

THE CAPITALIZING ON THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE RURAL AREA OF BRASOV COUNTY THROUGH TOURIST ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: *The Romanian space-through the ethnocultural and ethnographic specificity, through the originality and richness of the resources of the related geographical space - constitutes a unique tourist product and satisfies a wide range of motivations in organized tourism and on its own, inter and international.[2] The development and modernization of the existing infrastructure at the level of the Center Region and Brasov County has made tourism one of the economic priorities of the area, offering numerous business opportunities. This is supported by the tourist potential of the area represented by both natural resources and numerous historical and cultural elements, traditions and customs that are preserved in the rural areas of the region.*

Key words: *rural tourism, rural development, tourist potential, Brasov County*

INTRODUCTION

The development of Romanian villages has always been strongly marked by non-agrarian activities because they have a complementary function in the rural economy. The village community could not survive without certain services provided by some of its members, who perform elementary work activities in the agricultural sector and thus contribute to obtaining a more decent standard of living [5,8].

Among other valorizing activities of the village's potential, the idea of combining traditional activities with those related to hospitality and recreation was born. The idea of rural tourism and agritourism starts from the fact that the agricultural household is, in general, in a natural, unpolluted environment, carrying cultural veins specific to the area of existence, that the agricultural farm has complete natural resources that can ensure the stay of any tourist, and last but not least, that the gates are opened to the capitalization of rural areas and agricultural products owned by pure rural farmers [2,7,15].

The village or the agritourism area represents the real space of attraction, the space where all the elements of local development are assembled. Between the activity of rural tourism and the economic-social development of rural areas, there is a relationship of correspondence and reciprocity. The increase in tourist traffic is done through the overall development of the respective rural areas, development which is achieved through tourist activity [1,11,13].

The rural environment with its communities, with a rich culture and popular traditions, carrying out specific agricultural activities, represents essential elements for the development of agritourism [3,10]. In Romania, the practice of this form of tourism can bring direct benefits to rural communities, where the salaries of the population are below the average level, creating new jobs and additional income for agricultural producers.

Tourist villages located especially in mountain or pre-mountain areas, retain the population, especially the young, and contribute to the perpetuation of forestry activity, animal husbandry, or various crafts [12]. In such localities, the presence of tourists allows the creation of funds for the development of new infrastructure, through the taxes and rates paid for certain utilities (museums, paid parking lots, campsites, etc.) [4,11].

In addition to the economic and social effects of rural tourism and agritourism, we can also refer to some cultural effects, such as the improvement of the conservation activity of natural, architectural, and historical monuments, through specific revenues [9].

Rural tourism can contribute to the capitalization of resources and to sustainable development at the local or regional level through the sustainable use of tourist resources, maintaining the natural, cultural, and social diversity of the rural area, the integration of service provision activities in the local strategy of development, supporting local economies in the socio-economic development of the community but also in protecting nature and cultural values [6,10,14].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Brasov County is located in the center of the country, actually being the entrance to Transylvania on the Prahova valley from Bucharest. The studied area is called Tara Barsei, and borders the counties of Sibiu, Mures, Harghita, Covasna, Prahova, Dambovita and Arges.

Having a rich natural and anthropic tourism potential and being a perfect keeper of Romanian traditions and popular culture, Brasov County is an area that has allowed the increased development of agritourism activity, a fact that determined the economic development of Brasov rural area. In this paper, with the help of economic indicators specific to tourism, using the existing statistical data at the national level, we have carried out a quantitative analysis of the intensification level of rural tourism activity's development, at the level of Braşov County.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Brasov County is part of the Center Development Region, along with Alba, Covasna, Harghita, Mures and Sibiu counties.

