

EXPERT PAPER

## **Researches concerning the evolution and influence of agrotourism in durable development of Gorj County – Romania**

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### **Abstract**

The work analytically and synthetically describes the rich agrotouristic potential of Gorj County, the premises for this activity occurrence, the evolution and development of the agrotouristic phenomenon, as well as its contribution to the sustainable development of Gorj rural space, from a social and economical point of view. In conclusion the work shows that by promoting and developing agrotourism activities, a significant contribution is made in order to protect and preserve the natural and built surrounding environment, as well as to emancipate inhabitants at intellectual level, and from a social and cultural point of view.

Key words: agrotourism, Romania, Gorj County, geographical resources, touristic environment.

### **Introduction**

Gorj county has a significant touristic potential represented by a natural picturesque landscape, with art and architecture monuments with a great artistic value, some of them of real international interest, as well as with a valuable folkloric and ethnographic patrimony. The amount, diversity and value of Gorj county touristic resources allow to develop and promote various forms of tourism, that would capitalize these resources as good as possible. Except for balneary resources, the other resources are less capitalized, which makes that the county's touristic offer be less developed and of low competitiveness (Cîndea et al., 2000).

### **Material and method**

This study refers to the adequate development and capitalization method for Gorj agrotouristic potential through the modernization, consolidation and development of traditional forms of tourism as well as promotion of new ones (agrotourism, winter sports, congresses and reunions, sport hunting etc.), creation of an adequate touristic key signature and competitive touristic offer.

The following were used in assessing the agrotouristic phenomenon of Gorj county (Glăvan et al., 1994)

- Analyzing and getting information – the main method, hence revealing aspects like: touristic environment, touristic resources, touristic infrastructure, touristic circulation, etc.;
- Description, presentation of facts – as a means to describe, present all the elements noticed;

- Analysis, investigation – involves a set of instruments, techniques and methods for revealing and explaining the connections established between the elements of the touristic phenomenon;

## Results and discussions

### Premises for agrotourism activity occurrence and development

Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of touristic resources at the level of Gorj County, various priorities for their capitalization have resulted through the agrotourism activity. The premises for the occurrence and development of agrotourism activity in the area are the following: 1) generous natural environment through all its components (relief, water, flora, fauna) and a favourable climate for the development of an intense touristic activity; 2) volume, structure and value of touristic potential, its distribution in the area as well as availability of representative touristic resources for tourism - balneary, mountainous, winter and cultural sports; 3) further economic and social-demographic development of the county through the growth of mine exploitations, leading to increased employed and urban population; 4) potential touristic relapsing and increasing demand, at the level of the country for balneary treatment especially rheumatism or peripheral nervous system, curable in the county and for winter sports; 5) good general infrastructure of the county, with communications ways acceding to touristic areas; 6) county's placement in an international value touristic area (Iron Gates Area) crossed by European touristic thoroughfares ( E 70, E 79, E 81 ) with significant touristic flows. DN 67 national road joints together these touristic axes; 7) narrow Preajba – Apa Neagră railway, that could be an original touristic attraction for foreign tourists (as it is the case for Suceava, Maramureş and Neamţ counties); 8) significant and various anthrop touristic attractions, especially old tower type houses, hermitages and monasteries, wooden churches, Constantin Brâncuşi sculptural complex; 9) preservation of old occupations and craftsmanship, beautiful customs and popular traditions where a special place is held by pastoral village fairs.

### Evolution of tourism and agrotourism activities in the county

In order to make an objective and realistic presentation of the occurrence and evolution of agrotouristic activities in Gorj county, the experts team had to simultaneously analyse the evolution of the touristic phenomenon as a whole, because there is a strong connection and interrelation between them.

