

## AUTHENTIC RURAL TOURISM, ENGINE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN PRAHOVA COUNTY. CASE STUDY: MĂGURENI VILLAGE

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**Abstract:** *The article explores the development of key tourism economic indicators from 2018 to 2022 in one of the seven counties in the South Muntenia Development Region, Prahova County. The authors analyzed various indicators, including existing tourist accommodation capacity, the net use index of tourist accommodation capacity, number of tourist reception structures, tourist arrivals, and overnight stays in tourist reception structures. Prahova County, noted for its high urbanization, diverse activities, and industrialization, also features varied landscapes and an exceptional natural setting with numerous tourist attractions appealing to both Romanian and international visitors. During the analyzed period, tourism performance exhibited a slight upward trend, driven by the county's rich resources and accommodation infrastructure. The case study presented in the article demonstrates how authentic guesthouses can play a role in revitalizing rural areas.*

**Key words:** *authentic rural tourism, Măgureni village, Prahova County, rural development, agritourism guesthouses*

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Romania is one of the European countries that has a complex tourism potential, but it should be noted that part of the resources are not exploited at an appropriate level so that tourism contributes significantly to the GDP. [2] In our country, in each county one or more types of tourism are practiced depending on a series of determining factors. [3,14,17,18] Among these counties, Prahova stands out for a variety of types of tourism offered. Prahova County covers an area of 4,716 square kilometers and features a diverse range of landscapes. [6] The county is notable for its abundance of natural resources and its significant tourist potential [8]. Consequently, a variety of economic activities thrive here, contributing positively to both the regional and national economies. [13] Prahova is a popular tourist destination for residents of the capital and a notable spot for foreign tourists seeking to enjoy nature. As for the tourist destinations in Prahova County, they are efficiently promoted by the media, and the results are visible year after year. [5,7] In this county we find several types of tourism, but in recent years they have stood out: rural tourism, agritourism and wine tourism. These types of tourism contribute to the sustainable development of Prahova County. [1,9,10,11,16] Tourists visiting this area have a variety of accommodation options to choose from. In recent years, there has been a growing preference for staying in agritourism guesthouses. During the analyzed period, Prahova County had 45 such establishments, each with its own unique characteristics. [12]

In the paper, along with the analysis of the accommodation structures, the Satul Banului Guesthouse is also presented, which is located in Măgureni, a village in Prahova County. [15] Here, authenticity is harmoniously intertwined with modernity, offering tourists the opportunity to experience country life. The opening of this agritourism guesthouse represented an important element for the local community. The article will present how authentic rural tourism can contribute to the development of rural areas.

In the future, we expect that in Prahova County and beyond, the interest of tourists in spending their free time in agritourism guesthouses will increase.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To write this article, the authors used the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics. In parallel, other specialized sources and articles were studied, which were mentioned in the bibliography.

Data related to Prahova County, for the period 2018-2022, were extracted and analyzed.

The indicators examined in the article, specific to the tourism sector, were: tourist arrivals and overnight stays in tourist reception structures, the net utilization index of the tourist accommodation capacity, the existing tourist accommodation capacity, the number of tourist reception structures.

For the case study, Satul banului Guesthouse, the authors did research within the guesthouse and in the Magureni village and held discussions with both the employees and the locals.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The trend in the number of tourist reception structures with accommodation functions in Prahova County is shown in the Table 1 for the period 2018 - 2022. The total number of these structures rose significantly, from 345 in 2018 to 495 in 2022, representing a 43.48% increase over the analyzed period. However, the number of Motels, Tourist cabins, Campgrounds and Tourist guesthouses has decreased.

The number of Bungalows increased from 1 in 2018 to 4 in 2022, which meant an increase of 400%, the highest value recorded. This fact may suggest a new preference of tourists for this type of accommodation, more isolated and close to nature.

Agritourism guesthouses had a slight increase from 44 in 2018 to 45 in 2022, suggesting a stability and possible increase in interest in rural tourism.

