

**EFFICIENCY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE AGROTOURISTIC ACTIVITIES IN
BUCOVINA (CASE STUDY IN VAMA, SUCEAVA COUNTY)**

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Abstract: *Bucovina, one of the most important and popular areas of agrotourism in the country, has a high growth potential compared to other areas of the country. Therefore, agrotourism development is clearly the solution for rural communities to ensure economic growth and creating new jobs. The current level of practicing agrotourism in Bucovina highlights that the potential of this region is insufficiently exploited, hence the need to implement policies and strategies for efficient marketing of agrotourism activities. It is important to mention the many monasteries built in the area, the unique landscape, favored by the conditions of relief, hospitality of local communities and culinary variety. Also, keeping rural traditions and ancient customs, specific to this zone, represents a milestone in the development of rural tourism, which explains the high tourist attraction for this wonderful area of Suceava county. In this region, there is the possibility of practicing several forms of tourism such as spa, ecumenical, mountain, environment, equestrian, adventure, hunting, etc., where agrotourism holds a considerable share.*

Key words: *tourism, efficiency, traditions and ancient customs*

INTRODUCTION

The current development of agrotourism is influenced by strong economic and social transformation that Romania has crossed, and also by the changes that occur worldwide, of which the most important relate to globalization, sustainable development, computerization, improvement of the communication system, etc.

Size, economic strength, responsiveness and flexibility of tourism operators are of particular importance for policy makers, because the objectives, plans and development programs in this area are based on public-private partnerships and target to stimulate the private sector.

Tourism policy for 2004-2008, from the Government Programme drawn from this period, has two fundamental objectives (Government Programme 2004-2008, The Tourism Policy):

1. Increase of the tourist traffic in Romania.
2. Diversifying services and increasing their quality.

For these two fundamental objectives, the government program provides a number of practical measures and actions to achieve them:

a) *devising a national program to create the tourism brand (the Romanian tourism brand meaning a summary of all information related to names, symbols, slogans, designs of tourist destinations);*

b) *prioritizing infrastructure development to support rural tourism in correlation with general infrastructure development;*

c) *governmental bodies cooperation with the private sector, in order to promote cross-border investments, improving the training and protecting the natural environment;*

d) *the functioning of consultation units in the tourism industry and public administration at central and local level;*

e) *transfer to the private sector, in accordance with international practice, of the activities related to marketing, promotion, licensing, certification and classification in tourism;*

- f) using a share from the funds destined for retraining the unemployed for their schooling and training for specific tourism jobs and positions;
- g) improving and funding profile education (tourism high schools and faculties);
- h) computerization of the actions used to promote tourism;
- i) implementation of the marketing program and promotion that provides 100 % funding for creating, producing and distributing brochures, leaflets, posters, banners, billboards, brochures, videos, CD-s, slides, photos, posters, participation in fairs, public relations, visits for media representatives, tour operators, opinion makers; cofinancing rate of 50% for various projects to promote the touristic offer.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted based on information gathered from Vama commune City Hall and the "Tourism Association Vama- Bucovina", founded on 8th of January 2009, that aims to promote local tourism and agrotourism, in specific tourism areas, promoting pro-environmental bio cultures, organizing leisure activities and entertainment to increase the number of vacation days and occupancy of accommodation places, creating jobs and capitalizing local resources.

Also, the association has set some objectives regarding tourism and agrotourism information and promotion, establishment of a Tourist Information Center, the launch of annual events and an international festival with a specific Bucovina gastronomy theme, greening the area, restoring marks and tourist trails, etc.

The case study was conducted at the Bucovina Lodge agrotourism guest house, whose main goal is promotion of local tourism and agrotourism, in areas with such vocation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Vama is located in the northern side of Suceava county, in the mountain area, occupying a total area of 13628 ha, having four villages in its structure (*Vama, Molid, Prisaca Dornei and Strâmtura*) and total population exceeds 6000 inhabitants.

The diversity of the relief causes a strong attraction for tourists. Forests occupy 70 % of the commune, being in the group of regions with the largest forest area in the country.

