

**RESEARCH REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRITOURISM AND ITS  
IMPACT ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL AREA  
FROM CLUJ COUNTY**

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**Abstract:** *Rural tourism represents a possibility that can save agriculture and cultural heritage, being an activity in full development, with a positive impact on local development. Cluj County has a rich and varied natural and anthropogenic tourism potential, represented by natural landscapes, cultural-historical elements, religious buildings, villages that preserve very well the architecture, traditions and customs specific to the area, numerous traditional products and a developed accommodation tourist infrastructure. The existing valuable tourist resources both at the national level and in particular at the Cluj County level, constitute a major opportunity in the development of agritourism in Romania. Capitalizing on the existing potential, especially the one of the rural area, can determine the transformation of agritourism into the essential factor for the development and revitalization of rural areas, thus becoming an important sector of regional economies.*

**Key words:** *sustainable development, agritourism, rural areas, Cluj County*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism in general, but especially the one developed in the rural environment, is dependent by the resources of natural or anthropic environment, these constituting the "raw material", which at the same time ensures the development possibility but also supports its continuity. [1,2,13] The natural resources specific to the environment (forests, lakes, mountains) represent at the same time both resources and destinations or tourist attractions, which support the implementation of recreation and rest tourism, treatment tourism, etc. The tourism forms developed in rural environment, through their specific requirements, represent a solution and at the same time a motivation to keep the environment unaltered, the proceeds from this activity supporting the protection of nature, its conservation representing a necessity. [2,9,12]

The place of agritourism within the forms of sustainable tourism and sustainable development is given by its specificity, as an activity that uses the physical and human environment as its product. On the other hand, agritourism shares certain resources with other users (agriculture, industry, etc.). [4,7,14]

Returning to nature is the result of the need for relaxation, health, physical and spiritual comfort and is a valid motivation for all age categories, sex, social status. Modern man does not break away from the natural way of life, and his contact with the rustic environment has effects in maintaining balance.

Practicing agritourism is also a beneficial element for the local population, who want to spend their vacations in other areas than the everyday ones, but their modest incomes do not allow them expensive itineraries; the prices charged in agritourism are more accessible than in classic tourism, favoring the development of mass tourism. [3,5,6]

The beauty of the natural environment, which stands out through a picturesque landscape, to which are added historical vestiges evocative of moments from Romania's past, numerous art monuments and original ethnographic and folklore elements make the territory of Cluj County a center of great tourist attraction, on internal and international plan.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present paper is based on the statistical analysis of the data regarding tourist activity, obtained from different official bibliographic sources. The analysis of these data allowed the calculation of some important tourist indicators regarding agritourism circulation, carried out at the level of Cluj County (number of agritourism guesthouses, accommodation capacity, the index of net use of the accommodation capacity of agritourism guesthouses, the evolution of tourist arrivals and overnight stays, as well as the length of leisure stay).

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Cluj County is the place where we find a harmonious combination of the past and the present, where the tourist potential is well preserved and very varied, allowing the practice of many tourism forms, from the classic one to the one specific to rural environment. [10]

The statistical characterization of the technical-material basis of tourism is carried out with the help of a series of specific indicators, determined on the main types of tourist services that create the tourist activity.

In the analysis of this indicator, we will consider agritourism guesthouses, accommodation units registered and highlighted by approved institutions at the national level. Table 1 shows the situation of the existing agritourist guesthouses from North-West Region and their distribution among the counties of the region, in the period 2015-2022.

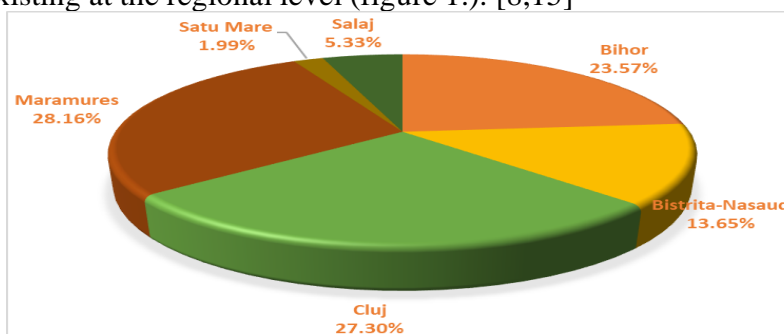
**Table 1.**

**The evolution of agritourism guesthouses number, Cluj County, 2015-2022**

	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
NW Region	246	520	538	616	750	806
Bihor	77	130	127	144	139	190
Bistrita-Nasaud	7	55	57	73	86	110
Cluj	59	146	164	166	203	220
Maramures	79	144	147	185	264	227
Satu Mare	4	11	12	18	18	16
Salaj	20	34	31	30	40	43

