

## STUDIES AND RESEARCHS REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRITOURISM IN THE APUSENI MOUNTAINS AREA

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to follow the development degree of this field at national level, to identify the resources with agritourism potential from the studied area, to highlight the degree of interest for the area and for agritourism, and based on the conclusions to come with some proposals. The complexity and tourist value of the Apuseni Mountains is a very important element in promoting this activity, as evidenced by the many forms of tourism that are currently taking place, the development of tourist and agritourism guesthouses that highlight the potential value of caring for this area.*

**Key words:** *agritourism, tourist potential, Apuseni Mountains*

### INTRODUCTION

The popularity of rural and mountain areas in particular, as a possibility to spend the holidays, has increased in recent years, in most countries. The changes in attitudes were parallel to the changes in the European styles of taking vacations, but also in the preferences for returning to nature, and various local products. [5,12]

Practicing agritourism is based on the need to find solutions for rural households, in the sense of increasing income, by capitalizing their economic potential, developing hosting services and capitalizing on own and local products:

- the existence of a rural area rich in traditions;
- people interested in practicing such an activity;
- the services offered by these people: accommodation and meals;
- the existence of a material base (which involves means of transport and access roads) and an adequate legislative framework, which will encourage people to practice such an activity. [1,6]

The effects of practicing rural tourism should have been graded depending on the level of development that rural tourism has reached as a "business". In this sense, in the initial phase of providing such services, if it is predicted to be a success, it should be possible to talk about economic effects - obtaining additional income, employment, some investments in the field of infrastructure, possible changes in the lifestyle of the locals through the possibility of abandoning traditional agricultural occupations in favor of tourist ones - and less of the social, environmental, legal ones [3, 8]. Only after the agritourism business begins to develop, to train a larger part of the community, to generate related services can the other effects appear. [14]

Taking in consideration the future of rural communities from a tourist point of view and analyzing them for this purpose, we believe that their rustic and ethnographic specifics could and should be preserved and supported (adequately), otherwise, the current interest from tourists in the village tourism, for the rural environment, will gradually decrease. [7, 10] The development of villages and ecotourism areas must bring direct income to the farmers and all citizens of the locality, and the local public administration must directly use the local budget to protect ecotourism resources. [9]

In Apuseni Mountains, zoning was conceived as a way of superior and complex capitalization of tourist resources, in a unitary vision, in order to efficiently exploit the tourist potential. Reported on the scale of the entire region, tourist zoning aims to establish a model of evaluation, ranking, valorization and priority development of tourist heritage. It

proved to be an important unitary analysis of the existing relations between tourism and the territory, with a view to the optimal, harmonious development of tourism. [11] The tourist areas include 15 tourist areas structured as follows: Vadul Crisului Area and the Crisul Repede Gorge, Meziad Area, Padis Area, Aleului Valley Area, Iadului Valley Area-Stana de Vale Area, Vascau Karst Are-Izbucul Calugari, Baisoara Mountain Area, Gilau-Tarnita Area, Belis-Fantanele Area, Ighiului Valley Area, Ampoiului Valley Area, Codru-Moma Mountains Area, Gurahont-Halmagi Depression Area, Geoagiu Valley Area, Aries Valley Area.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In conducting this study we have used a series of data obtained from national statistics and studies conducted at the regional level by specialized agencies. Based on the data collected, we structured and interpreted all the information from Apuseni Mountain and we identified possibilities for its development, given the richness of existing natural resources at the regional level.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The Apuseni Mountains region with an area of approximately 16,200 km<sup>2</sup> occupies about 7% of the total area of the country and includes the territory of six counties: Alba, Arad, Bihor, Cluj, Hunedoara and Salaj. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the Apuseni Mountains area by counties.

