

## QUALITY OF ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES IN A RURAL TOURIST PENSION

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**Abstract:** *Rural tourism means a lot of work, a lot of human energy, a lot of passion and, unfortunately, less money as a result of all these efforts. Considering the listed, the component elements of the overall development of the rural station need to be carefully analyzed so that the rural space can become an integrative pole for rural economic and social activity with a touristic vocation that will be able to attract a smaller or larger part of the urban population from the bordering area or not just for spending free time in the most natural conditions specific to the existing rural area, having at the same time the comfort of civilized, modern tourism. The continuous evaluation of customer preferences, in parallel with their degree of satisfaction, is of particular importance for the rural tourism unit, helping it to maintain its competitive position on the tourist services market.*

**Key words:** *services, rural tourism, evaluation, customers, satisfaction*

### INTRODUCTION

In its evolution, rural tourism has had periods of growth as well as periods of decline. It is certain that it was never on the verge of extinction. The forms of rural tourism are currently experiencing the greatest momentum so far, due to the desire for freedom and the lack of rigid programs. Carried out as complementary activities, the forms of rural tourism do not break the balance of peasant life, do not cause the disappearance of the activities existing until then, but allow the superior valorization of the products obtained and implicitly their development, simultaneously with the appearance of others. [2,5,6]

We can say that rural tourism means residential vacation in the countryside. In the midst of economic reconstruction after the Second World War, the term rural tourism was born. In the broadest sense we can understand by rural tourism the entire touristic exploitation of the world and rural life and the recipient of the profit is the rural society in its entirety. In this way, rural tourism becomes an economic factor of the rural environment but also a social development factor, constituting, at the same time, the relaxation alternative and the method by which customs and traditions can be preserved.

Among the forms of rural tourism, agritourism is the one that, in the last period, has experienced a stronger evolution and enjoys greater attention. [3,7,11]

Tourism can take place in hill and mountain areas. The mountain has always been the most suggestive evidence of the greatness of nature, that is why today it has become one of the main holiday destinations, being essentially considered for many peoples as a symbol of spirituality.

The overall development of tourism in general and its transformation into a mass movement has caused the mountain to impose itself more and more through the attention of investors and promoters of mountain tourism. Thus, currently the effects of the development of mountain tourism in economic, social and cultural terms, although they are very difficult to quantify, are increasingly appreciated due to their importance. The demand for mountain tourism experienced a continuous upward evolution both worldwide and in our country. [1,12,14]

In the whole of the global economy of tourism, rural tourism is defined as tourism exploitation: [8,15]

- of rustic spaces;
- of natural resources;
- of the cultural heritage;
- of cultural buildings;
- of village traditions;
- of agricultural products;
- by means of branded products (consecrated) illustrative of the regional identity, which cover the needs of consumers in terms of reception, food, recreational activities, entertainment and various services, for the purpose of a local, sustainable development and an adequate response to the needs of recreation from modern society, in a new city-village social vision.

Human society in a continuous transformation and increasingly concerned with the ecological aspect of the environment has laid the foundations for the renaissance of tourism in rural areas.

The renaissance of tourism is mainly due to the following reasons: [10,11,13]

- the growing demand for a new way of spending the holidays, emphasizing a better quality of the environment;
- trips at the end of the week or on days off during the week started to become more and more important;
- the crisis in agriculture;
- the support given by the European Union in the development of rural tourism;
- the contribution of rural tourism to the development of the rural economy.

An important characteristic of rural tourism is that it is a seasonal tourism, which is practiced especially in the summer, on weekends, with less stay compared to sun and beach tourism.

Another characteristic of rural tourism is that it is a selective tourism, addressed to a more special audience, whose emitting cores are metropolitan areas. [2,7]

Rural tourism does not only refer to farm holidays but also to other tourist activities in the countryside.

As a result of the intensification of tourist traffic, economic activities are developed at the local level aimed at satisfying the increased demand for agricultural and non-agricultural products.[4,7,9] As a result of the development of agritourism activity, fundamental changes are registered at the village level, both in terms of the number of activities carried out as well as their quality:

- Information through tourist centers, agencies and dispatchers, following the need to regulate and organize tourist traffic at locality level. The organizational segment becomes necessary in order to capture information and issue it in its relations with the outside of the local system but also with its interior. These activities of such units will be carried out only by persons specialized in tourism: tourism managers, operators, agents and specialized agencies, etc.

