

**RESEARCH ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF AGRO-TOURISM IN THE  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES  
IN BIHOR COUNTY**

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**Abstract:** *Bihor County stands out for a diversity of natural and man-made tourist attractions that can be developed as tourist products, giving the county an important position on the national and why not international tourist market. Over time, as a result of the interest shown in the cultural and folklore richness of the Romanian villages, in the originality and tranquility of the rural areas and in the less exploited natural or anthropogenic tourist resources, rural communities began to develop tourist services that would offer tourists the conditions necessary to spend free time in their midst. This also happened in the rural area of Bihor County, where, in recent years, we have noticed a growing demand for tourist activities practiced in the countryside.*

**Key words:** *rural tourism, agritourism, rural development, tourist potential, Bihor County*

**INTRODUCTION**

Agritourism is a particular form of tourism, a more complex form of tourism, including the tourist activity itself (accommodation, boarding house, tourist circulation, running of programs, provision of basic and additional services, etc.) as well as the economic activity, usually practiced in agriculture by the hosts of tourists - productive activities of processing agricultural products in the household and selling them to tourists or in commercial networks - as well as the way of spending free time. [1,7,13]

Agrotourism is the reception and hospitality activity carried out by individual or associated agricultural entrepreneurs and their families using their own household, holding, or a rented one, so that the activity carried out is in a relationship of complementarity with the activities related to land cultivation, forestry and animal husbandry, these should continue to constitute main activities. [3,11]

Agritourism, as a particular form of rural tourism, is limited to the level of the peasant household, by capitalizing on the natural environment, the offer of accommodation and agritourism services, having a narrower offer than rural tourism. Thus, it can be viewed from the following points of view: [2,10,14]

- ❖ *of the tourist reception structure:* as an element of capitalizing on the surplus of the existing accommodation space in a household, which is arranged and prepared for the reception of tourist clients. [6,8]
- ❖ *of activities:* as a set of goods and services offered by the household for consumption by the tourist customers who arrive in the rural area with the desire to satisfy their motivations for their arrival through direct, active but unpaid involvement.
- ❖ *of the local economy:* as a source of achieving and increasing local incomes.

The forms of rural tourism, specific and integrated to it, can be considered alternatives to solve, at the same time, problems specific to the rural environment but also to the urban one, from this category being problems such as those related to planning, social, economic, etc. [1,5] Therefore, the emergence and development of forms of tourism in the rural environment is necessary, the aim being to ensure the eventual economic and social development of the rural environment, the contribution of these forms of tourism to

supporting the overall development of the rural area being highlighted on several dimensions: economic, social, ecological and cultural. [4,9,12]

**Bihor County**, through the beauty and originality of the natural landscape, through the historical monuments, through the famous balneo-climatic resorts, through the folklore and ethnographic elements, offers tourists rich and varied possibilities for recreation and relaxation as well as possibilities for restoring health. [6,18] Bihor County presents a remarkable homogenous distribution of tourist attractions over its entire surface. However, certain distinct tourist areas with specific objectives can be distinguished. [2,6,17]

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to carry out this analysis and obtain a comprehensive perspective of the impact of the development of rural tourism and agritourism on rural communities in Bihor county, we used exhaustive statistical data from the database of Eurostat and the National Institute of Statistics as well as other reference documents regarding the development strategies of Bihor county: Bihor County Development Strategy 2021-2027, Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County 2021 -2027, the Sectoral Tourism Strategy 2021-2027, for the North-West Development Region, the Development Plan and Strategy of the North-West Region, etc.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The diversity of natural and anthropic resources, the cultural and ethno-folkloric wealth of Bihor's villages has made Bihor County stand out as an important agro-tourism destination at the national level and beyond.