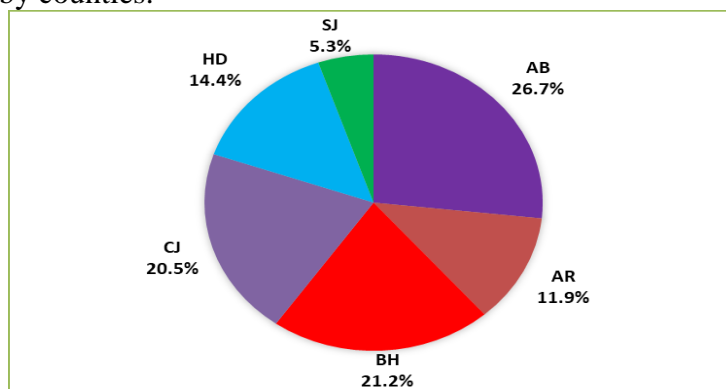


Figure 1. The structure of the Apuseni Mountains area by counties [16]

From the total area covered by the Apuseni Mountains, the largest area is found in Alba County (26.7%), followed by Bihor County (21.2%), Cluj (20.5%), Hunedoara (14.4%), Arad (11.9%) and Sălaj (5.3%).

Regarding the evolution of the tourist structures with the function of accommodation specific to rural tourism and agritourism, in the studied area, in the period 2010-2020, can be observed an increase in their number.

From the total number of accommodation units, 586 units registered in the Apuseni Mountains area, at the level of 2020, approximately 50% (47.78%) of these are agritourist guesthouses (280 units).

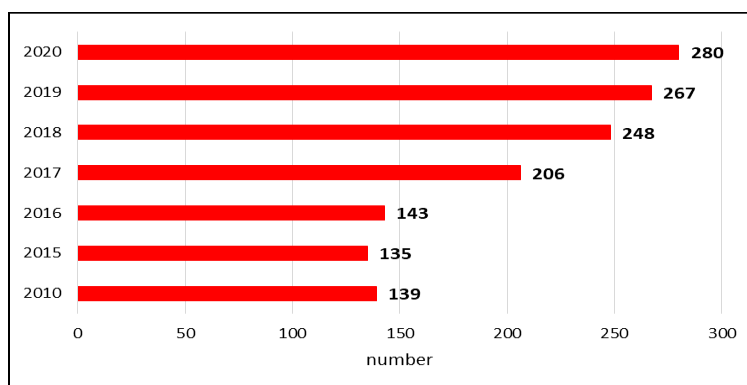
Table 3.1 shows the evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, registered in the period 2010-2020, on the territory of the six counties component of the Apuseni Mountains area.

**Table 1.**  
**The evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses in Apuseni Mountains area, 2010-2020**

	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Alba</b>	29	59	61	79	88	83	92
<b>Arad</b>	12	12	12	9	16	18	18
<b>Bihor</b>	2	14	15	17	26	29	31
<b>Cluj</b>	82	34	36	73	86	101	95
<b>Hunedoara</b>	8	7	7	14	14	18	28
<b>Salaj</b>	6	9	12	14	18	18	16
<b>Muntii Apuseni</b>	139	135	143	206	248	267	280

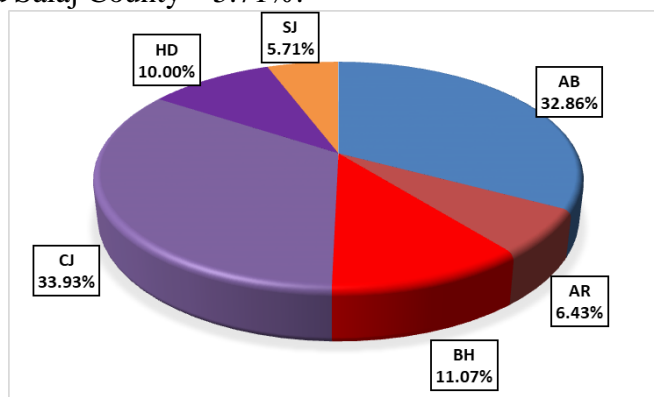
Source: [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)

In the period 2010-2020, the number of agritourism units, at the level of the studied area, increased by 102.15%. A positive evolution is found at the level of each county, but the percentage of growth is different. [1,16]



**Figure 2. The evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses in Apuseni Mountains area, 2010-2020**

The analysis of the agritourism guesthouses distribution in the territory indicates that two of the six counties, Cluj (33.93%) and Alba (32.86%), contain two thirds (66.79%) from the total number of these accommodation structures. The other counties have a smaller number of agritourism guesthouses: Bihor County – 11.07%, Hunedoara County 10.00% and Salaj County – 5.71%.