- The systematization and development of specific activities for the provision of activities complementary to agritourism, will be realized in units such as: bakeries, pastry workshops, milk processing units, butchery laboratories, tailoring and laundry workshops, shops selling handicraft products and souvenirs, photo workshops (sales of photo films and video cassettes, film development, etc.). The artisan sector and crafts occupy a special place in the countryside, these activities have an artistic, cultural connotation and are also different from one locality to another. They were practiced and transmitted from generation to generation, carrying economic and social influences of the respective areas.

Their particularities determine an advantage on the souvenir market with obvious influences on the income of local craftsmen.

- The organization of cultural homes together with the institutions already existing in the villages: the school, the church and other cultural units. There is thus an improvement of the education factors through a permanent contact of the civilized social categories that will impress the norms of civilization and culture of the locals but, at the same time, the other category, that of the tourists, will be influenced by the knowledge of traditions and popular customs.

- Rural tourism and agritourism, as a form of rural tourism, can have effects on the management of the locality, on the organizational factors of the environment, mobilizing them, increasing the interest for the development of the rural area as infrastructure, in finding sources of financing in order to achieve the proposed objectives, regarding the modernization of the access roads, the restoration of certain touristic objectives.

- The action of rural tourism and agrotourism on the social factors in the rural environment is manifested by the reduction of the rural exodus and, in particular, by the stabilization of the population. The phenomenon becomes achievable considering that decent living possibilities are offered and there is an occupational diversification of the area's population.

- The peasant who owns an agro-tourism household is more prosperous than the others, as a result he will be willing to invest in order to increase his standard of living and in order to prosper the entire rural community of which he is a member.

The great advantage of rural tourism and agritourism lies in the fact that they do not create specially and specifically the products offered to tourists as big hotels do, instead they capitalize on what exists for further development, however, without services it is difficult to develop even for these branches of tourism. We conclude, therefore, that rural tourism means a lot of work, a lot of energy, a lot of passion and less money as a result.

Urban life is full of stresses that increase the desire to escape into nature to find an oasis of peace, calm, fresh air, to feel good and restore physical and intellectual strength. This need to "escape" from the urban agglomeration is at the origin of tourism in general.[3,4,13]

The technical development of those who practice tourism (equipment, cars, tools) but especially of those who offer tourist products (accommodation, meals, treatment, leisure), has made tourism turn into a real industry with a development extremely fast and with real possibilities to change the economic structure of the areas and localities where it is practiced.[4,5,9]

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The continuous evaluation regarding the preferences of the customers, in parallel with their degree of satisfaction, is of particular importance for the accommodation unit, helping it to maintain its competitive position on the tourist services market.

The orientation of the rural tourist guesthouse taken into analysis by us towards the customer and towards satisfying their needs is conferred by the demands of the customers which are constantly growing, determining the continuous and appropriate adaptation of the services they offer.

The main objectives that we pursued in carrying out this research regarding the satisfaction of the customers of a rural tourist guesthouse, refer to the quality of the services that the guesthouse offers to its customers, to the performance of the staff employed in the guesthouse and to the quality-price ratio of the service provided by the guesthouse.

The first objective we chose was the assessment of the overall satisfaction level of the guesthouse's customers. The second objective refers to the need to evaluate satisfaction according to the chosen items and the third objective is to evaluate the importance of each factor, the importance of each characteristic in determining satisfaction.

We have chosen, to determine the degree of satisfaction of the customers of the rural tourist guesthouse, a number of 20 characteristics, presented below:

Price practiced	Intimacy
The surrounding landscape	Cleanliness
Pension parking	The thermal atmosphere in the restaurant
The menu in the restaurant and its diversity	The appearance of the tableware
Quality of food served	Recreation and relaxation facilities
Employed personnel	Sanitary installations
Promptness	Facilities in the rooms
The access to the pension	The politeness of the staff
The capacity of the guesthouse and the restaurant	Cleaning of the bedding
Atmosphere	Ambience in the restaurant

We carried out this research based on a survey applying the questionnaire method. The questionnaire was applied directly to people who stayed at the guesthouse between May 1 2023 and 15 March 2024.