**Table 1.**

**Tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions in Prahova County (number)**

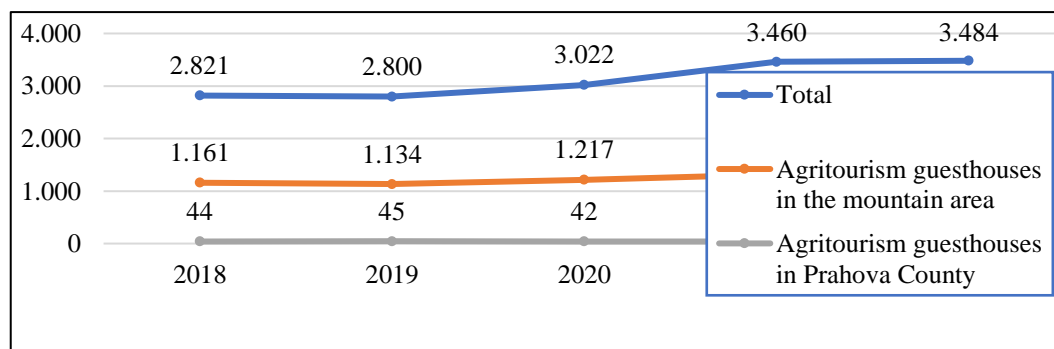
Specification	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022/2018 %
Total Prahova County	345	330	286	503	495	143.48
Motels	16	13	12	13	9	56.25
Tourist villas	52	47	43	56	52	100.00
Tourist cabins	7	7	5	4	5	71.43
Bungalows	1	1	1	1	4	400.00
Campgrounds	2	2	2	3	1	50.00
Tourist stops	1	1	1	1	*	-
Tourist cottages	*	*	*	2	3	-
Camps for students and preschoolers	3	3	*	3	3	100.00
Tourist guesthouses	128	121	102	92	90	70.31
Agritourism guesthouses	44	45	42	44	45	102.27

\* data is unavailable

Source: own calculation after [12]

The trend in the number of agritourism guesthouses is illustrated in Figure 1, for Prahova County, the Mountain area and nationwide, from 2018 to 2022. The overall increase in the number of agritourism guesthouses across the country (23.52% in 2022 compared to 2018) and in the Mountain area (14.91%) indicates a growing interest in agritourism, as it provides an authentic, nature-connected experience.

Instead, the stable number of Agritourism pensions in Prahova County suggests either a saturated market or the lack of development initiatives in this field compared to other regions.



**Figure 1. Number of Agritourism guesthouses in the Mountain area and in the Prahova County**

Source: own representation after [12]

Table 2 presents the tourist accommodation capacity in Prahova County, categorized by types of tourist reception structures for the years 2018-2022. The total for Prahova County registered an increase of 6.82%.

For Bungalows, Camps for students and preschoolers and Agritourist guesthouses, the accommodation capacity remained constant, while for the other tourist reception structures it decreased, the highest value being for Motels, 42.69%.

**Table 2.**  
**The existing tourist accommodation capacity by types of tourist reception structures in Prahova County (number)**

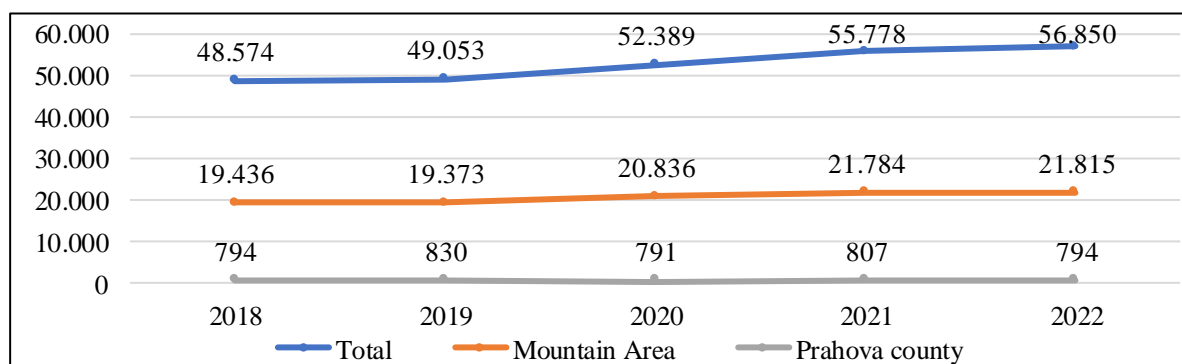
Types of tourist reception structures	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022/2018 %
Total Prahova County	12,651	12,370	10,624	13,914	13,514	106.82
Motels	691	551	517	547	396	57.31
Tourist villas	996	919	832	1,048	965	96.89
Tourist cabins	209	207	150	113	142	67.94
Bungalows	8	8	8	8	8	100.00
Campgrounds	56	56	56	88	28	50.00
Tourist stops	44	44	44	10	*	-
Tourist cottages	*	*	*	16	24	-
Camps for students and preschoolers	154	154	*	154	154	100.00
Tourist guesthouses	2,402	2,265	1,942	1,820	1,742	72.52
Agritourism guesthouses	794	830	791	807	794	100.00