**Figure 3. Distribution of agritourism guesthouses by counties, Apuseni Mountains, 2020**

Table 2 shows the main localities on the Apuseni Mountains that carry out agritourism activities. Most of these can be found on the territory of Alba, Cluj and Bihor counties.

**Table 2.**

**Distribution of agritourism guesthouses by counties and localities, Apuseni Mountains, 2010-2020**

		2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Alba	Albac	1	6	6	8	13	12	12
	Arieseni	8	19	18	18	18	16	18
	Bucium	:	:	:	4	3	3	4
	Galda de Jos	:	:	1	4	4	3	4
	Garda de Sus	4	10	10	10	13	12	14
	Horea	:	1	2	1	1	2	5
	Rametea	9	7	6	11	14	15	14
	Salciua	1	5	5	6	6	5	5
Arad	Vidra	:	2	2	3	3	2	3
	Moneasa	4	2	2	1	3	4	3
Arad	Paulis	2	4	4	2	3	3	3
	Bihor	Bratca	:	1	2	2	3	3
Bulz		:	2	2	2	6	7	7
Finis		:	:	:	:	3	3	3
Pietroasa		1	3	3	3	4	4	5
Rosia		:	2	2	4	4	4	4
Vadu Crisului		:	2	2	2	2	2	3
Cluj	Belis	8	4	11	12	15	27	19
	Ciucea	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Gilau	11	7	5	6	8	9	9
	Maguri-Racatau	1	1	1	3	3	3	3
	Margau	13	4	4	5	5	7	6
	Poieni	6	3	2	8	8	8	9
	Sancraiu	23	5	5	26	32	31	31
	Savadisla	5	2	2	4	5	5	5
Hunedoara	Certeju de Sus	:	:	:	2	2	3	5
	Gurasada	1	2	2	2	2	2	3
	Soimus	1	1	1	4	4	5	8
	Vata de Jos	1	:	:	3	3	3	6
Sălaj	Almasu	2	2	3	4	3	3	3
	Mesesenii de Jos	1	2	3	4	5	5	4

Source: [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)

In Alba County, the most famous localities that practice agritourism are Arieseni, which has 18 agritourism guesthouses, Girda de Jos and Rametea with 14 each and Albac with 12 agritourism guesthouses. Cluj County has the largest number of agritourist guesthouses on the territory of the localities: Sancraiu – 31 agritourist guesthouses, Belis – 19 and Gilau and Poieni with 9 agritourist guesthouses each. In Bihor County, we find at most 7 agritourist guesthouses on the territory of one locality: Bulz - 7, Pietroasa - 5 and Rosia 4 agritourist guesthouses. At the level of Hunedoara County, the following localities stand out for the number of agritourist guesthouses: Soimu - 8, Vata de Jos - 6 and Certeju de Sus - 5 agritourist guesthouses. In the counties of Arad and Salaj, there are a maximum of 4 guesthouses within the localities that carry out agritourism activities, most of them have between 1-3 agritourism guesthouses. [16]

In the analysis of the agritourism offer, special importance is assigned to the accommodation capacity. This indicator is of particular importance as it covers, on the one hand, the number of existing accommodation places available to tourists, in a unit of time, as well as the number of place-days reported by the period of operation of the accommodation units, on the during a year. [2,13]

Table 3 presents the evolution of existing and operating tourist accommodation capacity, in the period 2010-2020, in the Apuseni Mountains area. For the analyzed period, significant increases are recorded for both indicators.

Table 3.

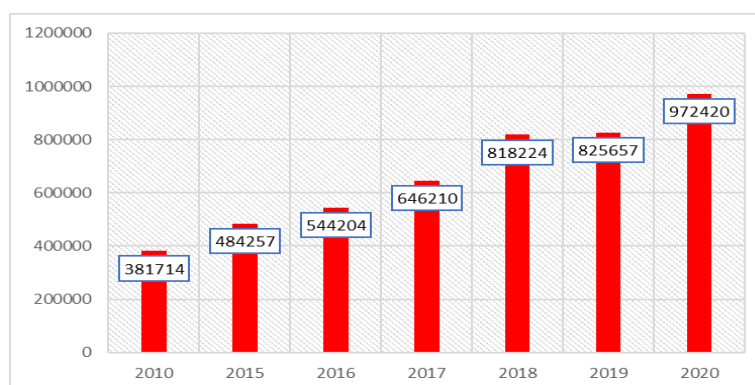
**The evolution of the accommodation capacity in the agritourism  
guesthouses from Apuseni Mountains, 2010-2020**