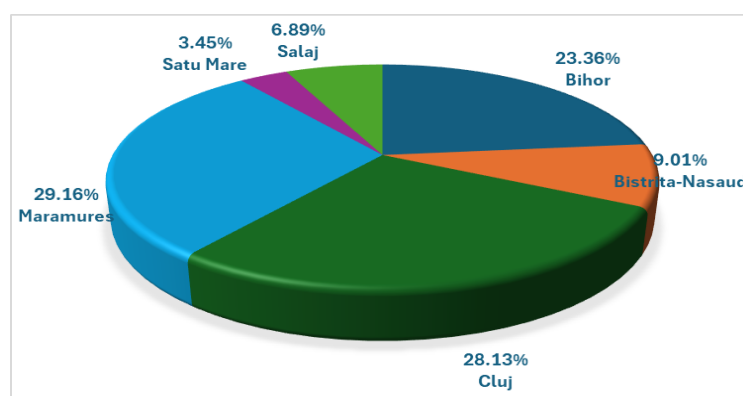
At the level of the North-West region, Bihor County stands out as a tourist destination, ranking third, regionally, in terms of the number of existing accommodation units, table 1.

**Table 1.**

**Evolution of the number of accommodation units, North-West Region, 2000-2023**

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>NW region</b>	292	480	658	<b>771</b>	1225	<b>1732</b>	<b>1952</b>	2119
<b>Bihor</b>	60	85	110	<b>179</b>	283	<b>336</b>	<b>472</b>	495
<b>Bistrita-Nasaud</b>	23	24	27	<b>44</b>	110	<b>143</b>	<b>184</b>	191
<b>Cluj</b>	87	181	222	<b>186</b>	344	<b>507</b>	<b>547</b>	596
<b>Maramures</b>	66	112	191	<b>197</b>	298	<b>508</b>	<b>537</b>	618
<b>Satu Mare</b>	39	61	64	<b>62</b>	77	106	<b>77</b>	73
<b>Salaj</b>	17	17	44	<b>103</b>	113	<b>132</b>	<b>135</b>	146

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online> [15]



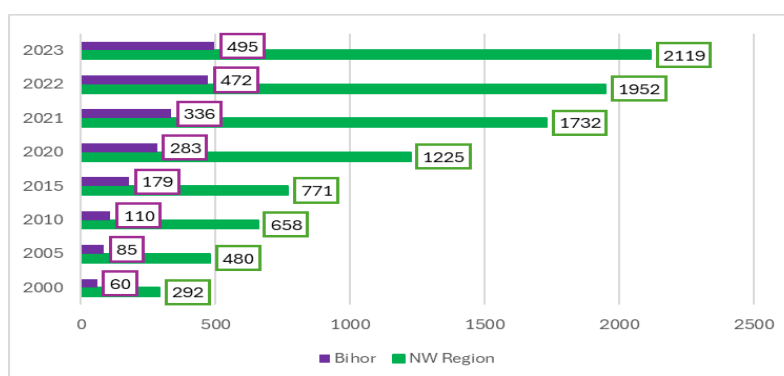
**Figure 1. Structure of the distribution of accommodation units, at the level of the North-West Region, 2023 [15,19]**

In 2023, 23.36% of the regional offer of accommodation units was concentrated in Bihor County, figure 1.

During the analyzed period, at the regional level, there is an increasing trend in the number of accommodation units, the average growth rate being 625.68%, i.e. an increase of 7.26 times. This upward situation is noticeable at the level of all the component counties, except for Satu Mare county, where in the last two years, a downward trend is observed.

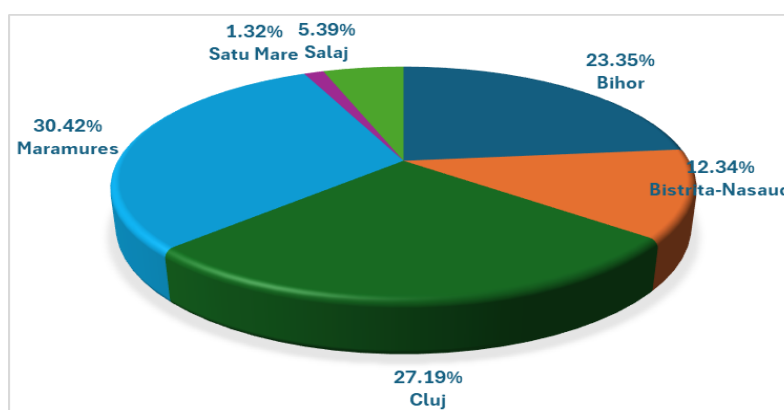
In Bihor County, the total number of existing accommodation units increased during the analyzed period, by 725% (8.25 times), the value being higher than the average of the North-West Region