\* data is unavailable

Source: own calculation after [12]

At the national level, the total accommodation capacity in Agritourism guesthouses increased from 48,574 places in 2018 to 56,850 places in 2022, representing an increase of 16.99% (Figure 2). In the same period, in the Mountain area, the increase was of 12.23%, continuing the growth trend manifested in the number of Agritourism pensions.

The accommodation capacity in Prahova County remained relatively constant, with small variations: 794 places in 2018 and 2022, with an increase to 830 places in 2019 and a decrease to 791 places in 2020.



**Figure 2. The existing tourist accommodation capacity in Agritourism guesthouses**

Source: own representation after [12]

Tourist arrivals in Prahova county, between 2018 and 2022, in the reception structures available, are presented in Table 3, along with the percentage change in this number from 2018 to 2022. At the county level, the total number remained relatively constant, with a slight increase of 0.14% [12]. In contrast, in agritourism guesthouses they increased from 18,258 in 2018 to 26,941 in 2022, marking a significant increase of 47.56%. At the same time, there were also increases for tourist villas and chalets.

But for Bungalows, arrivals have dropped dramatically, from 330 in 2018 to 63 in 2022, which is a decrease of 80.91%. Important decreases were also manifested in the case of Camps for students and preschoolers.

**Table 3. Tourist arrivals in tourist accommodation facilities by type of accommodation in Prahova County (number of persons)**

Types of tourist reception structures	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022/2018 %
Total Prahova County	567,877	585,785	312,539	486,339	568,691	100.14
Motels	15,985	14,387	9,373	16,225	14,791	92.53
Tourist villas	35,950	32,130	20,668	35,268	45,345	126.13
Tourist cabins	5,865	9,421	7,838	9,402	8,219	140.14
Bungalows	330	199	187	100	63	19.09
Campgrounds	376	547	312	319	342	90.96
Tourist stops	854	976	181	64	*	-
Tourist cottages	*	*	*	588	1,075	-
Camps for students and preschoolers	2,871	2,757	348	26	678	23.62
Tourist guesthouses	68,742	66,190	39,678	55,684	57,512	83.66
Agritourism guesthouses	18,258	22,452	14,882	24,381	26,941	147.56

\* data is unavailable

Source: own calculation after [12]

Table 4 shows the number of overnight stays in various tourist reception structures in Prahova County for the years 2018-2022. The total number of overnight stays in Prahova County decreased by 9.55%, suggesting that, although the county remains an attractive tourist destination, the capacity to retain tourists has been affected in recent years. The categories of Tourist villas (16.56%), Tourist cabins (26.91%) and Agritourism guesthouses (28.37%) registered significant increases, indicating a growing preference for these types of accommodation.

The number of overnight stays in Camps dropped dramatically from 9,692 in 2018 to 2,320 in 2022, which is a decrease of 76.06%. [12]

**Table 4.**  
**Overnight stays in tourist accommodation facilities by type of accommodation in Prahova County (number)**