	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Existing tourist accommodation capacity (number of places)</b>							
<b>Alba</b>	392	960	1101	1187	1307	1271	1414
<b>Arad</b>	66	92	92	53	130	162	130
<b>Bihor</b>	25	190	218	229	439	473	535
<b>Cluj</b>	719	514	574	1015	1197	1275	1344
<b>Hunedoara</b>	24	32	32	108	108	133	240
<b>Salaj</b>	48	96	123	122	122	110	110
<b>Munții Apuseni</b>	<b>1274</b>	<b>1884</b>	<b>2140</b>	<b>2714</b>	<b>3303</b>	<b>3424</b>	<b>3773</b>
<b>Tourist accommodation capacity in operation (number of places-days)</b>							
<b>Alba</b>	83802	228796	252440	299828	345909	348722	231745
<b>Arad</b>	7447	17355	17195	19345	38341	36520	25237
<b>Bihor</b>	15946	49095	47828	41817	95370	97368	70011
<b>Cluj</b>	263932	153763	180373	229133	255933	259896	584316
<b>Hunedoara</b>	0	3703	7375	10940	11591	11622	13068
<b>Salaj</b>	17408	32064	42115	43456	42322	40044	27380
<b>Munții Apuseni</b>	<b>388535</b>	<b>484776</b>	<b>547326</b>	<b>644519</b>	<b>789466</b>	<b>794172</b>	<b>951757</b>

*Source: www.insse.ro*

In the period 2010-2020, the value of the existing accommodation capacity, for the agritourism guesthouses on the Apuseni Mountains range, (figure 4.) experienced a significant increase, the number of accommodation places increasing almost 3 times (2.96 times). This is due to the increase in the number of accommodation units of the type of agritourism guesthouses. [4,15]

In the case of the accommodation capacity in operation, an upward evolution is also recorded, the value of the indicator increasing by 2.45 times, during the analyzed period (figure 5).

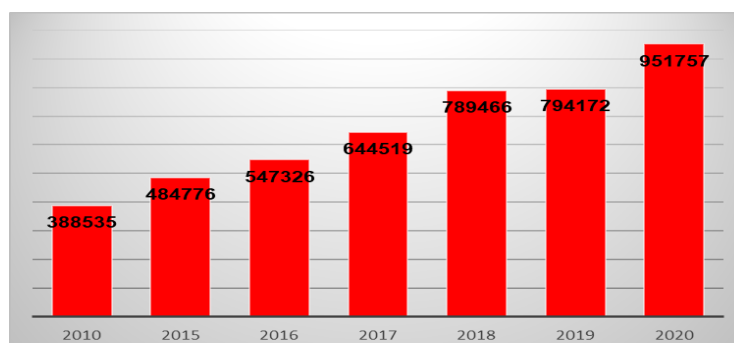


**Figure 4. The evolution of the existing tourist accommodation capacity in agritourist guesthouses in the Apuseni Mountains, 2010-2020 [16]**

At the level of each county of the region, significant increases in the number of accommodation places are recorded, the largest increase (21.4 times) being recorded among the agritourism guesthouses located within the Bihor County. On second place is Hunedoara County with a 10-fold increase in the existing accommodation capacity, followed by Alba County with 3.61 times, Salaj County with 2.29 times, Arad with 1.97 times and Cluj with 1.86 times.

