

TOURISM IN THE BIOECONOMY OF ROMANIA

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Abstract. *Tourism is an extremely important sector of the European economy and, implicitly, it must become an asset of the Romanian economy. Although the tourism activities are not considered part of the bioeconomy, certain types of tourism, by their specificity, are implicitly connected to it. In Romania, there are many areas with high tourist potential that may be capitalized through an integrated approach. The purpose of this paper is to present the place of tourism in the bioeconomy sector. The paper presents the directions of tourism development as a field of smart specialization, the connections between this sector and other fields of smart specialization, as well as the development opportunities of the national economy.*

Key words: *bioeconomy, agritourism, smart specialization, agri-food supply chains*

INTRODUCTION

Bioeconomy is a relatively new concept, which in the strategy documents of the European Commission appeared in the years 2010-2012. The Europe 2020 Strategy considers that the bioeconomy will be one of the most important areas of development in the next period, a path for “smart and green growth” in EU [6]. The European Commission (EC) defines the bioeconomy as encompassing “the production of renewable biological resources and the conversion of these resources and waste streams into value added, such as food, feed, bio-based products and bioenergy” [6]; the bioeconomy includes “agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food and pulp and paper production, as parts of chemical, biotechnological and energy industries” [7]. This document presenting the EU’s bioeconomy strategy shows the social and economic importance of the bioeconomy sectors, which generates every year “a turnover of 2000 billion euros and 22 million jobs” (approximately 9 % of EU’s employed population) [5,6].

The Review of 2012 Strategy highlights progress in the bioeconomy, especially in the fields of research and innovation, stimulating investment and developing new value chains. Also, the new strategy mentions the need to adapt bioeconomy national strategies in accordance with the strategy of the European Commission and stakeholders involvement[7].

The bioeconomy also provides strategic over-sector integrating form of action affecting economic development, and shall be entered in an interdisciplinary approach in the area of the bio-economy, including the issues of energy generated from renewable energy sources, as well as processes, such industries as textiles, paper, and part of chemical, cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries, but also some kinds of tourism, especially agritourism [15]. There are good arguments for including some services in the bioeconomy, especially tourism and outdoor recreation services [3].

The EU’s strategy on bioeconomy shows that a bioeconomy must use natural resources to create high added value products, improve the quality of the environment and support biodiversity. It will promote “more sustainable, circular and post-waste food systems and primary production on land and sea” [8]. On the one hand, rural areas can be sources of supply of raw materials for economic activities in the field of bioeconomy, whether they are used by local economic agents or by regional or national companies.

Rural development that is a part of bioeconomy can be promoted through a bioeconomy. The bioeconomy can contribute to the rural development. Rural areas can be sources of supply of raw materials for bioeconomy economic activities, even though they

are used by local economic agents or by regional or national companies. [5]. For example, bioeconomy offered goods from rural areas, create further opportunities for rural areas and represent support for other economic activities, such as tourism. Tourism can play an important role in bioeconomy, because it is a sector that supports sustainable development through “energy conservation, environment protection, waste reduction, recycling programs, increased use of natural cleaning products and natural food from local cuisine”[2].

Tourism are not considered part of the bioeconomy. But, agritourism, has the most obvious links with the bioeconomy, because, by definition, it involves the use of agricultural products from the peasant's own production, but also activities on farms that support tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper investigates the concept of agritourism and establishes the links between this form of tourism and the bioeconomy. Therefore, the first part of this paper presents a detailed analysis of a rich specialized literature, both Romanian and foreign. Second part contains a statistical analysis of the Romanian agritourism, using the statistical database of the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies. This statistical analysis provides a general image of the Romanian agritourism and identifies the best measures and solutions for the development of this form of tourism.

The development of the Romanian agritourism can be appreciated using the analysis of certain indicators, such as the accommodation capacity, the arrivals, the number of overnight stays, the index of the use of the accommodation capacity in the agritourism pensions. I analyzed this indicators for period 2010-2019.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Tourism represents an important economic activity, with an extremely positive impact on the economic growth and employment in Europe. Its role in the European citizens' lives is becoming more and more important, while the number of those traveling for personal or professional purposes is increasing. Tourism is an activity related to the cultural and natural heritage, as well as to the contemporary traditions and cultures of the European Union; it exemplifies the need to reconcile the economic growth with the sustainable development.

Tourism is an extremely important sector of the European economy and, implicitly, it must become an asset of the Romanian economy. Although the tourism activities, included in the tertiary sector of the economy, are not considered part of the bioeconomy, certain types of tourism are implicitly related to it through their characteristics. Agritourism is the most important.

Agritourism is not a new phenomenon in the countries of the European Union, nor in Romania. For a long time it has been practiced either spontaneously or organized, as a tourist activity in the rural area. But what is new is its size. This expansion has a double explanation: on the one hand the relaunch of the development of rural regions and, on the other hand, the diversification of the forms of tourism; agritourism, as part of rural tourism represents an alternative type of tourism that meets various categories of tourists [5,18].