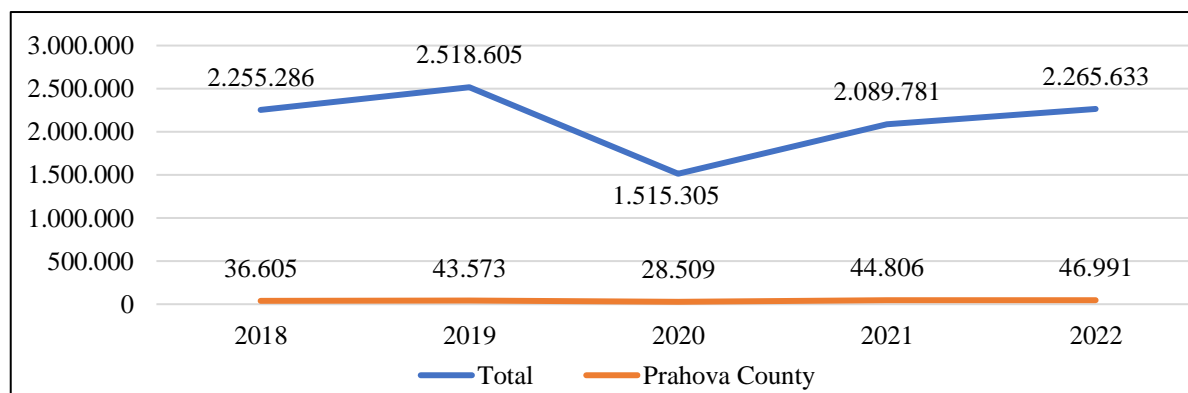
Types of tourist reception structures	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022/2018 %
Total Prahova County	1,284,823	1,302,244	667,314	1,005,892	1,162,152	90.45
Motels	25,732	21,758	12,704	23,142	23,600	91.71
Tourist villas	75,684	68,796	44,340	73,048	88,215	116.56
Tourist cabins	10,971	16,854	13,556	17,004	13,923	126.91
Bungalows	774	355	387	206	122	15.76
Campgrounds	623	1,216	680	603	562	90.21
Tourist stops	1,496	1,406	269	130	*	-
Tourist cottages	*	*	*	1,194	2,143	-
Camps for students and preschoolers	9,692	10,273	1,269	52	2,320	23.94
Tourist guesthouses	145,731	146,361	85,031	117,031	123,685	84.87
Agritourism guesthouses	36,605	43,573	28,509	44,806	46,991	128.37

\* data is unavailable

Source: own calculation after [12]

The number of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses remained relatively constant at the national level during the analyzed period, with a slight increase of 0.46% despite the fluctuations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 3).

In Prahova County, overnight stays increased from 44,806 to 46,991, representing a 4.88% rise.



**Figure 3. Overnight stays in Agritourism guesthouses**

Source: own representation after [12]

The index of net utilization of the tourist accommodation capacity in operation for the tourist accommodation structures in Prahova County, with values from August, for the period 2018-2022, is presented in Table 5. It is necessary to specify that we have chosen the values corresponding to the months of August because they are the highest percentage values recorded in the analyzed period.

Decreases were recorded in the categories of Campgrounds (0.94%), Camps for students and preschoolers (43.19%) and total for Prahova county, 8.55%.

For Tourist cabins, the utilization rates increased significantly, from 28.2% in August 2018 to 45.6% in August 2022, marking an increase of 61.70%.

This reflects a growing demand and better use of the available capacity in Tourist cabins.

**Table 5.**

**Index of net utilization of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, by types of tourist accommodation structures, in Prahova County (percentage)**

Types of tourist reception structures	August 2018	August 2019	August 2020	August 2021	August 2022	2022/2018 %
Total Prahova County	43.3	43.6	34.9	38	39.6	91.45
Motels	14.6	10.4	14.5	17.3	18	123.29
Tourist villas	33.1	33.9	38.9	41	39.8	120.24
Tourist cabins	28.2	43.3	51.3	61.7	45.6	161.70
Campgrounds	10.6	17.5	15.3	17.4	10.5	99.06
Tourist stops	17.6	17.7	*	*	*	-
Tourist cottages	*	*	*	40	40	-
Camps for students and preschoolers	34.5	37.8	*	*	19.6	56.81
Tourist guesthouses	27.8	27.6	28.7	33.3	36.9	132.73
Agritourism guesthouses	19.9	19.7	19.6	23.9	23.7	119.10

\* data is unavailable

Source: own calculation after [12]

The utilization index in the case of Agritourism guesthouses increased from 19.9% in August 2018 to 23.7% in August 2022, marking an increase of 19.10%. This growth reflects a particular interest in agritourism.