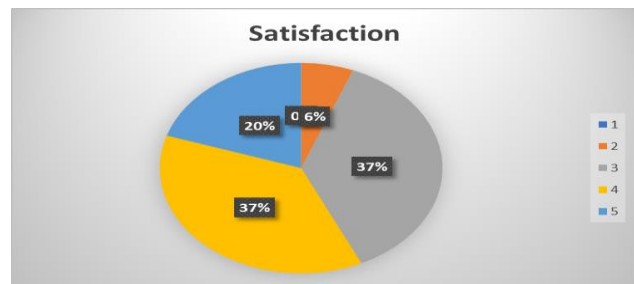
### RESEARCH RESULTS

The highest average was obtained by the promptness of the staff, an average of 4.69 with reference to customer satisfaction, followed by intimacy with an average of 4.63 and the quality of the food served, with an average of 4.49. At the diametrically opposite pole, we have the lowest values where we include the thermal ambience in the restaurant with an average of 2.14, the capacity of the guesthouse and restaurant with an average of 3.20 and the politeness of the staff with an average of 3.71.

*The level of satisfaction.* Most of the guesthouse's customers say they are quite satisfied with the services that this guesthouse offers.

**Table 1.**

Level of satisfaction	
Satisfaction	% (relative frequency)
1	0%
2	6%
3	37%
4	37%
5	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



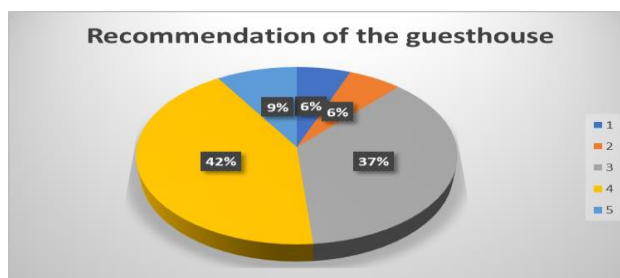
**Figure 1. Level of satisfaction**

*Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire*

*Recommendation of the guesthouse.* Analyzing this item, we find that the degree of recommendation of the boarding house is not extremely high, only 9% of customers stating that they would gladly recommend this boarding house.

**Table 2.**  
**Recommendation of the guesthouse**

Recommendation	% (relative frequency)
1	6%
2	6%
3	37%
4	43%
5	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



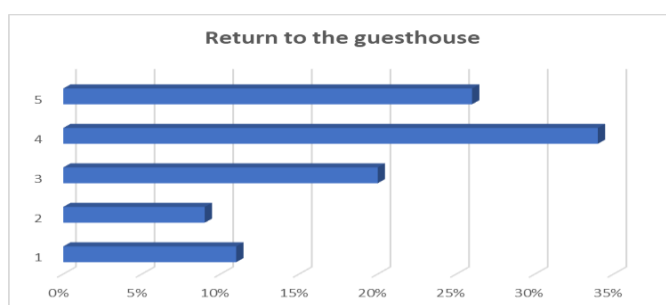
**Figure 2. Recommendation of the guesthouse**

Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

*Return to the guesthouse.* 26% of the customers would definitely return to the guesthouse, 34% of people would return to the guesthouse and 20% of the customers said that they were thinking and the rest stated that they would not return to the guesthouse (11% would not return at all and 9% would not would return).

**Table 3.**  
**Return to the guesthouse**

Return to the guesthouse	% (relative frequency)
1	11%
2	9%
3	20%
4	34%
5	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



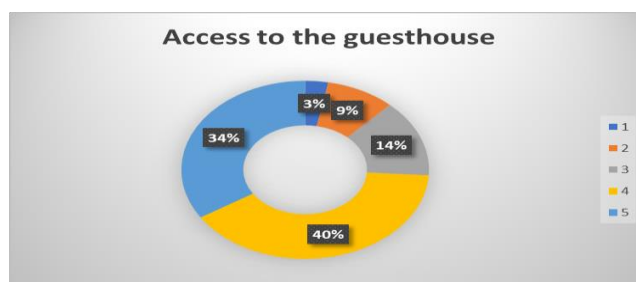
**Figure 3. Return to the guesthouse**

Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

*Access to the guesthouse.* Analyzing this item, I noticed that many customers consider that the access to the guesthouse is easy, being able to reach it very easily to benefit from the services that the guesthouse offers.