During the analyzed period, at the regional level, an upward trend is registered in terms of the number of agro-tourist guesthouses, the increase being 23.86 times. The upward trend is specific to all 6 counties, except for Satu Mare county, where in the period 2022-2023, a decrease of 38.89% is recorded. [15,16,18]



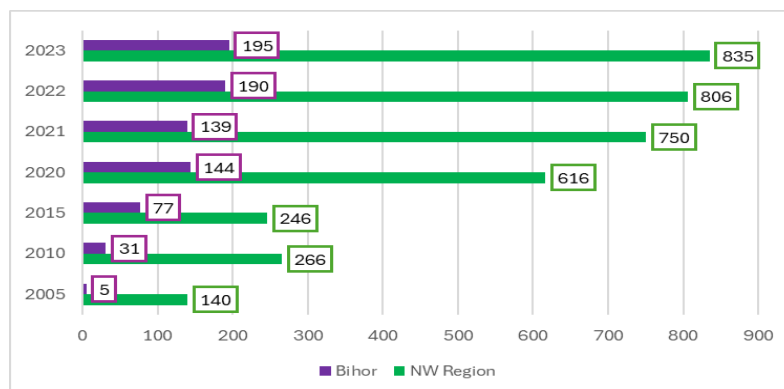
**Figure 2. Evolution of accommodation units North-West Region and Bihor County, 2000-2023 [15]**

Regarding the distribution of accommodation units of the type of agro-tourism guesthouses, figure 3., at the level of the North-West Region, Bihor County has 23.35% of the number of accommodation units, occupying the same third place, after Maramureș counties - 30.42% and Cluj 27.19%.



**Figure 3. The structure of the distribution of agritourism guesthouses, at the level of the North-West Region, 2023 [15,16]**

The analysis of the number of agro-tourism guesthouses at the level of Bihor County indicates a considerable increase in the period 2005-2023, the value of the indicator increasing 39 times, figure 4.



**Figure 4. Evolution of the number of agro-tourism guesthouses North-West Region and Bihor County, 2005-2023 [15]**

The rural tourism activity carried out at the level of Bihor County is not uniformly distributed, being areas with more intense activity and areas where the rural tourism activity is in its infancy. Table 2 shows the main localities in Bihor County where agro-tourism guesthouses are registered. From the point of view of the number of existing agro-tourism guesthouses, the town of Sanmartin ranks first, with a total number of 98 agro-tourism guesthouses, in 2023, more than half (50.25%) of these existing units are concentrated here county level.

**Table 2.**

**The evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, in the localities of Bihor County, 2010-2023**

	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Bihor</b>	31	77	144	139	190	195
<b>Nucet</b>	-	-	3	3	4	3
<b>Valea lui Mihai</b>	-	-	1	1	1	2
<b>Bratca</b>	-	1	3	3	3	3
<b>Budureasa</b>	-	1	1	1	3	3
<b>Bulz</b>	-	2	7	6	9	10
<b>Câmpani</b>	-	-	-	-	2	2
<b>Carpinet</b>	-	-	1	1	2	2
<b>Finis</b>	-	-	3	3	4	3
<b>Gepiu</b>	-	-	1	1	1	2
<b>Hidiselu de Sus</b>	1	2	4	4	6	7
<b>Madaras</b>	-	-	2	2	3	3
<b>Nojorid</b>	-	1	2	2	4	4
<b>Osorhei</b>	-	:	2	2	4	4
<b>Pietroasa</b>	1	3	5	5	7	7
<b>Remetea</b>	1	1	1	1	2	3
<b>Rosia</b>	-	2	4	4	4	4
<b>Sanmartin</b>	23	47	80	78	96	98
<b>Sarbi</b>	1	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Sinteu</b>	-	-	-	-	4	4
<b>Șuncuius</b>	1	1	1	1	3	3
<b>Vadu Crisului</b>	-	2	3	2	3	3

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online> [15]

The accommodation capacity is an element of major importance in the analysis of the activity of tourist units. This indicator is analyzed both from the perspective of the number of accommodation places - the existing accommodation capacity and from the perspective of the number of days of operation of the accommodation unit, during a year - the accommodation capacity in operation.