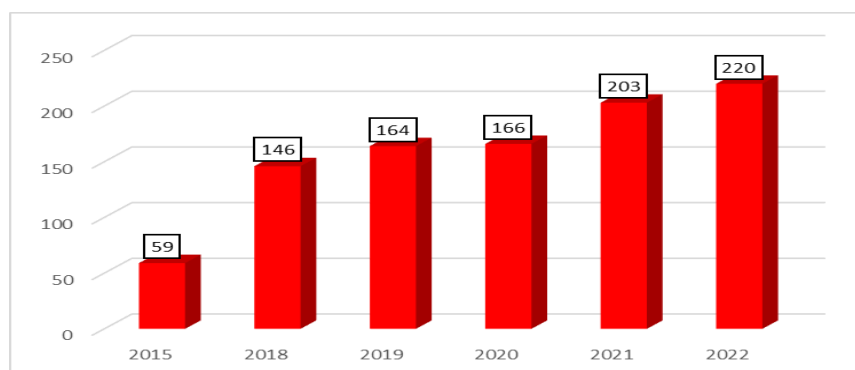
Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

At the level of the North-West Region, Cluj County represents the second county with agritourism potential, concentrating 27.29% from the total number of agritourism guesthouses existing at the regional level (figure 1.). [8,15]



**Figure 1. Distribution of agritourism guesthouses, North-West Region, 2022 [15]**

In the period 2015-2022, can be observed, at the county level, a continuous growth trend in the number of agritourism guesthouses the average growth rate being 272.88%.



**Figure 2. The evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, Cluj County, 2022 [15]**

On the territory of Cluj County, there are many localities where agritourist guesthouses are registered, their number being unevenly distributed, per locality. The localities that have the highest number of agritourist guesthouses are: Sanraiu – 30 agro-tourist guesthouses, Belis - 26 agritourist guesthouses, Margau – 11 agritourist guesthouses, Calatele and Poieni each 10 agro-tourist guesthouses, Florești – 9 agro-tourist guesthouses and Gilau - 8 agritourist guesthouses. [14,15]

**Table 2.**

**The distribution of agritourism guesthouses by localities, Cluj County, 2015-2022**

	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Apahida</b>	3	4	4	4	5	5
<b>Baciu</b>	2	3	3	3	3	4
<b>Baisoara</b>	3	6	6	7	7	6
<b>Belis</b>	4	15	27	19	23	26
<b>Calatele</b>	1	1	1	1	8	10
<b>Capusu Mare</b>	:	3	3	3	4	4
<b>Caseiu</b>	1	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Ciucea</b>	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Ciurila</b>	2	4	5	5	7	7
<b>Cojocna</b>	:	1	1	1	2	2
<b>Feleacu</b>	1	3	4	4	6	5
<b>Florești</b>	2	9	9	10	10	9
<b>Gilau</b>	7	8	9	9	8	8
<b>Izvoru Crisului</b>	1	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Jucu</b>	1	1	1	2	2	2
<b>Maguri-Racatau</b>	1	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Margau</b>	4	5	7	6	11	11
<b>Marisel</b>	2	1	2	2	3	5
<b>Mihai Viteazu</b>	2	2	2	2	3	3
<b>Moldovenesti</b>	1	5	6	6	6	6
<b>Poieni</b>	3	8	8	9	11	10
<b>Rasca</b>	:	1	1	1	1	3
<b>Sanraiu</b>	5	32	31	31	32	30
<b>Sandulești</b>	:	2	2	2	3	4
<b>Sanmartin</b>	:	:	:	:	:	5
<b>Savadisla</b>	2	5	5	5	5	4
<b>Tureni</b>	1	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Total</b>	59	146	164	166	203	220

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

The analysis of the tourist accommodation capacity is carried out both for the existing tourist accommodation capacity (installed) and for the tourist accommodation capacity in operation (available). The measurement of tourist accommodation capacity is expressed in absolute sizes, structured by types of accommodation units, comfort categories and tourist destinations.

Table 3.

