

**A RELATIVELY NOVEL SUB-TYPE OF DOMESTIC
TOURISM: HOLIDAYING-AT-HOME/HOMESTAY**

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***Abstract:** Home-Stay/Homestay Tourism is a relatively new sub-type of domestic tourism. It has been the response to tourists with low incomes and to tourists who could not travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is related to several sub-types of domestic tourism such as home-exchanging tourism, near-home/proximity tourism, residency tourism, second-home tourism, or staycation in that it differs from the traditional definition of tourism. The authors define homestay and identify its causes, advantages, disadvantages, and risks, and they make suggestions for the expansion of this sub-type of tourism in Romania based on both Romanian and foreign experiences.*

***Key words:** domestic tourism, holidaying-at-home, homestay*

INTRODUCTION

Home stay or homestay tourism has been practiced since times immemorial: in the Iron Age, it was very common for the Celts to host travellers in one's households; in Antiquity, the Greeks and the Romans did the same; in the Middle Ages, hospitality had religious motivations and bed & breakfast became common; in the late Renaissance, people started to travel for health and culture and rent apartments or inns; as for homestay, it started only 100 years ago and got its community-based approach in the 1980s [14,16]. According to Yasami, Awang & Teoh [9,14], homestay has four common features: it supports, as a primary type of hospitality, "the fundamental principle of human survival within societies since it deals with a broad range of human basic needs such as meal, shelter and security;" it is able to develop "close relationships between host and guest leading to the lifetime friendship and well-established loyalty;" it treats tourists as if they were in their own homes; it highlights, by offering things and services to the guests with the expectation of a reward, the form of reciprocity of guest and host.

Home stay/homestay tourism is distinct from holidaying in one's home (i.e., domestic tourism – [6,13]): it refers to holidaying in somebody else's home [3,14] – in this case, accommodation includes bed and breakfasts, boarding houses, farm stay accommodation, guest houses, host families, lodging houses, and small hotels.

Home stay/homestay tourism, which is related to community-based tourism [14], has been defined as: "a scenario where the local people invite tourists to stay with them as members of the family at a fee" [7,10]; "[staying] together with the host family and [interacting] with the local community for a reasonable charge" [12,15]; "a new idea for accommodation [where visitors or guests pay directly or indirectly to stay in private homes] in the tourism industry" [2,4]; "an alternative lodging experience to the normal chain hotels due to its capability in creating a short relaxing break in a homelike atmosphere allowing them to experience host culture and pristine nature in more authentic way" and "accommodation offered and organized by local communities which involves tourists staying with local families where they can interact directly with hosts and learn more about [their] daily life and culture" [1,11,14]; "a form of tourism where the tourists get to stay with a family in the destination of visit and get to spend time and move around with the members of the family – such that social and cultural interaction (in a way quite

distinct from the professionalism of a businessmen) takes place while exploring various tourist spots”; “an escape from the day to day crowded urban areas to peaceful locations in and around rural areas” [1,5,7,8].

According to some researchers [7], there are three types of homestays: authentic homestays, located in remote locations, with simple and rustic accommodation style and offered by local community with authentic services; comfortable homestays, located near tourist attractions, are well-furnished homes where multiple generations of the family stay under same roof and may know multiple languages (especially English) for better communication, with better facilities (with western toilets on sharing basis); tourist homestays, located in tourist attraction areas, with new, renovated, easily accessible, comfortable, and private homes/rooms with good facilities and services (with shared services showers and toilets in western style): the host family (which speak good English) need not be from the local community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material use in this paper consists in random articles on home stay/homestay tourism given the fact that it has not been yet unanimously defined and thoroughly analyzed particularly in European and American literature. The research method consists of content analysis of the articles cited under Bibliography.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Homestay has been analysed from several perspectives: *alternative accommodation* (attributes of accommodation/visitor perspective); *factors influencing accommodation choice* – alternative accommodation (tourist perspective); *factors influencing accommodation choice* – traditional accommodation (tourist perspective); *factors influencing rural homestay choice* (tourist perspective); *homestays* (community development, homestay concept, homestay operators, local communities, sustainability issue, visitor perspective); *rural homestays* (community development, homestay operators, local communities, sustainability issue, visitor perspective); *travel accommodation in rural locations* (factors affecting marketing strategies/visitor perspective).

