

STUDY REGARDING THE CLASSIFICATION OF TOURISM ACCOMMODATION UNITS FOR RURAL TOURISM WITHIN THE EU MEMBER STATES

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Abstract: *This paper represents a comparative study regarding the classification of tourism accommodation units operating within rural tourism in the EU member states. The results of this research offer resourceful pieces of information aimed at identifying the role, objectives, procedures and purpose of such classification as well as its types and categories for rural tourism. Furthermore, this study is meant at contributing to the clarification as regards touristic classification of rural tourism accommodation units within the EU member states offering important and useful information for professionals and economic players undertaking activities in the field of tourism.*

Key words: *rural tourism, classification system, tourism accommodation units, level of comfort*

INTRODUCTION

Taking into consideration the fact that contemporary tourism consumers are increasingly informed and more demanding in terms of quality and quantity of touristic services, we consider that it is necessary to perform an analysis on classification of tourism accommodation units related to the rural tourism, at the level of U.E. member States, under the conditions where the comfort level provided by the certificate and the classification categories became an essential requirement of tourism services market.

Rural¹ tourism is a form of tourism which takes place in the countryside, which is oriented to the use of local tourism resources (natural, cultural, etc.), the knowledge of local customs and traditions, peasant households, farms, etc. Rural tourism is a type of tourism that emerged and was developed as a recent phenomenon, but it was used in the EU states for several decades in an organized manner or spontaneously.

Rural tourism is a concept that treats the developed touristic activity in rural areas, that is organized and carried out by the local population and being based on linkage with the natural and human environment.

The classification of tourism structures represents the coded form of the integration of the comfort level and the range services and based on reputation, moral climate and a set of standards service.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology has assumed activities of gathering, processing and interpretation of the information on the classification issues of the accommodation tourism units related to rural tourism, at a national and international level, using an extensive documentary material (such as: books, studies, magazines, legislative regulations, database information available through the internet network, etc.), and also carrying out analytical and objective observations, theoretical analysis, comparative analysis and a content analysis.

Starting from the premise that through classification of accommodation tourism units it is desired the consolidation of the comfort level and of the range of services by providing

¹ The law of the Republic of Moldova's Tourism no. 798 – XIV since 11.02.2000

a category, and the the objectives that are desired to be achieved by adopting a classification system that can be:

- clients' information;
- the possibility of making the difference between the tourism accommodation units, through the implementation of differentiated policies;
- the possibility of an increased fiscal pressures from the state on luxury products (establishments);
- a possible regulation of tariffs;
- facilitates the communication, the close contracts and their monitoring, in the relationship between the service providers and travel agencies, as well as between the service providers and tourists.

Each of country of the world, due to cultural and national traditions, uses a specific classification system, which prevents the application of a single worldwide classification system.²

Some of the main criteria for the classification of tourism accommodation units with lodging³, taken into account by the O.M.T., are: the level of comfort (superior: Luxury, 4 and 5*, medium 3*, unpretentious environment: 1 and 2*), the territorial location (seasonal, mountains, spa areas, rural, urban, outside, near and outside the localities) and also the services standard and the facilities offered (complete, economic, self catering). possible, taken into account by the Organization, are: the level of comfort (superior: Luxury, 4 and 5 *, 3 *, unpretentious environment: 1 and 2 *), territorial location (seasonal mountain spa climeterice areas, rural, urban, outside, near the localities of circulație artery) and the standard of services and facilities offered (complete economic, self catering).

One of the basic criteria for classification is the comfort level, and is composed of the following parameters:

- the surface (mp), the structure of the common spaces, the rooms (depending on number of beds/places), the accommodation, the presence of utilities;
- proper furnishings, insurance inventory items and sanitary utilities;
- the presence and the type of public units;
- construction-roadways, sights;
- the provision of technical services, including telephony, internet, TV, reception facilities refrigerator, minibar, safe etc;
- possibility and offering of additional services.