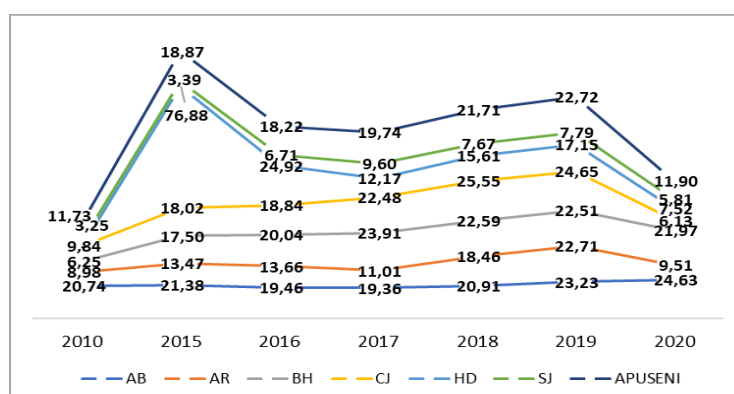
In the case of accommodation capacity in operation, in most counties, the increases recorded are higher than the regional average. Thus, there were increases of 4.39 times in

Bihor County, 3.53 times in Hunedoara County, 3.39 times in Arad County and 2.76 times in Alba County. In the other two counties, Cluj – 2.21 times and Salaj – 1.57 times, the recorded values are lower than the growth produced at the level of the studied area.



**Figure 5. The evolution of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, in agritourist guesthouses from Apuseni Mountains, 2010-2020 [16]**

In the period 2010-2019, there is a significant increase in the utilization of the accommodation capacity in operation by 10%, for the agritourism guesthouses in the area of the Apuseni Mountains. [1,13] The use degree of the accommodation structures is different, depending on the counties within which the agritourism guesthouses are located, the highest level of their use being recorded in Cluj County-24.65%, followed by Alba County - 23.23% , Arad – 22.71%, Bihor – 22.51%, Hunedoara – 17.15% and Salaj – 7.67%. For all counties, with the exception of Hunedoara and Salaj counties, the index of intensive use of the accommodation capacity registers values higher than the area average - 22.72%.



**Figure 6. The evolution of the intensive use index of the accommodation capacity in operation in the agritourist guesthouses in the Apuseni Mountains area, 2010-2020**

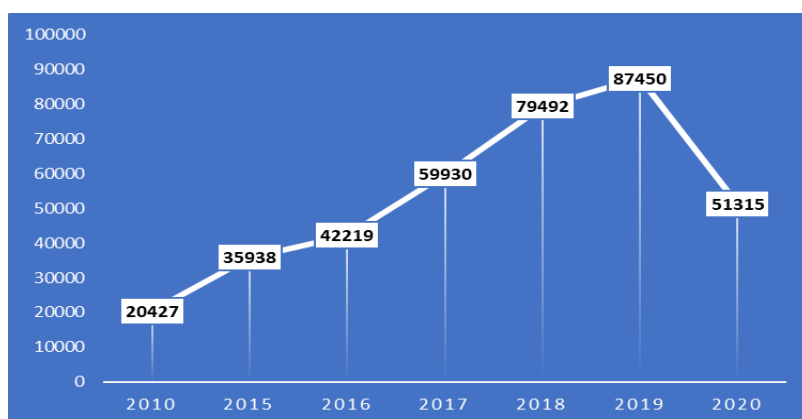
In 2020, due to the reduction of tourist activity and the suspension for a relatively long period of the activity of the HoReCa sector, there is a significant decrease in the utilization degree of the accommodation capacity. At the level of the studied area, the decrease was by 10.82 percent. However, the more remote tourist destinations in Alba County, and their intense promotion, have caused that in 2020, the index of intensive use of the accommodation capacity in operation in the agritourism guesthouses will increase compared to 2019, being in fact the only case. [1,11]

Important reductions in terms of the utilization degree of the accommodation capacity in operation were achieved in the counties of Cluj and Arad. If in 2019, Cluj County recorded the highest level of the intensive use index of accommodation capacity in

operation, in 2020, it records the second, lowest value after Salaj County. This is due to the extended period of time of suspension of HoReCa activity in this area, as a result of the high degree of infection with the Covid19 virus.