Vama and Prisaca Dornei villages are located on a 8-10 m high terrace, on agricultural grooves having a very thin layer of soil. A more consistent point is called Zăvoi, over the water, and the pastures and meadows located on the upper terraces create favorable conditions for animal breeding.

In Vama commune, more than 50 functional economical agents carry out their activity, the main businesses being farming, vegetal production, wood processing, tourism, agrotourism, catering, road transport, trade, bakery and construction.

Some agrotouristic guest houses sell traditional products (*vegetable stew, jams, stew, etc.*) processed in their own household, being at least nationally renowned.

The touristic dowry of the commune increased year by year, both in terms of accommodation and diversification of services, due to important investments made out of own resources or obtained from international institutions. Of the total number of touristic and agrotouristic units in Suceava county, about 10% are in Vama. Types of tourism that can be developed in the area are: agrotourism, mountaineering, ecumenical, scientific, rest and recreation, adventure, transit, cultural, organized sightseeing - monuments of art, culture and other achievements of human activity (*handicrafts*), trade exhibition, whose practice is occasioned by profile manifestations (*fairs, exhibitions*), which attract many visitors, festival, occasioned by cultural and artistic events (*ethnographic, folk*), sports (*fishing, cycling*).

In Vama, agritourism has a great potential, due to the influence of several determining factors, among which we mention:

- *quality of the landscape;*
- *numerous religious sights;*
- *air and water quality;*
- *hospitality of the people;*
- *folk art, crafts and traditional occupations.*

The Ethnographic Museum, placed in an old house (*Iorgu Toma memorial house – the most representative personality among the peasants in Vama, 1871-1935*), 200 yearsold, where several items have been preserved - male and female costumes, furniture, harnesses for animals, household items, rugs, towels, icons, carved frames, medals and old currency, family photographs and paintings;

The Museum of painted eggs "Letitia Orsivski", which houses the largest collection of decorated eggs in the region, domestic and international exhibits, made with various techniques;

The wooden church "Înălțarea Domnului", built in 1783, which, according to the legend written on the tablet of Bucovina Village Museum, was founded by Mihail Tempescu, Toader of Toma in Upper Vama.

"Stâlpul lui Vodă" monument, also known in the area as the Tartars' Cross or Tartars' Stone, is a stone column which dates from 1717 and was built by the command of Mihai Racoviță, a moldavian ruler, as evidence of his victorious campaign against the Austrians in Transylvania;

Heroes' Cemetery is located on the Buzăului hill and hosts the graves of German, Russian and Austrian soldiers who died in both world wars;

Nicorescu House museum, a monument of old, traditional architecture, with two rooms which showcases many household items, appliances, agricultural, etc. sheepfold, books, magazines, collected over time; Boca Gheorghe painting workshop; Olas Dragos and Miron Gheorghe sculpture workshop. The case study was done at Bucovina Lodge agrotouristal guest house, classified with 4 flowers, from a number of 4 agrotouristal and 18 rural guest houses that are approved and classified in the commune (figure 1):