To understand the essence of the classification system of tourism accommodation units related to rural tourism, from the point of view of the comfort level, the most important aspect is the regulatory activity from the international practice, which knows two different approaches in the elaboration of classification rules:

1. the rulemaking is assured by the authorities/institutions of the state (the national classification system);
2. the rulemaking is assured by the unions and professional organizations.

The main objectives for this study are:

- *to clarify the role, the objectives, the procedures and the purpose of the classification of accommodation units of rural touris;*

² The European Consumer Centres' Network - *Classification of hotels establishments within the EU*, pg. 7

³ The European Consumer Centres' Network - *Classification of hotels establishments within the EU*, pg. 5

- to identify the types and the classification categories of accommodation units of rural tourism at the level of the EU Member States;
- to clarify the concepts and to provide of information concerning the tourism classification related to rural tourism for EU Member States.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The paper carries out an analysis of the classification systems of tourism accommodation units of rural tourism in the countries member of the European Union.

Depending on the classification system adopted, the States Member of the EU can be divided into the following categories:

1. countries which have not taken any official rating system (like the Nordic countries) - these countries adopt a classification system justified by the principle of market freedom, without any form of intervention and control.
2. countries which have not adopted any official classification, but have an informal system of classification, which enjoys recognition from the public (for example: England – classification system introduced by two automobile associations: Automobile Association and Royal Automobile Club, in Denmark we have the system of – “best practices” promoted by Politiken., and in Switzerland, Germany, etc there are professional associations of hoteliers;
3. countries have adopted an official system of classification, more or less detailed (such as: Romania, Italy, Greece, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, France etc).

Table 1

Classification types of the structure of the accommodation system related to rural tourism with lodging in the Member States of the European Union

No. crt.	Country	The type of the classification system
1.	Austria	National voluntary system (facultative)
2.	Belgium	Compulsory official regional system
3.	Bulgaria	Compulsory official national system
4.	Cyprus	Compulsory official national system
5.	Latvia	Compulsory official national system
6.	Czech Republic	National voluntary system (facultative)
7.	Denmark	Compulsory official national system “best practices”
8.	Estonia	- Compulsory official national system - National voluntary system (facultative)
9.	Finland	There has no classification system
10.	France	- National voluntary system (facultative) since June 2009, - until June 2009 there was a compulsory official national system
11.	Germany	National voluntary system (facultative)
12.	Greece	Compulsory official national system
13.	Ireland	Compulsory official national system
14.	Italy	Compulsory official regional system
15.	Latvia	National voluntary system (facultative)
16.	Lithuania	Compulsory official national system
17.	Luxembourg	National voluntary system (facultative)
18.	Malta	Compulsory official national system
19.	Great Britain	National voluntary system (facultative)
20.	Holland	National voluntary system (facultative)
21.	Poland	Compulsory official national system
22.	Portugal	Compulsory official national system
23.	Romania	Compulsory official national system
24.	Slovakia	Compulsory official national system
25.	Sloven	Compulsory official national system
26.	Spain	Compulsory official national system
27.	Sweden	National voluntary system (facultative)
28.	Hungary	- Compulsory official national system and - National voluntary system (facultative)

Analyzing the existence of the classification system of tourist accommodation units related to rural tourism in the Member States of the European Union, we can note the presence of a classification system in the 27 states, only Finland has not adopted such a system.

The analysis of the classification system of the tourism accommodation units with lodging functions related to rural tourism, is adopted by the member countries of the EU in terms of its nature, and from that it reveals the fact that 17 of the States have an official classification system, and we can also identify the existence of a self-regulated system in 11 States and in Finland there is no system adopted (voluntary informal or non-existent).

Analyzing the classification system of tourism accommodation units with lodging related to rural tourism, adopted in the Member States of the EU, in terms of competences distribution in the classification system, we note that in most countries there are regulations at national level, and only in Belgium, Spain and Italy we can see regulations at regional level, and in Finland there are not regulations of this nature either.