Tourist demand represents an important actor in the agritourism market of the area under study. The different touristic motivation of those who choose the Apuseni Mountains as their agritourism destination has determined an intensification of tourist arrivals in agritourism pensions. [13]

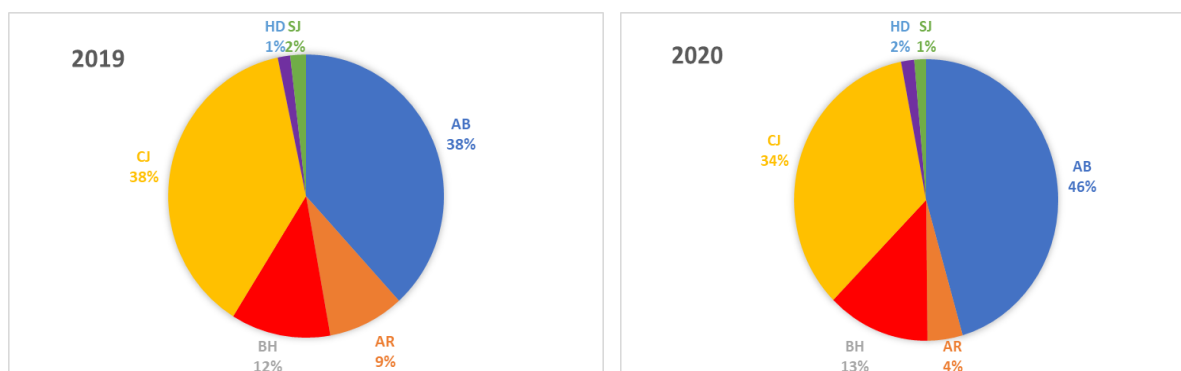
Thus, for the period 2010-2019, tourist arrivals registered in the agritourism guesthouses in the Apuseni Mountains increased by 328.11%, figure 7. In 2020, significant decreases are recorded as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic and the conditions imposed regarding limiting infection with the new Coronavirus. In the period 2019-2020 there was a reduction of 41.32%.



**Figure 7. The evolution of tourist arrivals in agritourist guesthouses in the Apuseni Mountains, 2020, [16]**

The increases recorded at the level of the Apuseni Mountains area register different values at the level of the counties. The biggest increases in tourist arrivals are recorded in Bihor County - 22.07%, Arad - 13.13%, Salaj - 7.10% and Alba - 5.56%. In all these counties the growth percentage is higher than the average of the region. For the counties of Hunedoara - 3.53% and Cluj - 2.52%, the arrivals of tourists register lower increases, compared to the zonal average. [1,13]

Regarding the distribution of tourists in the existing agritourism guesthouses at the level of the studied area, in 2020 compared to 2019, (figure 8.) there are changes in the structure of arrivals by counties. It is known that, in 2020, as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, the population began to turn to those forms of tourism and especially tourist locations that aimed to reduce tourist traffic.



**Figure 8. Structure of tourist arrivals, by counties, Apuseni Mountains, 2019-2020 [16]**

In 2020, the restrictions imposed by limiting the spread of the SARS-Cov2 virus, determined the intensification of tourist arrivals, in Alba County, in accommodation units aimed at more secluded and less crowded areas, such as Garda se Sus and Rametea, for example, which were ranked among the top agritourism destinations at national level, last year. [1,13]

The evolution of overnight stays in the agritourism guesthouses in the Apuseni Mountains area follows the trajectory of tourist arrivals, recording an increasing trend (295.73%, compared to 2010), in the period 2010-2019, with a significant decrease (-37.21%), in the pandemic year 2020 compared to 2019.

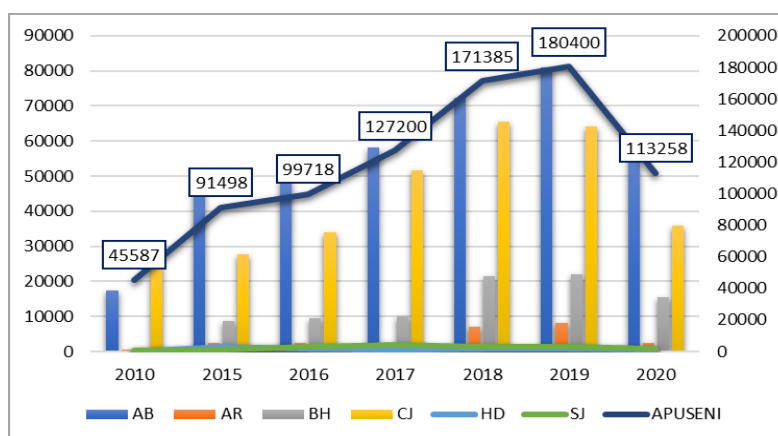


Figure 9. Evolution of overnight stays, the Apuseni Mountains area, 2010-2020 [16]

In the period 2010-2019, there were significant increases in the value of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses for three of the existing counties in the Apuseni Mountains area, namely: Bihor County (+22.01%), Arad County (+12.40 %) and Alba County (+4.66%). These values exceed the zonal average of 3.95%. The only county in which there was a reduction in overnight stays was Hunedoara County (-0.29%).