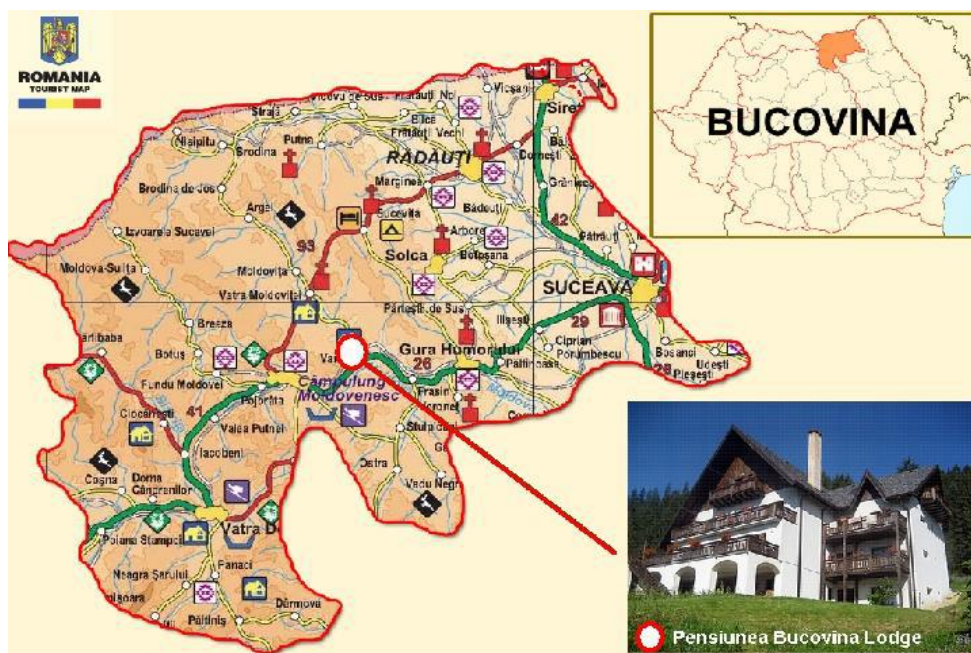


Figure 1 Bucovina Lodge - positioning on the tourist map of Bucovina

The guest house belongs to S.C. Bucovina Lodge S.R.L., founded in 2005, registered at the Trade Register of Suceava, being put into operation on October 17th 2007.

The uniqueness of Bucovina Lodge is given by its location: at the edge of the forest on Barbusca hill, in a beautiful setting, with an impressive and exceptional view of the village, Rarău mountain and the neighboring sights (figure 2):



Figure 2 Bucovina Lodge-front view

It is a guest house equipped with all facilities for comfort, built according to local architecture, has a total number of 10 accommodation units and consists of 4 levels as follows:

- *Basement* - where the central kitchen is located, as well as a playground for children, sauna, bathroom and boiler room;
- *First level* – comprising the living room (**figure 3**), dining room (**figure 4**), service kitchen, reception office and 3 rooms for 2 people, equipped with bathroom;
- *Second level* - comprises 6 rooms with two beds each (**figure 5, figure 6, figure 7**);
- *Third level* - includes an apartment for 4 people, a conference room and a billiard room.

All rooms open out to a balcony/terrace. The first level has a terrace with a panoramic view of Vama and Rarău Mountains.



Figure 3 View of the living room

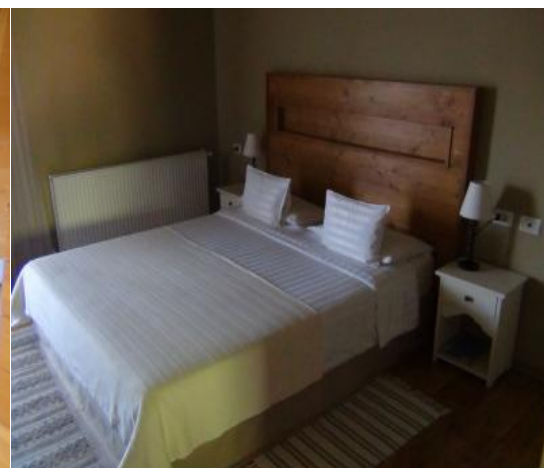


Figure 4 View of a 2 persons room



Figure 5 View of the yard –playground and traditional house



Figure 6 View of the yard - pavillion

Also, the guest house has a garden for growing vegetables.

The main activities in the guest house is accommodation and catering, the manager also facilitating other tourism activities such as hiking in the mountains or at the sheepfold, the main tourist attractions in the area, picking fruits, mushrooms, possibility of practicing winter sports, opportunity to participate in craft activities such as egg decoration, carved wood, stone, etc.

Cooking and cattering is entirely done in the guesthouse, the raw material used consistsonly of natural products purchased from local neighbors (milk, cheese, butter, eggs, poultry, pork, beef, honey, syrups, jams, etc.), but also from its own vegetable garden.



Figure 7 Dining room

The menus are traditional and are always recommended to clients. Drinks are mostly purchased from local producers (juices, wine, brandy, etc.), but also from well known manufacturers, such as Cotnari, Vincon Vrancea, Orhei-Vit or Tohani.

To determine the economic efficiency of the analyzed guest house, the following indices that can express the annual results of activities were taken into account: gross profit, gross profit rate, rate of return, absolute/relative costs.