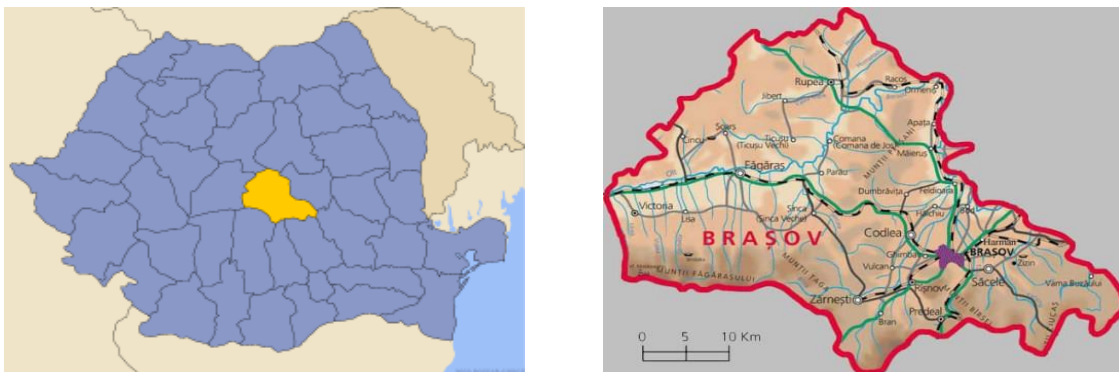


Figure 1. The location of Brasov County

Keeper of Romanian traditions and culture, Brasov County has established itself as an important agritourism destination. The representative area for practicing this form of tourism is the Bran-Moeciu ethnographic area, composed of 3 communes and 11 component villages.

The analysis of the agritourism offer will be carried out based on some indicators that characterize the tourist reception units with the function of accommodation, namely: the number of reception structures of the type of agritourism guesthouses, the existing and operating accommodation capacity as well as the use degree of the tourist offer [9,10,15].

Table 1 shows the evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, at the level of the Central Region.

Table 1.**The evolution of agritourism guesthouses number from the counties of the Central Region**

	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Alba	36	81	119	113	126	131	132
Brasov	177	347	402	383	379	387	380
Covasna	28	47	45	36	56	45	45
Harghita	156	178	240	215	229	229	265
Mures	17	42	60	49	51	51	56
Sibiu	73	118	113	96	126	146	141
Center Region	487	813	979	892	967	989	1019

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/> [16]

At the regional level, the number of accommodation units, such as agritourism, guesthouses show an upward trajectory, for the analyzed period, with the exception of 2019, when there was a decrease of 8.89% compared to the previous year.

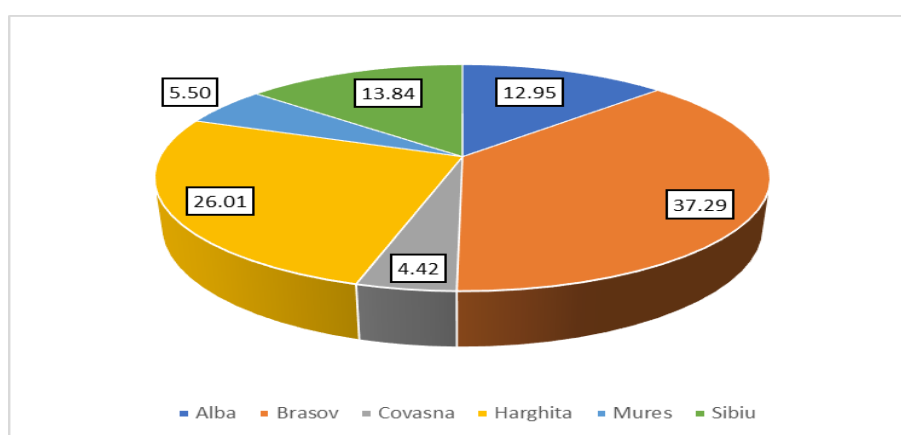


Figure 2. Distribution of agritourism guesthouses, at the level of the Central Region, 2022, [16]

Agritourism guest houses have an uneven distribution, both at the regional level and at the level of each county. Brasov County is the county with the most agritourism guesthouses, from the Central Region [11]. In the year 2022, from the total of 1019 agritourist guesthouses registered at the level of the region, 37.29% of them (380 agritourist guesthouses) were found in the territory of Brasov County. On second place is Harghita County with a percentage of 26.01% from the total number of structures in the region, and in third place is Sibiu County, with 13.84% [8].

At the level of Brasov County, the evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2010-2022, indicates a sinuous evolution, marked by increases, in the period 2010-2018, (+127.12%), decreases in the period 2019-2020 (-5.72 %) and then increases again (+2.11%).