Agritourism can be a sector that support the rural economy and ensures the preservation of the rural environment. This form of tourism that takes place in accommodations unit such us touristic pensions and agritourism farms, benefits from anpolluted natural environment, natural attractions, as well as historical and cultural traditions [1,14].

Agritourism is based on the provision of accommodation, meals, leisure and other complementary services within the peasant household [10,17]. Agritourism is practiced by the small owners in rural areas, usually as a secondary activity, while the activity carried out in the household / farm remaining the main occupation and source of income. [12].

In recent years, the agritourism services have become a possibility to diversify their sources of income for many farm families. Keeping a traditional farm, very often no longer provides its owners a satisfactory level of income. Currently, many farmers decide to start such activities in rural areas [16].

Agritourism implies the existence of two main activities: agriculture and tourism, which offer specificity to the tourist product through the three elements: accommodation, food and leisure [9]. The first element of agritourism is accommodation. Thus, the farmer has the possibility to offer for accommodation the available rooms, and the agritourism activities are related to the main activity (agriculture). The second element of agritourism product is food. The farmer has the opportunity to capitalize directly his agricultural production to tourists, therefore the quality of local products can play an important role in agritourism development. The third element is leisure, which is based on traditional activities, in which tourists take part directly or indirectly.

Agritourism has developed in Romania in the last decade. The number of agritourism guesthouses has increased significantly in the last 10 years (it has doubled). The largest increase occurred between 2015 and 2018, when more than 600 new units came into operation. The number of accommodation places in agritourism guesthouses has also increased, from 20,000 accommodation places in 2010, to almost 45,000 accommodation places in 2019 (with shares higher than in the case of the number of agritourism pensions) (Table no. 1).

Table 1

The total number of agritourism guesthouses and the accommodation capacity in agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2010 - 2019

Year	Number of agritourism guesthouses	Accommodation places in agritourism guesthouses
2010	1,354	20,208
2011	1,210	20,683
2012	1,569	27,453
2013	1,598	28,775
2014	1,665	30,480
2015	1,918	35,188
2016	2,028	37,394
2017	2,556	44,499
2018	2,821	48,574
2019	2,800	49,053

Source: Tempo Online Database

The reasons for these increases are diverse. Agritourism is not a recent phenomenon in Romania. It has long been practiced either spontaneously or in an organized way. But what is new is the size of this form of tourism. This expansion has a double explanation: first, the relaunch of the development of rural regions and second, the diversification of tourism forms, agritourism being an alternative form of tourism that meets various categories of tourists, who prefer an authentic interaction with the local population and its cultural values, nature contact and natural environment protection. Last but not least, accessing European funds through various programs has allowed the agritourism development has contributed to the increasing number of guesthouses and accommodation places within them.

The arrivals and the overnight stays of tourists in agritourism guesthouses followed the same upward trend as the other two analyzed indicators. However, as a percentage, the increase is much higher (about 4 times). It is another indication that the agritourism developed significantly between 2010 and 2019. Foreign tourists also contributed to this favorable evolution, their number increasing from about 20,000 in 2010 to over 100,000 in 2019, while their number of overnight stays increased from about 56,000 to more than 200,000 (table no. 2).

Table 2
The arrivals and the overnight stays of tourists in agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2010-2019

Year	Arrivals (number of tourists)	Out of which: foreign	Overnight stays (number)	Out of which: foreign
2010	289,923	19,677	604,606	56,592
2011	360,696	24,691	741,350	61,149
2012	447,113	30,174	906,504	77,963
2013	501,746	38,183	996,475	86,342
2014	549,302	41,434	1,081,521	91,342
2015	672,756	50,569	1,368,992	112,900
2016	813,454	65,134	1,597,939	140,776
2017	1,004,400	87,187	1,928,485	178,131
2018	1,173,455	89,793	2,255,286	186,398
2019	1,272,878	101,088	2,518,605	200,353