For the analysis of indicators expressing economic efficiency of the guesthouse, two basic indicators were chosen: expenditures and incomes (Table 1):

Table 1
Structure of expenses by nature during 2009-2011

Expenditures	Years					
	2009		2010		2011	
	Total lei	%	Total lei	%	Total lei	%
Staff expenses	22970	16,4	31170	20,8	75942	35,9
Energy and water expenses	4485	3,2	5599	3,7	7860	3,7
Merchandise expenses	11442	8,2	-	-	-	-
Raw materials, consumables and inventory items expenses	11392	8,2	22240	14,8	47384	22,4
Depreciation expenses	53029	37,9	52397	34,9	38530	18,2
External services expenses	21338	15,3	23102	15,4	24927	11,8
Taxes expenses	14139	10,1	14902	9,9	11057	5,2
Other expenses	1018	0,7	714	0,5	5855	2,8
Total expenses	139813	100,0	150124	100,0	211555	100,0

Source: Own calculations after synthetic records of Bucovina Lodge

From the data analysis on the structure of expenditures, we observe a significant difference, especially on the depreciation, staff and raw materials expenses (figure 8):

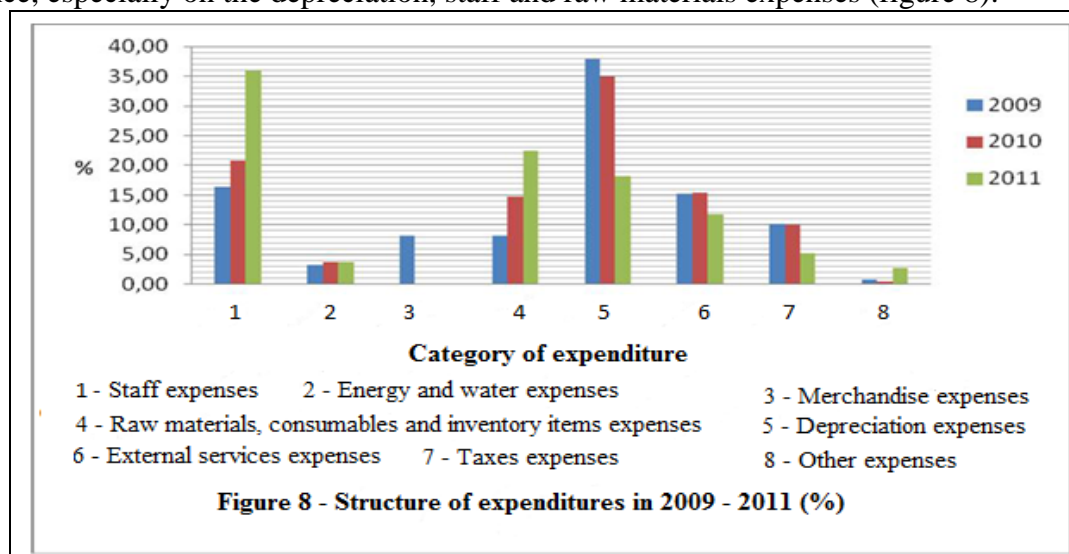


Figure 8 Structure of expenditure in 2009-2011 (%)

In the case of new investments, depreciation expenses represent almost a third of the total, with the highest value being recorded in the first two years.

Staff expenses charge, on average, 24 %, with a significant increase in 2011, which explains the higher number of employees and their further motivation.

Expenses with external services have been relatively constant (14 %), highlighting that the collaborators were established at the beginning of business (subscriptions to telephony, internet, maintenance supplies and devices, other services).