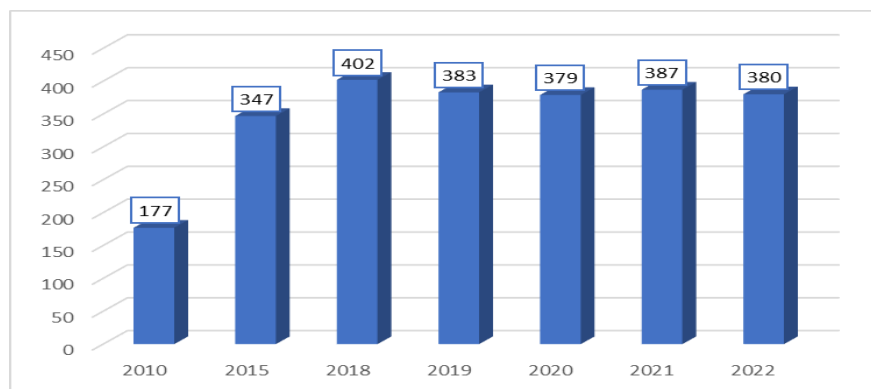


Figure 3. The situation of agritourism guesthouses, Brasov County, 2010-2022, [16]

In Brasov County, agritourism is mainly practiced around the Bran villages (Fundata, Moeciu-Bran) and in Poiana Marului, areas that have a rich agritourism potential materialized in natural, historical and cultural resources, as well as in the Sacele-Tarlungeni region, near the city of Brasov.

From the 380 agritourism guesthouses registered in 2022, at the level of Brasov County, 84.21% are concentrated in the ethnographic area of Bran-Moeciu, Poiana Marului and Sacele-Tarlungeni [15].

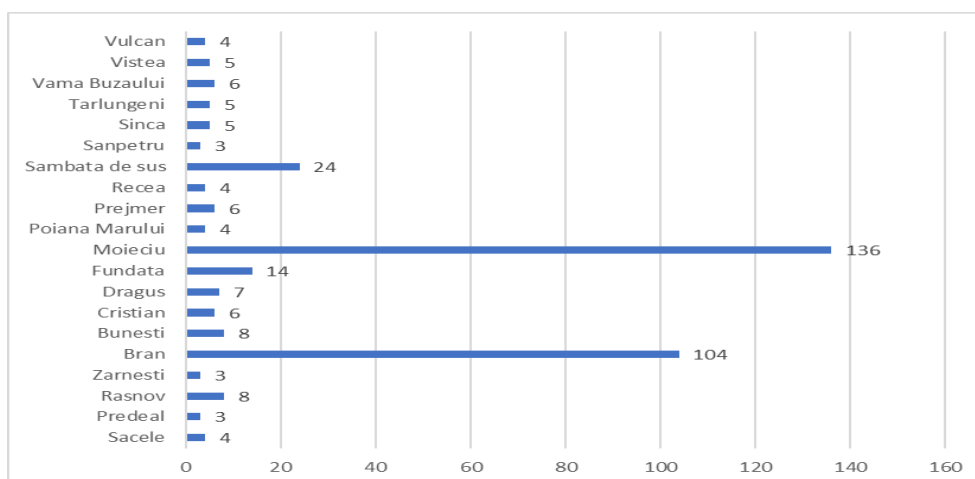


Figure 4. The main localities that own agritourism guesthouses, Brasov County, 2022

Accommodation capacity is an important indicator of the tourist offer. It can be analyzed under two aspects: the existing capacity and the capacity in operation.

Table 2.

The existing accommodation capacity in agritourism guesthouses, at the level of the Center Region

	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Alba	630	1.634	2.157	2.140	2.383	2.459	2.505
Brasov	2.676	6.234	6.894	6.763	6.695	6.920	6.688
Covasna	374	648	678	574	762	761	734
Harghita	1.762	2.819	3.192	3.254	3.439	3.525	3.511
Mures	329	995	1.107	965	972	968	1.009
Sibiu	1.043	2.119	2.015	1.770	2.275	2.558	2.517
Center Region	6.814	14.449	16.043	15.466	16.526	17.191	16.964

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>, [16]

The evolution of the accommodation capacity indicator, both in the case of the existing one and the one in operation, at the level of the Central Region, is marked by an increasing trend, in the period 2010-2018, followed by a decrease between the interval 2019-2020 and after that follows then new growth [12].

From the total number of accommodation places in the agritourism guesthouses in the Central Region, 39.4% are found in the territory of Brasov County. In the case of capacity in operation, Brasov County holds 45.11% from the total number.

Table 3 shows the arrivals of tourists, in the agritourist guesthouses in the Central Region, by category of tourists, in the period 2010-2022.

The arrivals of tourists in the agritourism guesthouses in the Central Region, in the period 2010-2022, show an upward trend until 2020, when, due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, it decreased considerably.

Table 3.