During the analysis period, the analysis of the existing accommodation capacity

indicator, for the accommodation units of the type of agro-tourism guesthouses, shows an upward trend both at the regional level and at the level of Bihor County. At the level of the North-West Region, the value of the indicator increased by 10.06 times, a value lower than that recorded at the county level - 82.73 times. The accommodation capacity in operation also shows an increasing trend, at the level of the region the value of the indicator increasing by 8.22 times, and at the county level by 101.79 times.

As far as the accommodation capacity is concerned, from the agritourism guesthouses, Bihor County is also in this case, in third place, holding 27.47% of the existing accommodation capacity and 22.25% of the operating accommodation capacity of the Northern Region -West.

The analysis of the existing accommodation capacity in agritourism guesthouses in Bihor County indicates that the localities that have the most agritourism guesthouses (Sanmartin – 98 guesthouses, Bulz – 10 guesthouses, Pietroasa – 7 guesthouses and Hidiselu de Sus – 7 guesthouses), concentrate 61.18% of the total number of existing accommodation places at the county level. Regarding the accommodation capacity in operation, the same four localities (Sanmartin, Bulz, Pietroasa and Hidiselu de Sus), to which is added the city of Nucet, hold 69.34% of the total county capacity.

**Table 3.**

**The net utilization index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, in agro-tourist guesthouses, in the localities of Bihor County, per month, 2023, %**

	and	VI	III	N	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
<b>Bihor</b>	14.14	12.92	12.82	17.07	17.80	26.10	35.40	40.35	22.80	16.35	14.45	13.79
<b>Nucet</b>	15.85	15.24	11.20	6.29	3.87	7.43	36.27	46.82	11.35	21.80	5.33	35.62
<b>Bulz</b>	33.48	28.42	31.07	38.16	52.58	51.32	73.95	50.89	50.91	34.76	38.45	38.51
<b>Hidiselu de Sus</b>	19.27	12.60	16.34	24.09	32.76	19.18	42.45	53.83	31.07	22.52	24.39	11.66
<b>Pietroasa</b>	3.53	1.28	1.09	6.70	6.67	10.50	22.55	36.44	3.16	7.89	0.00	1.01
<b>Sanmartin</b>	12.49	12.78	13.10	17.53	17.19	28.32	36.89	44.44	23.18	14.20	12.72	10.99

Source: <http://statistici.inssse.ro:8077/tempo-online> [15]

The index of net use of the accommodation capacity in operation expresses the correlation between the tourist accommodation capacity in operation and its actual use by tourists. Table 3.6 presents a situation of the degree of use of the agro-tourism guesthouses in Bihor County, during the year 2023. The highest values of the index are recorded in the agro-tourism guesthouses in the town of Bulz, and the lowest, in those in the town of Pietroasa.

As for Bihor County, figure 5, it can be observed that, in the May-September period, the degree of use of agro-tourism guesthouses is higher, a fact due, in principle, to the warm season, school holidays and vacations. At the level of the localities studied, the degree of net use of the accommodation capacity in operation broadly respects the situation at the county level.

From the analysis of the presented data, it can be observed that, in the locality of Bulz, the highest values of the degree of net use of the accommodation capacity in operation are recorded, the values recorded being higher than the county averages.

Agritourism demand represents the second pillar of the agritourism market and the dynamics of its volume and structure determine important changes in the structure and dynamics of the offer.