Starting from the statistical data presented above, we have analyzed how Agritourism pensions can contribute to the development of rural areas, in this case, in the mountain area.

Satul Banului Guesthouse is an Agritouristic guesthouse located in Măgureni, Prahova County (Photo 1, Photo 2). [15] It has been designed to provide an authentic rural living experience, encouraging a complete disconnection from technology and an offline lifestyle. The guesthouse offers traditional-style rooms, the names of the rooms representing the names of the owners' great-grandparents, such as “Mother Lina”, “Mother Floarea” and “Mother Lisandra”, and evoke memories of their childhood and the authentic atmosphere of Romanian life in the past.

The guesthouse is located on the land inherited from great-grandfather Ghiță Stan Dobre, a well-known innkeeper and manager of parquet exploitation in the village and offers unique opportunities for tourists in terms of rural tourism. This farmhouse is located in the middle of a picturesque landscape, where the traditional lifestyle is still preserved by some locals.

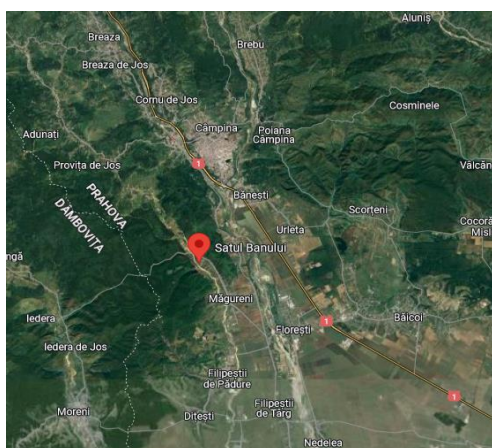


Photo 1. Map with the positioning of Măgureni Village in Prahova county

Source: [4]



Photo 2. Agritourism guesthouse in Măgureni Village, Prahova County

Source: [15]

Satul Banului Guesthouse also offers various outdoor recreational and exploration activities, making it an ideal place for those looking to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and reconnect with nature and rural traditions. The area surrounding the guesthouse is rich in history and offers numerous historical vestiges to explore, such as the palaces of Cantacuzino and Mavros Cantacuzino. [15]

Once at Satul Banului Guesthouse, tourists have the opportunity to enjoy traditional Romanian dishes and participate in local events and various festivals. [15]

Satul Banului Guesthouse has contributed to the economic development of Măgureni Village through the following elements:

- employed staff from the same locality or from neighboring localities, thus contributing to the reduction of local unemployment and the decrease of population migration to cities,

- in order to preserve the authenticity, the owners of this guesthouse have purchased, over time, from the locals, a series of household items, as well as furniture of considerable age, in order to introduce the tourist to the atmosphere of the peasant household of the past,

- food dishes based on products obtained in the households in the area are served at the guesthouse,

- the events organized by Satul Banului Guesthouse represent for the locals a possibility to spend their free time and first of all to capitalize on their own products both at the guesthouse and at the visitors,

- increasing the demand for local products and services, small businesses and local producers were stimulated,

- Farmers in the area have the opportunity to diversify their incomes and reduce their dependence on traditional agriculture,

- Satul Banului Guesthouse promotes local traditions through its activities, helping to preserve cultural heritage.

- Interaction between locals and tourists, including the sharing of old traditions and customs, strengthens social cohesion.

- Additionally, the increase in the number of tourists at the agritourism guesthouse can prompt local authorities to improve infrastructure, benefiting the entire community.

Therefore, an agritourism guesthouse can significantly contribute to the development of the rural area from an economic, social and cultural point of view.

## CONCLUSIONS

Examining the case of Măgureni Village in Prahova County, where an agritourism guesthouse highlights the region's history and traditions, we can conclude that agritourism was an important source of income for Prahova County during the studied period. It leveraged the natural beauty and longstanding traditions of the region.

The guesthouse provided jobs for local residents, enabling them to work close to home, sell products from their small family farms, and even capitalize on their traditional craft skills. Therefore, this type of tourism directly contributes to increasing the income of the rural population.

By stimulating the local economy, promoting culture and traditions and supporting sustainable development, agritourism guesthouses play an essential role in the development of rural areas. They can transform local communities, improving the quality of life for residents and creating a valuable urban-rural link.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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