**Table 4.**  
**Access to the guesthouse**

Access to the guesthouse	% (relative frequency)
1	3%
2	9%
3	14%
4	40%
5	34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 4. Access to the guesthouse**

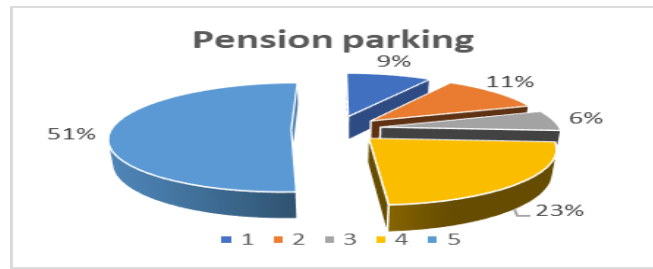
Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

*Pension parking.* More than half of the customers of the hostel studied are very satisfied with the parking available at this hostel.

**Table 5.**

**Pension parking**

Pension parking	% (relative frequency)
1	9%
2	11%
3	6%
4	23%
5	51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 5. Pension parking**

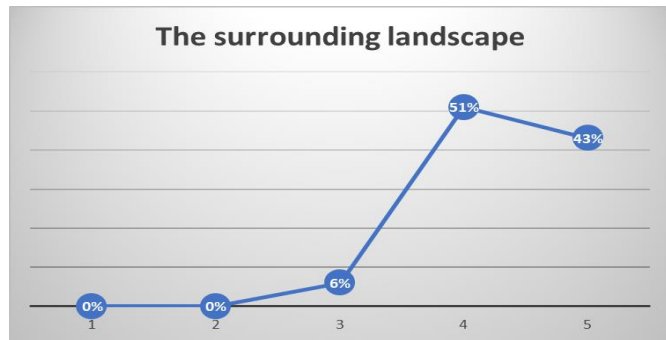
Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

*The surrounding landscape.* The clients declare themselves satisfied with the landscape, with what surrounds them, with the nature that gives them the feeling of well-being, causing them to relax, to recharge mentally and spiritually.

**Table 6.**

**The surrounding landscape**

The surrounding landscape	% (relative frequency)
1	0%
2	0%
3	6%
4	51%
5	43%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 6. Surrounding landscape**

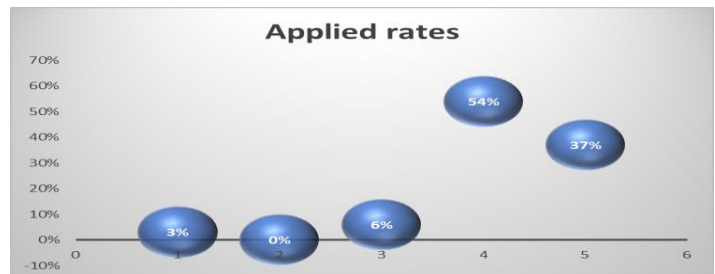
Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

*Applied rates.* Regarding the rates charged by the guesthouse, according to the table and graph above we can see that they are satisfactory, satisfactory for most of the customers who responded to our survey.

**Table 7.**

**Applied rates**

Applied rates	% (relative frequency)
1	3%
2	0%
3	6%
4	54%
5	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 7. Applied rates**

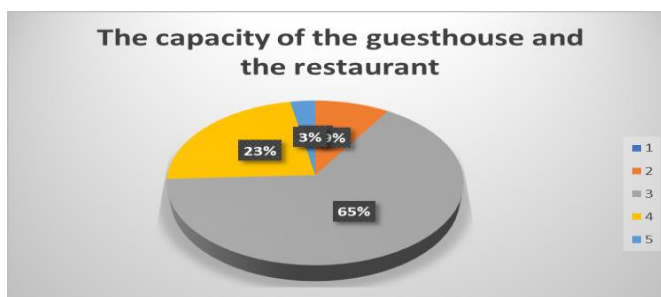
Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

The majority of customers are very satisfied with the polite manner in which they are treated by the employed staff, with the appearance of the tableware in the guesthouse's restaurant as well as with the diversity of the menu.