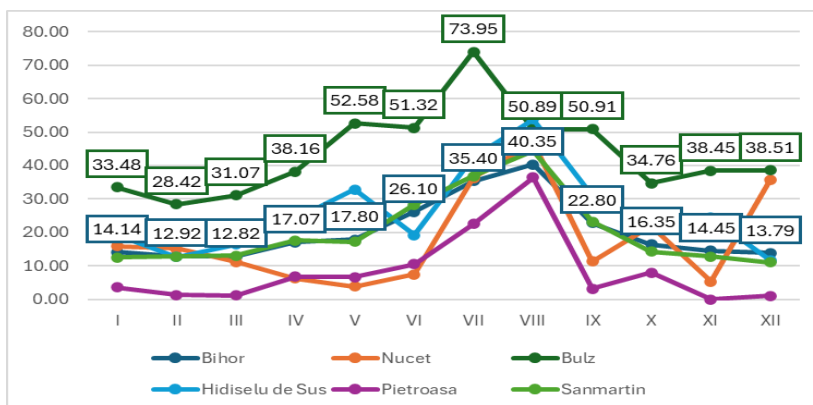


Figure 5. Index of net use of the accommodation capacity in operation, in the agro-tourism guesthouses in Bihor County, 2023, [15]

Tourist arrivals are an important indicator of tourism demand analysis. In the analyzed period, a trend of increasing the number of tourists can be observed both at the level of the region and at the level of Bihor County, except for 2020, when, due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid19 Pandemic, there was a decrease in tourist arrivals.

In 2023, 584,249 tourists were registered in tourist accommodation units in Bihor County, representing 30.44% of the total number of tourists registered in the North-West region. The distribution by categories of tourists, figure 6., indicates a higher share of Romanian tourists - 92.01% compared to foreign tourists - 7.99%.

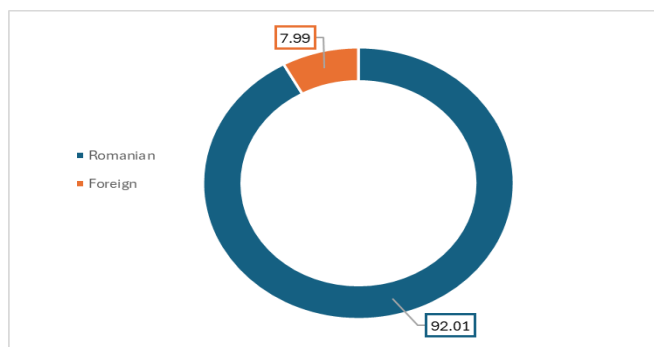


Figure 6. Structure of tourist arrivals by category of tourists, in Bihor County, 2023

Regarding tourist arrivals in agritourism guesthouses in Bihor County, in the period 2005-2023, an intensification of tourist demand can be observed, reflected in the increase in arrivals of tourists staying in agritourism guesthouses, both at the regional and county level.

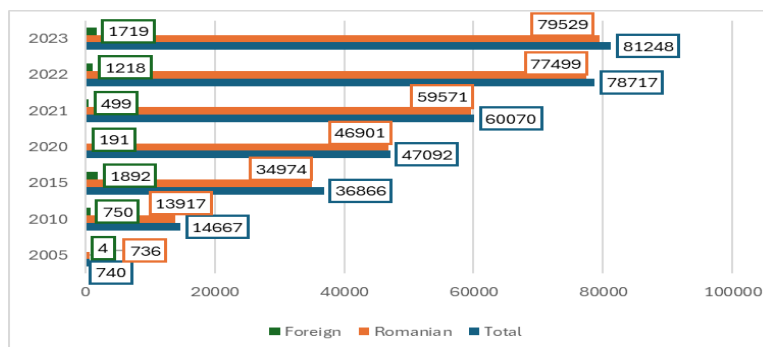


Figure 7. The evolution of tourist arrivals, by category, in agro-tourist guesthouses in Bihor County, 2005-2023, [15]

At the level of the North-West Region, the value of this indicator increased by 9.86 times, and at the level of Bihor County by 109.79 times. The increasing trend of tourist arrivals was diminished in 2020, because of the Covid19 pandemic, resuming its upward trend in 2021.

The structure by category of tourists of tourist arrivals from agritourism guesthouses in Bihor County indicates a higher share of Romanian tourists in 2023, representing 97.89%.