Tourist arrivals, Central Region, 2010-2022

	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
ROMANIANS							
Alba	5.877	27.081	43.512	50.954	41.852	52.797	52.333
Brașov	43.641	105.525	176.698	188.407	118.860	176.481	180.543
Covasna	2.393	6.580	12.533	15.795	13.729	21.383	19.329
Harghita	3.031	18.478	30.859	38.967	22.870	32.149	37.002
Mures	11.221	26.814	34.986	37.649	16.548	15.072	16.485
Sibiu	8.620	33.291	50.509	47.701	31.065	51.006	49.055
Center Region	74.783	217.769	349.097	379.473	244.924	348.888	354.747
FOREIGNERS							
Alba	2.452	4.562	7.389	6.380	556	1.764	3.142
Brașov	2.094	4.892	7.867	9.885	821	2.185	4.354
Covasna	1.233	2.118	2.972	2.766	317	1.602	2.047
Harghita	2.035	8.574	13.484	14.900	993	2.967	5.742
Mures	1.864	3.547	4.865	5.731	514	497	665
Sibiu	1.265	3.215	10.498	13.118	1.050	3.590	5.224
Center Region	10.943	26.908	47.075	52.780	4.251	12.605	21.174

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>, [16]

The decrease in total tourist arrivals was 42.35%, in the case of Romanian tourists by 35.46%, and in the case of foreign tourists by 91.94%. Starting from 2020, the number of tourists started to increase [11,12].

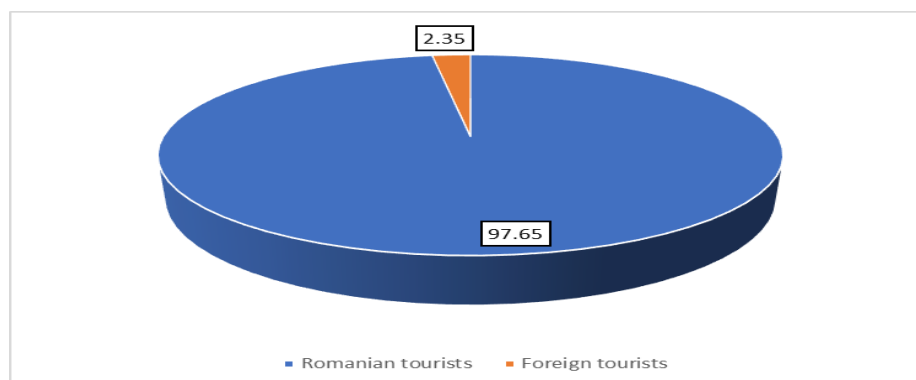


Figure 5. Structure of tourist arrivals in Brasov County, 2022, [16]

At the level of Brasov County, the decrease in total arrivals of tourists, registered in agritourism guesthouses, was lower than the value recorded at the regional level, 39.64%. In the case of Romanian tourists, the reduction was 36.91%, and in the case of foreign tourists, 91.69%.

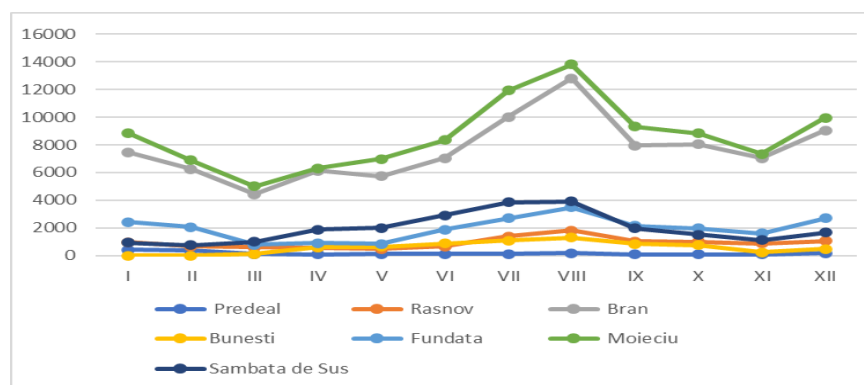


Figure 6. Seasonality of tourist activity in agritourism guesthouses in Brasov County, 2022, [16]

In the year 2022, the structure of tourist arrivals in the agritourism guesthouses, in Brasov County, indicates a share of 97.65% Romanian tourists and 2.35% foreign tourists.

The analysis of tourist arrivals in the agritourism guesthouses in Brasov County, during the months of the year, indicates a deeper concentration of them in the months of July-August and December-January, these periods being marked by vacations and holidays, as well as the winter holidays.

Table 4.