Analysis of the expenses for raw materials, consumables and inventory items highlights that the activity of the guest house has grown from one year to another, registering an increase which ranged from about 8% in 2009 to over 22% in 2011. Moreover, the total annual expenditure evolution shows a difference of over 43% in 2011 compared to 2009 and over 30% compared to 2010 (figure 9):

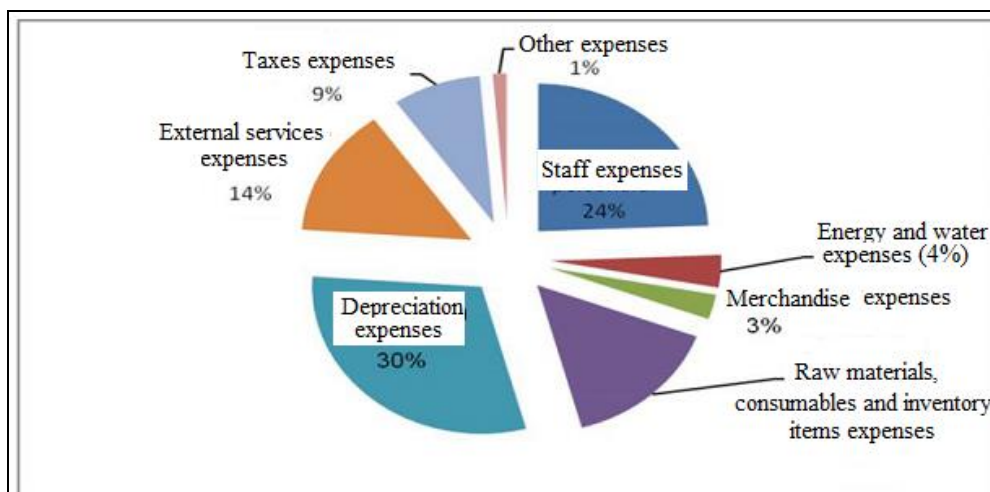


Figure 9 Structure of total expenses - the average period 2009 - 2011 (%)

Incomes recorded in 2009-2011 had an upward trend, therefore in 2011 there was an increase of 60% compared to 2009 and 34% compared to 2010, while the income sources were both works and services, but also from non-repayable subsidies received by accessing funds from the SAPARD Programme. (Table 2):

Table 2

Structure of incomes in the period 2009-2011

Income source	Years					
	2009		2010		2011	
	Total lei	%	Total lei	%	Total lei	%
Incomes from agrotouristic services	42678	39,6	136843	77,9	197213	73,3
Incomes from subsidies	37534	34,8	38013	21,6	25664	9,5
Incomes from various activities, interests, currency, commodity sales	27512	25,5	778	0,4	46260	17,2
Total incomes	107724	100,0	175634	100,0	269137	100,0

Source: Own calculations aftersynthetic records of Bucovina Lodge

The comparative analysis of total annual revenues, by categories, it appears that the largest share of revenues (64%) was obtained from agrotouristic works and services (mainly accommodation and catering), while from subsidies - only 20%.

In 2009, after the first year of activity, the main source of income was represented both by services and subsidies - 35%, and in the following years, incomes from subsidies reduced rather much, so that in 2011 they were reduced to only 9%, while the incomes recorded in the last year of analysis were higher by over 60% compared to the base year (figure 10).

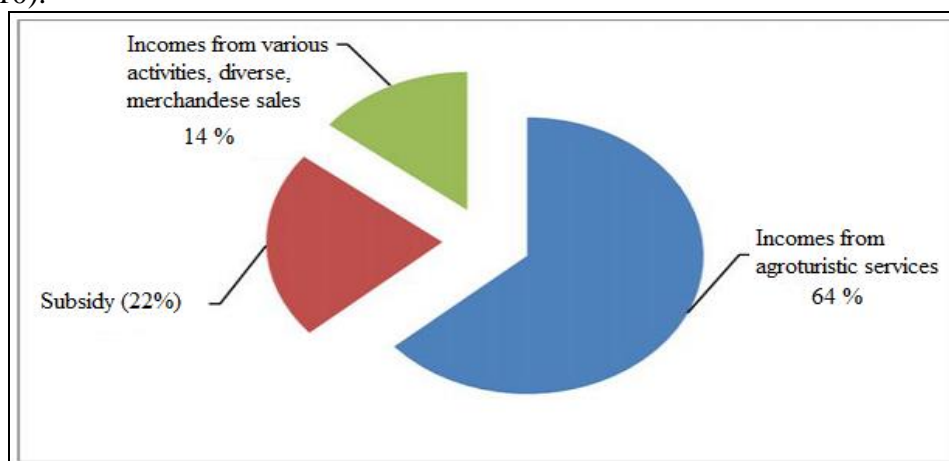


Figure 10 Structure of total income - the average period 2009 - 2011 (%)