The classification of accommodation tourism units related to rural tourism is as a coded form such as to synthesize the level of comfort and the range of services based on reputation, moral climate and a set of requirements, criteria and standards of services.

Not only classification systems differ from one Member State to another, but also there is a significant diversity of types of tourism accommodation units with lodging related to rural tourism.

Table 2

Types of tourism structures related to rural tourism accommodation and classification categories used in the different States of the European Union

No. crt.	Country	Types of accommodation tourism units	Classification categories/Structures types
1.	Austria	Guest House, bed and breakfast, Apartment	1- 5 stars
2.	Belgium	Guest room, open-air, Recreation Complex (structure), holiday	1 - 5 stars
3.	Bulgaria	Complex (and religious) holiday, Family Hotel, Bungalow and Camping, houses for rent, rooms, vacation homes and houses	Complex (and religious) holiday: 3 - 5 stars, Family Hotel: 1 - 3 stars, Bungalow and Camping: 1 - 2 stars, Houses for rent: 1 - 3 stars, Separate rooms, holiday homes and houses: 1 - 3 stars
4.	Cyprus	Tourist village, Tourism villa, camping Ground, Traditional House (Hotel and Apartment Hotel), Tourist Apartment	Tourist village, Tourist Villa: Deluxe, A, B, C -categories Camping ground A, B, -categories Traditional House (Hotel and Apartment Hotel), Tourist apartment: no stars Other categories: Star Hotel and Guesthouse
5.	Croatia	Camping and other types of accommodation: rooms and apartments	1 – 5 stars
6.	Czech Republic	Bed and breakfast, Camping, Cottage, Bedroom for Hikers	1 star: Tourist 2 stars: Economy, 3 stars: Standard, 4 stars: First class, 5 stars: Luxury
7.	Denmark	Hostel	1- 5 stars
8.	Estonia	Guest house, tourist villages and camps, holiday home, apartment for visitors, B&B	1- 5 stars
9.	Finland	Chalets	-
10.	France	Camping, rooms, Houses, Holiday Villages Tourist Villages, Residential, Residential	Accommodation classified pursuant valid norms by July 2009: arpitane: Hotel 0 stars.