**Table 4.**

**Arrivals of tourists in agro-tourism guesthouses, from the localities of Bihor County, 2010-2023**

	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Bihor</b>	14667	<b>36866</b>	47092	60070	78717	81248
Nucet	-	-	4418	3734	2287	2531
Bratca	-	<b>276</b>	439	188	923	547
Budureasa	-	<b>220</b>	-	-	905	1053
Bulz	-	<b>1680</b>	3764	6278	8233	8250
Finis	-	-	61	173	525	397
Hidiselu de Sus	305	<b>1156</b>	1152	1416	2603	2760
Madaras	-	-	307	48	1051	167
Nojorid	-	<b>439</b>	337	362	86	343
Osorhei	-	-	67	284	582	546
Pietroasa	463	<b>526</b>	744	1127	2241	1035
Remetea	276	<b>227</b>	203	211	344	339
Rosia	-	<b>505</b>	1165	1525	1034	1766
Sanmartin	11515	<b>26455</b>	28350	35775	44606	44660
Sinteu	-	-	-	265	2788	1961
Suncuius	334	<b>694</b>	533	576	1263	1393
Vadu Crisului	-	<b>177</b>	289	321	406	462

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online> [15]

The arrivals of tourists recorded different values, at the level of each locality with tourist potential, a fact due, in principle, to the different number of agro-tourism guesthouses and the different accommodation capacity.

**Table 5.**

**Overnight stays by tourists in agro-tourism guesthouses, from the localities of Bihor County, 2010-2023**

	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Bihor</b>	32106	<b>85425</b>	104420	134769	173854	175201
Nucet	-	-	6419	7372	4429	4849
Bratca	-	<b>505</b>	1223	447	1675	1138
Budureasa	-	<b>468</b>	-	-	3205	2629
Bulz	-	<b>3793</b>	8829	14094	17636	17308
Finis	-	-	134	430	1249	879
Hidiselu de Sus	464	<b>2284</b>	3798	4244	6404	6910
Madaras	-	-	474	58	2213	439
Nojorid	-	<b>636</b>	393	422	140	797
Osorhei	-	-	157	752	1080	1139
Pietroasa	996	<b>1890</b>	2126	2768	5103	2938
Remetea	544	<b>630</b>	554	516	736	1020
Rosia	-	<b>1468</b>	2443	3807	2503	4105
Sanmartin	25185	<b>58711</b>	61249	76460	97834	94639
Sinteu	-	-	-	628	3512	4501
Suncuius	350	<b>1054</b>	666	716	2315	3034
Vadu Crisului	-	<b>937</b>	625	697	1105	1090

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online> [15]

The largest number of tourists, registered in 2023, in agro-tourism guesthouses, was registered at the level of Sanmartin - 44,660 tourists, representing more than half of the existing tourist arrivals in Bihor county - 54.97%.

Tourists' overnight stays represent an important indicator in the analysis of tourist demand, indicating the number of nights spent by tourists in accommodation units.

The overnight stays of tourists in accommodation units of the type of agro-tourism guesthouses show an upward evolution, both in the North-West Region as a whole, as well as in the Bihor County as a whole. The Covid 19 pandemic also had a negative effect on this indicator, in 2020, registering a decrease in the value of this indicator, compared to the previous year. The structure of overnight stays, at the level of Bihor County, indicates that most overnight stays registered in agro-tourism guesthouses are of Romanian tourists - 97.69%, the difference of 2.31% being foreign tourists.

The breakdown by locality of the overnight stays registered in the agro-tourist guesthouses in Bihor County, in 2023, indicates a high concentration of them in the Sanmartin locality - 94,639 tourist-days, (54.02%), with several 98 agro-tourist guesthouses operating here. In the town of Bulz several 17,308 tourist days were recorded, that is 9.88%.

The average length of stay indicates the accommodation unit's ability to retain tourists for as long as possible. This indicator is determined as a ratio between the number of overnight stays and the number of tourists.