Source: Tempo Online Database

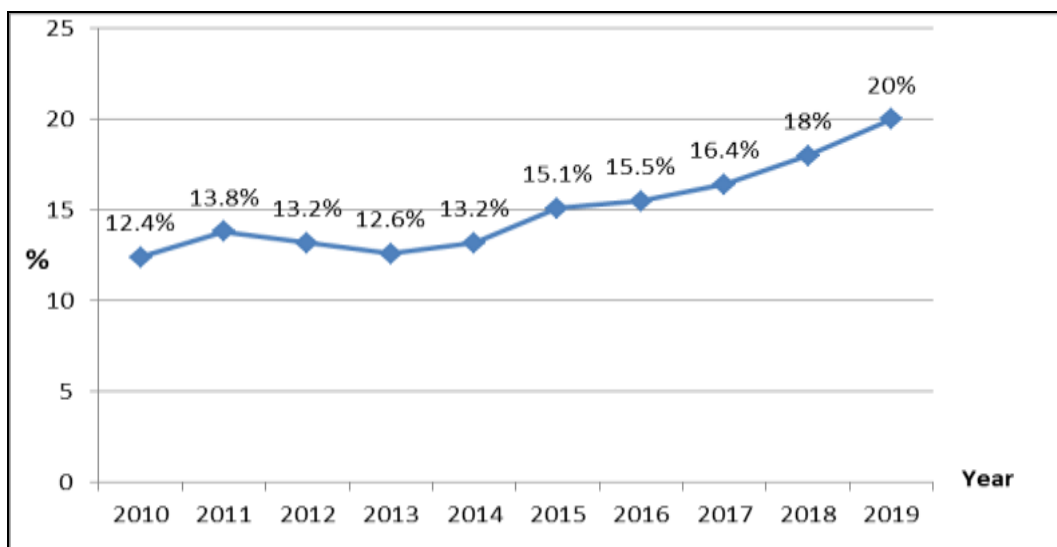


Figure 1. The capacity utilization index in agritourism guesthouses in the period 2010- 2019

Source: Tempo Online Database

The capacity utilization index in agritourism guesthouses increased significantly during the analyzed period (from 12.4% in 2010 to 20% in 2020), but continues to remain very low (figure no. 1). Correlated with the average number of nights of accommodation in agritourism guesthouses, this low value shows that this form of tourism, beside its seasonal character, it is related to certain events and weekends for the most areas where it is practiced (Bran-Rucăr, Marginimea Sibiului, the Apuseni Mountains or near large urban agglomerations - Bucharest, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca).

The favorable evolution of the main indicators that characterize agritourism shows the importance that this form of tourism for the economy of rural areas. In order to turn

agritourism into a factor of local development, a number of priority conditions must be defined:

- maintaining an optimal balance between the ecological, socio-economic and cultural systems when introducing a process of development, change of a certain area;
- providing additional sources of income for the local population;
- diversifying the economic activities by increasing the offer of local services and products, this leading to the increase of the tourist attractiveness of the area;
- promoting the exchange between cultures and populations through mutual knowledge and respect, as a factor of solidarity and social cohesion;
- favoring a coordinated spatial planning policy that would improve the competitiveness of the economic activities in the less favored areas and the provision of infrastructure elements and equipment indispensable for the quality of life, both for the local population and for tourists;
- concluding partnership agreements with national, regional or local organizations that could facilitate access to funds earmarked by the European Union for the development of agritourism;
- concluding partnership agreements between the territorial centers, both in the country and abroad, to achieve a flow of information regarding the changes in the field, a mutual promotion of the tourist offer, staff training and common views promotion;
- attracting experts able to provide advice on marketing issues, accommodation arrangement, catering, behavior in relations with tourists, information system;
- including the agritourism offer in catalogs or guides, with folkloric, religious and cultural manifestations, resulting in motivations to attract tourists and to individualize the specifics of each area.

Agritourism contributes to the development of the areas poorer in economic resources, but with natural or anthropic tourist resources, which, capitalized, can become tourist attractions and determine the development of some villages. Agritourism capitalize the areas with tourist and cultural-historical resources and high tourist attraction. With relatively small investments, these areas can enter the tourist circuit.

Therefore, agritourism may be considered a lever to diminish the interregional, intraregional or local imbalances. Besides attracting some tourist areas in the value circuit, it also has consequences on territorial development. Tourism has an important effect in training and stimulating production in other economic fields, and the need to adapt to the touristic demands leads to the appearance of new branches for tourism. Thus tourism becomes a sector that supports the local economy.

Starting from the statement that sustainable development is considered that „development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, tourism, as an economic activity, must collaborate with other economic activities in ensuring the quality of the environment, of the resource base and its survival [6].

CONCLUSIONS

The research of tourism sector contribution (and in particular of agritourism) to the development of the bioeconomy is at the beginning. An economic branch of interference, the Romanian tourism could become an important sector for the national economy. Subsystem of the national economy, tourism is influenced by other subsystems and exerts a growing influence on their evolution. Although it is easy to identify which of the specific

activities of the bioeconomy interact with the tourism sector, it is very difficult to make quantification.

Among all the forms of tourism, agritourism, as a form of rural tourism, has the most obvious links with the bioeconomy, because it involves the use of local agricultural products and local traditional activities. Usually agritourism is not the main activity, but those carried out by the local households or farms.

In the last 10 years, the main indicators that characterize the Romanian agritourism have registered a significant increase. It is a clear proof consolidating the image of agritourism among tourism consumers.

Agritourism is an activity that can bring important benefits both for the owners of agritourism guesthouses and their families, but also for the local community. Agritourism can generate additional income and can contribute to increasing employment in rural areas. It can be an activity that contributes to the revitalization of the rural economy and the sustainable development of rural areas. But agritourism is a form of "niche" tourism, which requires adequate strategies and planning. It is obvious that through its specificity, agritourism contributes to the development of the activities specific to the bioeconomy.

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