Tourists who always choose home stay/homestay tourism travel alone (25.0%) or with colleagues (2.8%), family (41.7%), friends (8.3%), or random groups (8.3%).

The motivational factors behind home stay/homestay tourism are shown in Figure x below. To note that the variables “earn income for household” and “diversify sources of income for household” had the highest means.

Home stay/homestay tourism operators’ perception of the socio-economic benefits of homestay accommodation are shown in Figure x below. Similar findings are presented in Bhuiyan, Siwar & Ismail’s study (2013).

Home stay/homestay tourism has both *strengths* and *weaknesses*:

- *Strengths*: it allows tourists to know the traditions and cultures of the local area as well as natural beauties of the tourism places; it allows tourists to stay closely with the local communities; it boosts infrastructure development; it brings commercial benefits due to investments; it can be done by car, which is an affordable, available, and independent means of transportation; it can give tourist a better chance to enjoy ecotourism; it contributes to poverty reduction; it involves an integrated approach (marketing, stakeholding); it is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable; it presents cultural performances; it protects ecotourism resources and biodiversity; it provides opportunities for local entrepreneurs; it reduces individual loneliness that stems from isolation imposed by modern life; it relies on low fare transportation (by train, by plan);

- **Weaknesses:** brand image issues; lack of campaign (comprehensive guidebook, IT-based information); lack of hospitality experience; lack of identity for each home stay; lack of training facilities (e-booking courses, home stay management skills training, IT courses); little investment in professional marketing; low accommodation quality/standard (including, unfortunately, unacceptable bathroom and toilet facilities).

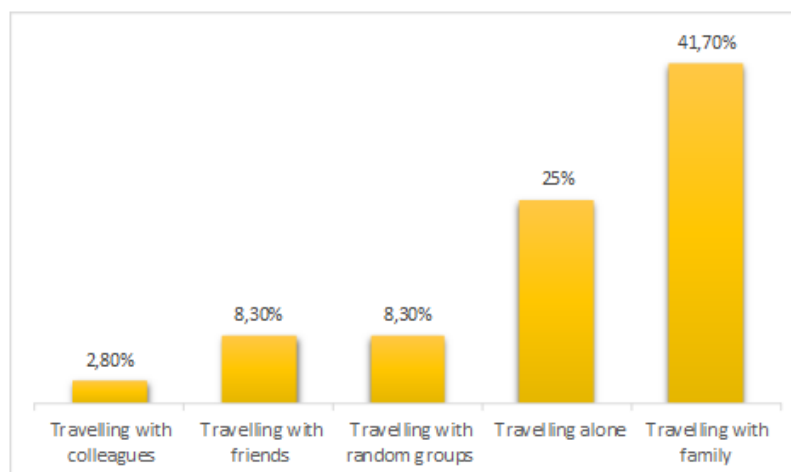


Figure 1. Ways of travelling in home stay/homestay tourism

Source: own interpretation after [7]

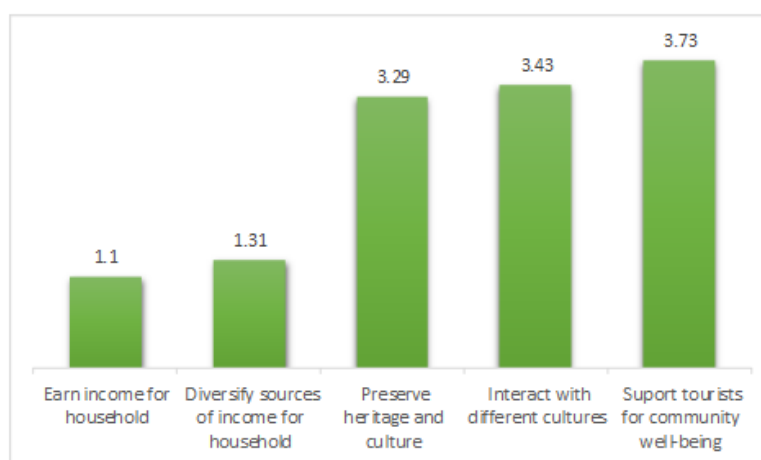


Figure 2. Motivational factors for homestay

Source: own interpretation after [7]