Special attention should be paid to the average length of stay. It is known that rural tourism and agritourism are forms of tourism that take place over shorter periods of time, being considered forms of weekend tourism. [1,8,13]

The evolution of the average length of the stay, for the period 2010-2020, shows a fluctuating trend both on the whole of the studied area and, especially, on the level of each county.

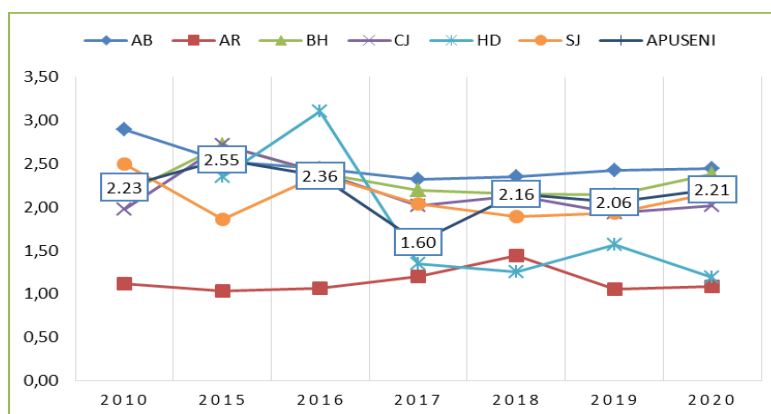


Figure 10. The average length of stay in agritourism guesthouses from the Apuseni Mountains area [16]

For the year 2020, an increase in the average length of stay can be observed for all counties, except Hunedoara County, where reductions were recorded. The increase in the average length of stay is due to the intensification of tourist traffic, after the relaxation of pandemic restrictions and the orientation of the population towards agritourism activities. In Alba (2.44 days/tourist) and Bihor (2.38 days/tourist) counties, the value of the average length of stay exceeds the zonal average of 2.21 days/tourist. In the other counties, the value is lower than this: Salaj-2.16 days/tourist, Cluj-2.02 days/tourist, Hunedoara-1.19 days/tourist and Arad-1.09 days/tourist. [1,8]

In conclusion, we can say that the area of the Apuseni Mountains is an area with an agritourism vocation, but not all the counties on whose territory this area is spread, participate in equal proportions in the development of the tourist activity.

### CONCLUSIONS

The capitalization of resources and local products, as well as the possibility of combining agricultural activity as a basic activity with tourism activity as a complementary activity, highlights the fact that the profitability of the agritourism activity, in the studied area, is high, constituting an alternative variant of income generation for the inhabitants of rural areas and especially for those from mountainous areas.

Regarding the area of the Apuseni Mountains, following the analysis carried out, we can formulate the following conclusions:

- The area of the Apuseni Mountains has a valuable tourist potential, considering the natural tourist resources and traditional products that can be capitalized through agritourism;

- The practice of agritourism in the studied area takes on a more spontaneous form than an organized one. This fact indicates the need for the involvement of local authorities and communities in the organization of the agritourism activity so that it constitutes a real source of income for the inhabitants of these lands and allows their sustainable development.

- The tourist services offered are very little diversified, which determines the need for their development but, at the same time, imposes the need to use a qualified workforce, which ensures satisfaction at the highest possible level of consumer preferences for agritourism products and services.

The development and intensification of agritourism activity from the mountain villages from the Apuseni Mountains area requires, in addition to the modernization, diversification and development of a competitive tourist offer at the national and international level, a series of measures aimed at improving marketing and promotion activities, so that the tourist products offered be included in the international tourist circuit and be established as unique tourist destinations.

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