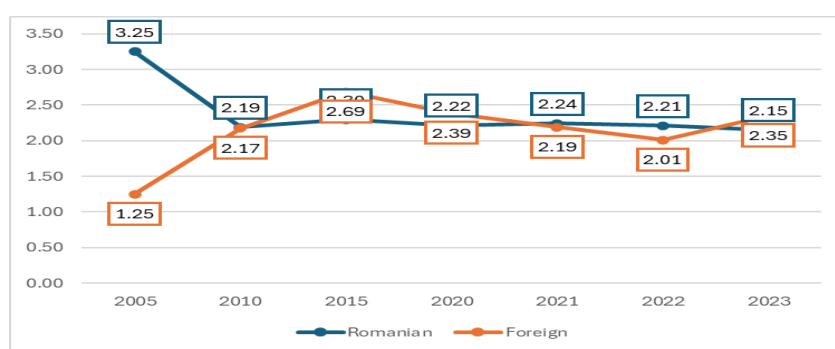


Figure 8. Average length of stay in agro-tourism guesthouses in Bihor County, 2005-2023, [15]

Figure 8 shows the average length of stay in agro-tourism guesthouses at the level of Bihor County, by category of tourists, in the period 2005-2023. The highest value of this indicator, for Romanian tourists, was recorded in 2005, 3.25 days/tourist. In the same year, the average length of stay for foreign tourists recorded the lowest value – 1.25 days/tourist.

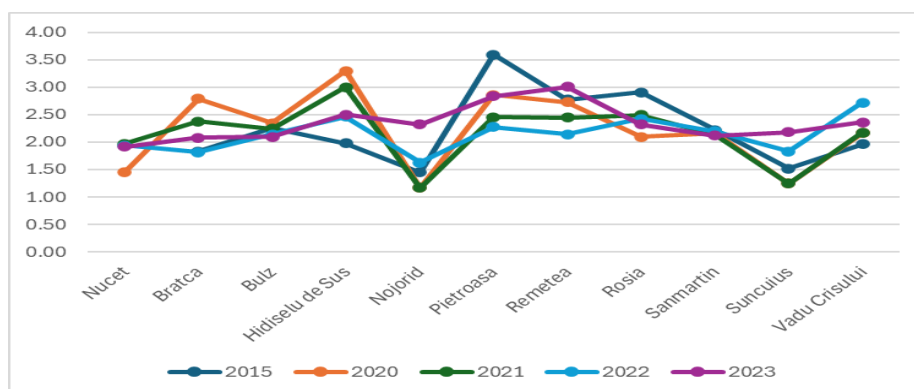


Figure 9. Average length of stay in agritourism guesthouses in localities with agritourism potential, from Bihor County, 2015-2023, [15]



The analysis of the indicator – the average length of stay, at the level of the main localities with agro-tourism potential, indicates different values. The highest values were recorded in the agritourism guesthouses in Hidiselu de Sus, in the period 2020-2023, and the lowest values in the agritourism guesthouses in Suncuius.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Bihor County** has a remarkable tourist potential allowing the practice of numerous types of tourism, from speleological, to spa, cultural and mountain tourism to rural and agro-tourism. The biodiversity of the Apuseni Mountains, the spa resources, the karst relief, the diversity of traditions and cultural manifestations have allowed the development of various tourist activities.

The analysis based on the statistical data provided by local and national public institutions allowed the following conclusions to be drawn regarding the tourist activity carried out in the rural area of Bihor County:

- ❖ the tourist products that motivate tourists to visit Bihor County are very varied, offering a high valorization of natural resources as well as ethno-folkloric, cultural, culinary and human resources.
- ❖ pertinent analysis of tourist resources in correlation with the characteristics of the external environment allows the development of sustainable, responsible and quality tourism development strategies in Bihor County.
- ❖ the sustainable development of tourism in Bihor County is supported by the favorable climate, the variety of landforms, the karst richness of the county, the multitude of traditions and customs, the multitude of cultural events organized in rural communities, etc.
- ❖ The natural tourist potential of Bihor County allows the optimal practice of agrotourism, using the agrotourism household with all daily occupations and facilities as a tourist reception structure. It also allows a better utilization of the existing local resources in the rural area.
- ❖ numerous localities of the county have a remarkable agro-tourism potential, which, however, is currently not exploited to its true value.
- ❖ the main cause of the reduced utilization of the tourist potential and the low level of occupancy of the accommodation units in Bihor County is due to a reduced length of stay, as a result of the lack of some tourist programs, the facilities complementary to the accommodation and the poor promotion of agrotourism in area

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