We identified both *internal* and *external issues* in homestay:

- ❖ *internal issues – challenges:* conflicts in community, informal organizational structure, leadership problems, over – commercialization, passive community, unbalanced demography;
- ❖ *deficiencies:* dependability syndrome, generation y commitment, incompetent community leadership & operators’ commitment, inexperienced, lacking of knowledge and understanding of the industry, lack of creativity and entrepreneurship skills;

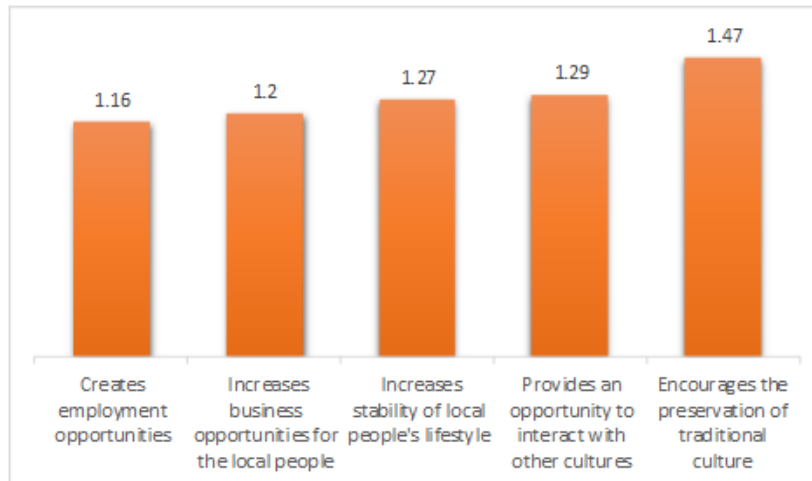


Figure 3. Homestay operators' perception of the socio-economic benefits of homestay accommodation

Source: own interpretation after [7]

- ❖ *weaknesses*: communication problem, culture shock to village community, incomplete infrastructure facilities, lack of activities, lack of exposure and understanding towards tourism business, lack of hospitality experience, lack of investment capital, expertise, and entrepreneurial ability, lack of network with tourism industry players, lack of promotion and under-developed marketing strategies, low standard of accommodation, over dependence on outside assistance, sub-standard and not up-to-par services, unacceptable bathroom and toilet facilities, weak administration and management;
- ❖ *external issues – challenges*: failure in meeting international standards, identity problem - brand image issues, lack of commitment and cooperation among operator, community and leadership, lack of marketing and promotion, lack of training, method of payment, misconception of homestay programme;
- ❖ *deficiencies*: exploitation by external parties, inefficient networking, misuse of homestay term by opportunist; *threats*: competition from agro-tourism and eco-tourism, competition from other accommodation providers, emergence of “false or fake homestay”, exploitation by external parties.

CONCLUSIONS

To be successful, home stay/homestay tourism in Romania needs:

- Achieving a balance between the educational, entertainment, and commercial elements of home stay;
- Arranging training programs to upgrade foreign language proficiency and service quality;
- Certifying the home stay in a rating system according to their quality control and encouraging competition between home stay providers;
- Improving the professionalism of the home stay owner for product development, management, marketing, and operation;
- Improving the quality of the houses participating in home stay programs;
- Involving the key stakeholders in the overall activities of home stay;
- Maintaining an integrated approach towards developing, managing, and marketing home stay programs;
- Reaching niche market segments to attract tourists to the home stay experience.

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