The evolution of tourist accommodation capacity, North-West Region, 2015-2022

	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Existing accommodation capacity (places)</b>						
<b>NW Region</b>	4815	9405	9543	10918	12317	12977
<b>Bihor</b>	1671	2781	2717	3103	3014	3565
<b>Bistrita-Nasaud</b>	159	798	867	1020	1197	1476
<b>Cluj</b>	1193	2463	2610	2862	3323	3477
<b>Maramures</b>	1342	2665	2725	3218	3961	3666
<b>Satu Mare</b>	86	211	201	282	284	208
<b>Salaj</b>	364	487	423	433	538	585
<b>Accommodation capacity in operation (places-days)</b>						
<b>NW Region</b>	1107215	1418016	2450033	2452822	1857218	2847378
<b>Bihor</b>	170483	374111	590851	588477	440097	636302
<b>Bistrita-Nasaud</b>	17206	44728	209657	237375	184103	251558
<b>Cluj</b>	482538	374196	635401	629626	461435	789010
<b>Maramures</b>	358064	436009	796076	788326	631129	965553
<b>Satu Mare</b>	21685	58847	56835	67695	44727	65836
<b>Salaj</b>	57239	130125	161213	141323	95727	139119

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

The existing accommodation capacity indicates a continuous increase at the level of Cluj County, in the period 2015-2022, the value of this indicator increasing by 191.45%, a fact due to the increase in the number of accommodation units such as agritourism guesthouses.

The analysis of the accommodation capacity in operation, at the level of Cluj County, in the period 2015-2022, indicates a winding trend marked by increases and decreases in the value of this indicator. [10,15]

The net utilization index of the tourist accommodation capacity in operation is determined as a percentage ratio between the number of overnight stays and the tourist accommodation capacity in operation, for the analyzed period. [2,15]

Table 4 shows the evolution of the net utilization index of the accommodation capacity, per month, in the guesthouses of Cluj County, during the period 2018-2022.

Table 4.

The evolution of the net utilization index of tourist accommodation capacity, Cluj County, 2018-2022

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
<b>2018</b>	18.3	19.4	20.4	25.2	25.6	24.5	31.3	35.7	29.8	26.8	18.3	19.4
<b>2019</b>	20	20.3	18.2	25.3	25.2	33.2	37.2	33	30.1	22.8	21.1	22.7
<b>2020</b>	19	19.7	15.6	13.8	10	11.2	23.7	29.5	19.1	13.6	12	11.5
<b>2021</b>	12	13.3	10	10.5	14.2	18.5	23.9	31.2	18	14.2	14	14.4
<b>2022</b>	13.8	13	11.5	12.3	17.2	20.7	22.5	26.1	18.2	15.5	15.1	16.7

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

Table 5.

**The evolution of tourist arrivals in agritourism guesthouses in Cluj County**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total</b>					
<b>NW Region</b>	259651	260077	143797	217538	265827
<b>Cluj</b>	79774	79150	42323	72033	84082
<b>Romanian</b>					
<b>NW Region</b>	243366	244284	142582	212950	257979
<b>Cluj</b>	71441	70115	41814	69304	79283
<b>Foreigners</b>					
<b>NW Region</b>	16285	15793	1215	4588	7848
<b>Cluj</b>	8333	9035	509	2729	4799

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

From the point of view of tourist arrivals, Cluj County takes the first place, regionally, in 2020, concentrating 50.70% from the total number of tourists registered in agritourism guesthouses in the North-West Region. [2,15]

In the period 2015-2022, the number of tourists increased permanently, with the exception of 2020, a fact due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which imposed certain sanitary conditions, which led to the limitation of the practice of tourist activity. In this year, the number of tourists decreased by 46.52% compared to the previous year. In the case of Romanian tourists, the decrease was 40.36% and in the case of foreign tourists, 94.34%.

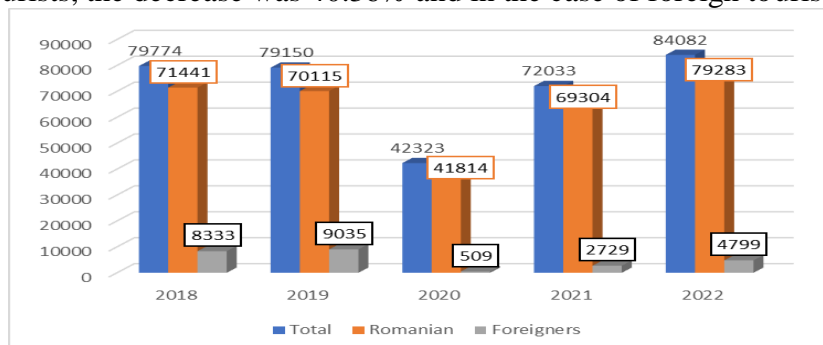


Figure 3. The evolution of arrivals in agritourism guesthouses, Cluj County, 2022