From the analysis of the financial results, we conclude that Bucovina Lodge guest house has worked in terms of economic efficiency, which results from the analysis of gross profit and rate of return (Table 3):

Table 3

Analysis of synthetic indicators of economic efficiency Bucovina Lodge Pension from 2009-2011

Indicators	Value - lei		
	2009	2010	2011
Turnover	62187	136843	242923
Total assets	2069898	1628641	1616487
Total incomes	107724	175634	269137
Total expenses	139813	150124	211555
Gross profit – total	- 32089	25510	57582
Gross profit rate %	- 22,95	16,99	27,22

Source: Own calculations after synthetic records of Bucovina Lodge

Since 2010, the agrotourism activities carried out at the guesthouse started to generate profit, which makes the investment to become sustainable. In 2011, gross profit increased by 50% compared to 2010, which led to the economic development of the guest house. Thus, analyzing the developments in profits in the last three years, we can say that the prospects of economical development of Bucovina Lodge are feasible and the attention that its owner must pay is towards product diversification, improving services in order to sustain and determine future growth and profits.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The European experience in agrotourism, as well as the conduct of studies and research in this field in some developed countries in Europe, is, for specialists and decision makers in agrotourism from our country, an important source of information and successful models that can be applied in rural areas with tourism potential.

2. As shown in the work of several foreign authors who conducted studies of rural tourism and agrotourism in our country, but also in published works of different Romanian authors, Romania is still at the beginning of agrotourism, because of the large gaps in the transport infrastructure, the modest training of the personnel who provides tourism services, poor promoting and the non-inclusion of agrotouristic offers from areas with high potential in the touristic packages of agencies from this field.

3. Bucovina is one of the main tourist areas in Romania, due to the favorable conditions of relief, the beauty of the landscapes, the air and water purity, the mountain areas, the preserved traditions and customs, the specific Moldovan gastronomy and, not least, the well known hospitality of the locals.

4. In terms of diagnostic analysis on the agrotouristic offer in Bucovina, this mainly highlights the predisposing factors for tourism development in the study area, characterizing, in this regard, a number of factors such as: geographical location and relief conditions, forestry and agricultural potential, touristic and agrotouristic potential and evolution of the main touristic indicators.

5. SWOT analysis of the tourism potential in Bucovina, performed on the elements of natural frame, touristic potential, area's infrastructure, environment, rural development, business environment, human resources, research, technological innovation and IT, highlights the agritouristic potential of the study area and justifies the importance of agrotourism activities' efficiency.

6. Possibilities to streamline the agritouristic activities in Bucovina were highlighted by a case study of Vama, chosen because of its high tourism potential and geographical settlement, in the heart of the region. Such elements have been described: the geographical

location and natural environment of the commune, the administrative-territorial organization and the socio-economic and agrotourism issues in this area.

7. The results of the above mentioned elements have contributed to a marketing plan for promotion of tourism units in Vama, while demonstrating the importance of knowing them for achieving any analysis or strategy.

8 Evolution of economic efficiency indicators in the period 2009-2011, analyzed in a compared study at the Bucovina Lodge agritourism gues thouse in Vama, shows that practicing agrotouristic activities in this area can be an important source of income. This model for determining the economic efficiency can be applied in other agrotouristic guest houses in the studied area, which would certainly show that the value of the tourist zone presents a significant high potential that can be converted into equity by locals, which can conduct agrotourism services in the area, and guest houses owners.

9. Agrotourism can become an important source of income for local residents from Vama who want to turn their household into a structure with accomodation and cattering function, and for those who want to invest in building new agrotouristic guest houses. A very important element is the creation of new jobs in the area, which could solve one of the biggest problems that our society is facing nowadays.

10. All these arguments show that agrotourism activity can be profitable for the guest houses in the studied area, but also for local communities, thus justifying the need for strategies to streamline these activities and involve all stakeholders in tourism for promoting Bucovina as an agrotouristic area.

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