The capacity of the guesthouse and the restaurant. Not many customers expressed their satisfaction with the capacity of the guesthouse and restaurant.

**Table 8.**  
**Capacity of the guesthouse and the restaurant**

The capacity of the guesthouse and the restaurant	% (relative frequency)
1	0%
2	9%
3	66%
4	23%
5	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 8. Capacity of the guesthouse and the restaurant**

Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

The largest majority of customers declared themselves satisfied with the quality of the food in the guesthouse's restaurant and 86% of the respondents are satisfied with the cleanliness of the guesthouse and the restaurant.

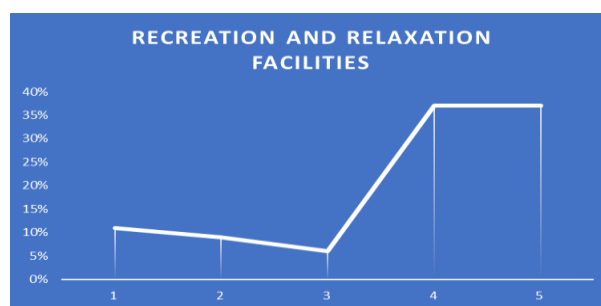
The atmosphere in the guesthouse restaurant turned out to be a pleasant one, with relaxing, calm music.

A noteworthy aspect of the guesthouse and restaurant, which brings great advantages to this location, is represented by the existing cleanliness, an aspect with which most customers declared themselves more than satisfied.

*Recreation and relaxation facilities.* The recreation and relaxation facilities offered by the guesthouse have proven to be satisfactory for most customers, but there are, however, dissatisfied customers from this point of view.

**Table 9.**  
**Recreation and relaxation facilities**

Recreation and relaxation facilities	% (relative frequency)
1	11%
2	9%
3	6%
4	37%
5	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 9. Recreation and relaxation facilities**

Source: data obtained by processing the applied questionnaire

The last questions of the questionnaire referred to the customers who stayed in the analyzed guesthouse, namely their age, gender and background. The majority of those staying in the guesthouse were between the ages of 31 and 40, males predominated, with a percentage of 57%, and the environment of origin was predominantly urban.

## CONCLUSIONS

The boarding house analyzed in this research places a special emphasis on the requirements expressed by customers. Being located in an area with high tourist potential, highlighted by the existence of numerous memorial houses, monasteries, nature reserves, this aspect implies the arrival in the area of tourists with different personalities. For this reason, the management of the guesthouse is in a position to carry out various researches in order to identify the preferences of customers who arrive at the guesthouse, succeeding, in this way, in satisfying various requirements and needs during their stay in the tourist unit.

The evaluation of customer satisfaction and its continuous monitoring is the essential management tool for the accommodation unit, a tool based on the analysis of information related to the set of customer relations.

For this purpose, our research has identified the extent to which customers are satisfied with the services offered to them, noting their high level of satisfaction vis-à-vis the services they have received or are receiving within the guesthouse.

Thus, we reached the following conclusions:

- the characteristics of low importance and low satisfaction are represented by the thermal atmosphere in the restaurant and the capacity of the restaurant. These attributes do not contribute in a significant way to the overall quality of services, but, in addition to other attributes, they can become quite important in terms of overall satisfaction, which is why it is necessary to keep them under surveillance.

- the characteristics of low importance and high satisfaction are represented by the access to the guesthouse, the parking lot of the guesthouse, the surrounding landscape, the rates charged, the politeness and promptness of the staff, the appearance, the food, the cleanliness, the general ambience, the privacy, the sanitary facilities and others. Increased satisfaction for features of low importance to customers indicates that they have probably overinvested in these attributes. A fairly large importance is represented by the access to the penione, an attribute that is on the same level as the diversity of the menu.

- the strong attributes of the boarding house are represented in our case by the recreation and relaxation facilities, an extremely important reason for spending time in the boarding house.

- the attributes with great importance but with little satisfaction represent threats for the boarding house, but we observe that our boarding house does not have characteristics for such attributes.

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