Tourist overnight stays follow the same trajectory as the arrivals. The decrease in overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses in Cluj County, in 2022, compared to 2019, was 47.54%. In the case of Romanian tourists, the decrease was 42.40%. In the case of foreign tourists, the decrease of this indicator is much more pronounced, 94.71%. [15]

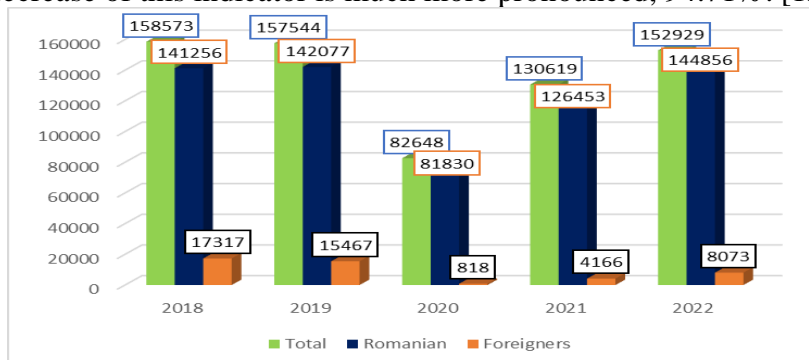
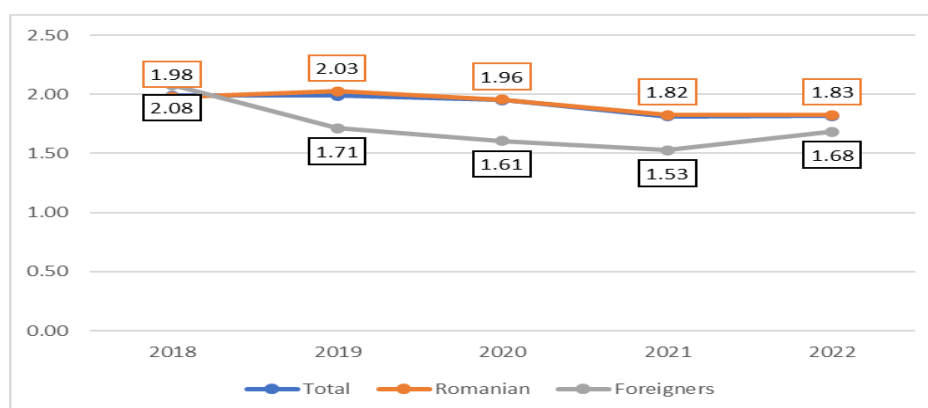


Figure 4. The evolution of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses, Cluj County, 2022

The analysis of the average length of stay indicator, in the case of Romanian tourists, precisely follows the value of the indicator at the total level. The highest value is recorded in 2019, 2.03 days/tourist, and the lowest, in 2021, 1.82 days/tourist.



**Figure 5. Average length of stay, agritourism guesthouses, Cluj County, 2018-2022**

The average length of stay for foreign tourists is lower, with the exception of 2018, when the value of 2.08 days/tourist was recorded, a value higher than the average length of stay recorded for Romanian tourists, 1.98 days/tourist. [16]

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the study undertaken, it was concluded that the main reasons why tourists choose to spend their free time in agritourism guesthouses in Cluj County are the following:

- Cluj County has a valuable tourist potential, having numerous natural tourist resources and traditional products that can be exploited through agritourism;
- Agritourism in Cluj County takes on a more spontaneous form than an organized one. Thus, the involvement of the authorities and local communities in the development of tourist activities is required, agritourism being a real source of income for the inhabitants from the studied area, allowing their sustainable development.
- Diversification of tourist services are required, these being little diversified. At the same time, the qualification of the labor force is necessary, so that it can satisfy at the highest possible level the preferences of consumers of agritourism products and services;

During the analyzed period, the agritourism market in Cluj County registered a significant increase for the main tourist indicators analyzed, a fact due to the development of tourism activity in the countryside, the financial support of this sector from various European funds as well as the intensification of promotion activity.

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