SUB-MEASURE 6.2 - which provides support for the establishment of non-agricultural activities in rural areas;
- SUB -MEASURE 6.4 - where investments can be capitalized in the production and marketing of non-agricultural products, for the development of craft activities, the provision of services, as well as for infrastructure investments in accommodation units such as agritourism and leisure tourist services.

The Agency for the Financing of Rural Investments (AFIR) is a public institution with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which aims to develop the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, both technically and financially. Therefore, AFIR offers non-reimbursable support, according to the current provisions (the value of the support will be maximum 90% of the total cost of the project but will not exceed 200,000 euros per beneficiary, over three fiscal years) so that interested persons can open an agritourism accommodation unit in a rural area.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Agrotourism is viewed with increasing interest by those who want to have a connection with nature and quiet life in rural areas, and by those who know how to respect nature and the human being.

Under the current pandemic conditions, when the problems in the tourism field are very big, and travels to crowded destinations are called into question, agrotourism is one of the viable solutions.

Romania is among the few EU member states where the village, especially in the mountain areas, preserves the archaic life. That is why there is, with the support of the state and the EU, the possibility of developing agrotourism. The EU support for agrotourism development has been beneficial and significant.

In the Romanian legislation, agrotourism is referred to and recognized as a form of tourism, and in the Territorial Development Strategy of Romania - Polycentric Romania 2035 Territorial cohesion and competitiveness, development and equal opportunities for people, there is the Measure: *increasing the competitiveness of rural areas and the creation of jobs*, which, in operational terms, has a strategic action related to agrotourism (Diversification of economic activities in rural areas - tourism - p 166).

Romanian agrotourism is becoming more and more known and appreciated by tourists, and this could already be seen from the statistical data presented above.

The current situation generated by the Covid-19 pandemic has determined more tourists to go to the countryside and to agrotourist guesthouses, considering them safer, more unpolluted.

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