The evolution of overnight stays by tourists, Central Region, 2010-2022

	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
ROMANIANS							
Alba	13370	67027	95651	114348	91865	109014	117194
Braşov	103127	228993	353613	391396	248959	353686	354704
Covasna	5190	18833	24066	30684	25953	39196	44010
Harghita	9950	45698	74085	91800	49263	75039	84957
Mures	13748	54751	52395	55765	22993	22006	24767
Sibiu	22065	62690	93200	94045	60246	97172	90452
Center Region	167450	477992	693010	778038	499279	696113	716084
FOREIGNERS							
Alba	8204	9090	14027	12561	1126	4072	6889
Braşov	7640	12920	18567	22893	2432	4539	8989
Covasna	3349	5850	6262	6110	576	3074	4473
Harghita	6882	22877	36236	39267	3026	7798	15268
Mures	6660	5875	8172	9348	676	782	1224
Sibiu	3344	6645	16963	23945	1956	5446	9090
Center Region	36079	63257	100227	114124	9792	25711	45933

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>, [16]

Another important indicator of tourist demand is the number of overnight stays. As in the case of tourist arrivals, there is an increasing trend, except for 2020, the year of the SARS CoV2 pandemic. At the regional level, the total number of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses decreased in 2020, by 42.94%, compared to 2019. In the case of Romanian tourists, the decrease was 35.83% and 91.42%. In the following period, the situation improves, and the number of overnight stays begins to increase.

At the level of Brasov County, there are also reductions in the total number of overnight stays and by category of tourists. In the case of foreign tourists, the decrease is very large, 89.38%, still lower than the regional average.

The average length of stay is an indicator of tourist demand, determined by relating the number of overnight stays to the number of tourists staying in the accommodation units and expresses their ability to maintain the tourists within the structure for as long as possible.

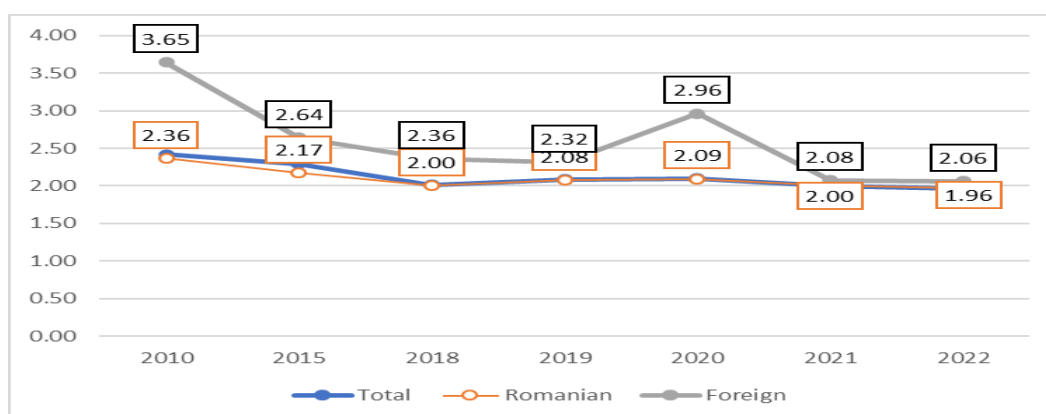


Figure 3.6. Average length of stay, agritourism guesthouses, Brasov County, 2010-2022, [16]

The analysis of the dynamics of the average length of stay indicator shows a longer length of stay in the case of foreign tourists compared to Romanian tourists. The year 2020 indicates the highest value, 2.96 tourist days for foreigners and 2.09 tourist days for Romanian tourists.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism and agritourism represent one of the effective solutions through which we can harmonize the tourist activity with the demands and requirements regarding environmental protection and sustainable development. The beauty and authenticity of rural areas and the preservation of popular culture determine an increased attractiveness towards this tourism segment, the last years showing a spectacular evolution of rural tourism.

A particular form of rural tourism, agritourism, aims at accommodation on the farm, in the peasant household and the provision of meal and leisure services, within the household or the local community. This activity becomes for agricultural producers a secondary activity, generating additional income to that obtained from the main activity carried out.

This specific form of rural tourism is based on the provision, within the peasant household, of accommodation, meals, leisure and other complementary services, being practiced by small owners in rural areas, usually as a secondary activity, the activity carried out in the household or own farm remaining the main occupation and source of income.

The further development of agritourism services in the rural areas of Brasov County requires, in addition to the necessary invitations to modernize and diversify the tourist offer, competitive at the national and international level, a series of measures aimed at promoting the studied area as a tourist area of national and international interest.

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