		Amusement Parks	Tourist residence: 1-4 stars. accommodation classified pursuant to applicable rules in July 2009: 1 – 5 stars
11.	Germany	Guest houses, bed and breakfast, Inn, Tavern etc.	G-classification
12.	Greece	Main structures: furnished apartment, Camping-secondary structures: rooms for rent, furnished apartments, furnished house and mansion	-Furnished apartments and rooms for rent: 1-5 stars, -Camping: A, B, C categories
13.	Ireland	Guest House, Hostel for holiday, Holiday Camp, campers and camping, Holiday Cottages, holiday apartment	-accommodation units (Guest houses): 1 – 4 stars -accommodation units Guest houses) – ungraded, with symbols U,N, R
14.	Italy	non-establishment: B&B, Youth Hostel, private House, Alpine Refuge-outdoor shelters-tourist village, Camping, these categories may vary from one region to another	- most regions have adopted a system based on six categories of classification: from 1 star to 5 star Deluxe, based on a minimum required score of each category,-10 regions using a system based on 5 categories of classification: from 1 star to 5 stars deluxe based on classification criteria.
15.	Latvia	The Guest House, the-Other categories: Camping	Guest House: I-IV categories, Camping: I-III categories
16.	Lithuania	The Guest House, the-other: camping, rest home, nursing home, for health center, tourist center, the home of free time	Guest House: 1 – 4 stars
17.	Luxembourg	Hotel,	1 – 5 stars
18.	Malta	Holiday village guest house, B&B establishment	Holiday Village: 2-5 stars, Guest House: standard or comfort, B&B establishment: 2-3 stars
19.	Great Britain	Hotel: Hotel-guest accommodation units: B&B, House, farmhouse, Inn, Restaurant with rooms, Campus-Hostel: Hostel accommodation, Activity, sleeping cabin, shed, Camping-self-catering apartment, Caravan, holiday-holiday park: camping and tourist Park tourist village	- There are four classification systems, distributed for: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Most of the systems is based on the star system. England: 1-5 stars, Scotland, Wales: 0-5 classes
20.	Holland	Camping and Bungalow Park	1 – 5 stars
21.	Poland	Bed and breakfast/guest house, Camping, tourist Home, Bivouac	Pension: 1-5 stars, Camping: 1-4-star Guest House/House for tourists, the bivouac: I-III categories
22.	Portugal	tourist structures: Inn, tourist village (holiday), tourist Apartment (holiday) Holiday Villa, tourist structures in rural areas (cabins, structures for agritourism, rural hotels), Camping and caravans-hosting local units	-tourist structures: Inn: located in a national park or monument of public interest: the 4-star hotel, located in a building of regional or local public interest or historical or architectural value: 3-star tourist village: 3-5 stars, tourist Apartment (holiday): 3-5-star tourist structures, located in rural cabins, structures for agrotourism, hotels, Camping and caravans: 3-5 stars-hosting local units: not classified
23.	Romania	Hostels, tourist complexes, apartments and rooms for rent, bungalow, cottage, camping, tourist village, a tourist stopover, apartments and camping,	- tourist and agrotourist pensions pensions: 1-5 daisies (flowers)-bungalow, cottage, apartment or tourist rooms for rent: 1-3 stars-camping, tourist village, a tourist stopover, apartments and camping type: 1-4 stars
24.	Slovakia	Guest House-Apartment, holiday village, Camping and campsites, private accommodation	Guest House: standard and budget (economic), which correspond to categories of classification of the hotels of 1, 2 and 3 stars, House-apartment: 2-, 3-star holiday village: economic, medium, superior Camping and campsites: four classes, private accommodation: rural tourism and agrotourism.

25.	Sloven	Pension, Inn, Campground, apartment, 1st floor, Holiday House, private rooms, accommodation at the farm House	Camping: 1-5 stars, Pension, Inn, second floor, Holiday House, private rooms: 1-4-star accommodation on the farm House: 1 to 4 apples.
26.	Spain	Camping, private rooms, retreat, guest houses, rural homes,	Secondary group:-private rooms, rural Houses: 1-3 stars-guest houses: no category. In some regions, the grading system can be included in a "higher class" for private rooms and rural Houses-silver stars.
27.	Sweden	Hotel, Hotel Garni	1 – 5 stars
28.	Hungary	Bed and breakfast, camping, holiday house, hostel, tourist board	1 – 5 stars

The analysis of structures types of tourism accommodation units related to rural tourism and the classification categories of those used in the Member States of the European Union highlights the fact that there is a diversity of structures of tourism accommodation that are different and have specific names, from one country to another.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism is a concept that treats the developed touristic activity in rural areas, organized and carried out by the local population and based on linkage of the natural, traditional and human environment.

The classification of tourism of the accommodation units related to rural tourism, such as a coded form of the integration of the comfort level and of the scale of services, is based on reputation, a moral climate and a set of requirements, criteria and standards of services.

In E.U. Member States, the system of classification of tourism accommodation units related to rural tourism is present in 27 of the 28 Member States, 17 of them have an official classification system, 11 states have an auto-regulated system, while in most countries there are regulations at a national level; only in two countries we meet regulations at regional level.

At the level E.U. Member States there are a variety of different structures of tourism accommodation units related to rural tourism which differ and have specific names, from one country to another.

In the European Union, not only of the classification systems of the tourism accommodation units for rural tourism differs from country to country, but there is also a significant diversity of the comfort level, regarding the level and the classification criteria, which differ from one Member State to another, an aspect that complicates even more the accuracy of information provided by the classification system in tourists perception

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