**Table 1. Dynamics and structure of accommodation capacities in Gorj county 1989,1997,2007**

Nr.	Years Types of units	1989		1997		2007		No. of rooms dynamics	
		No. of rooms	%	No. of rooms	%	No. of rooms	%	1997/ 1989	2007/ 1989
	Total, of which	2106	100.0	1789	100.0	2012	100.0	-15.1	-4.5
1.	Hotels, hostels	908	43.1	1071	59.9	1094	54.4	18.0	20.5
2.	Inns, motels	53	2.5	177	9.9	315	15.6	234.0	494.3
3.	Touristic cottages	528	25.1	194	10.8	48	2.4	-136	-1000
4.	Halts, chalets	170	8.1	139	7.7	145	7.2	-18.2	-14.7
5.	Touristic pensions	-	-	65	3.8	343	17.1	6500	34300
6.	Camping places	447	21.2	143	8.0	67	3.3	-212	-567

Presentation of tourism and agrotourism activities evolution has been made by comparison to year 1989, because then our country passed from communist centralized economy to free market economy based on demand and offer. Along with this major transformation at political and economic level, the agrotourism began to occur and sustainably develop at the level of the entire country and Gorj county, because legal and competition conditions were

created for this new form of tourism. A detailed analysis of the accommodation structures dynamics, according to their types of units allows certain conclusions that, with the help of data in table 1, we shall describe next: touristic accommodation structures have known a decreasing evolution, the number of total places in the county being in 15.1% less in 1997 than in 1989, and 4.5% less in 2005 than in 1989; compared to 1989, in 2007 the greatest growth of accommodation spaces was recorded in rural and agrotouristic pensions, because any private accommodation activity for touristic and especially foreign ones at local population was forbidden before, from 0 rooms to 343, for inns and motels the growth is by 493.3%, followed by hotels and hostels, by 20.5%. This was a result of the reclassification action of accommodation structures made by the Ministry of Tourism. In return, the number of camping places spectacularly decreased from 447 to 67 rooms, which is 567% decrease. A significant decrease is also recorded for the number of accommodation rooms in cottages – 1000 %, from 528 to 48, due to their physical and moral wear;

**Table 2. Distribution of accommodation structures in Gorj county**

Touristic structure type	Locality	Rooms	Places	Touristic structure type	Locality	Rooms	Places
Agrotouristic pension	Arcani	4	8	Chalet	Ranca	6	12
Motel	Arcani	15	35	Hotel	Ranca	40	80
Rural touristic pension	Arcani	7	14	Agrotouristic pension	Baia de Fier	29	58
Motel	Lainici	14	28	Motel	Baia de Fier	30	60
Urban touristic pension	Bumbesti	6	12	Chalet	Baia de Fier	10	20
Agrotouristic pension	Rachiti	16	36	Rural touristic pension	Polovragi	10	20
Agrotouristic pension	Runcu	4	8	Agrotouristic pension	Polovragi	3	6
Rural touristic pension	Borosteni	4	8	Cottage	Sacelu	24	48
Rural touristic pension	Pestisani	9	15	Agrotouristic pension	Sacelu	20	42
Touristic halt	Closani	6	13	Hotel	Sacelu	67	152
Rural touristic pension	Closani	9	24	Hotel	Tg-jiu	212	424
Urban touristic pension	Motru	16	32	Youth hotel	Tg-jiu	68	152
Hotel	Novaci	21	42	Motel	Tg.Jiu	51	90
Rural touristic pension	Novaci	14	28	Pension	Tg.Jiu	6	12
Agrotouristic pension	Novaci	2	4	Hotel	Carbunesti	27	54
Agrotouristic pension	Pociovaliste	4	8	Agrotouristic pension	Pocruia	4	8
Hotel	Ranca	20	40	Rural touristic pension	Vanata	3	6
Cottage	Ranca	12	24	Rural touristic pension	Tismana	23	45
Rural touristic pension	Ranca	23	69	Cottage	Tismana	12	24
Urban touristic pension	Ranca	49	92	Motel	Tismana	41	82
Youth hotel	Ranca	18	36	Rural touristic pension	Turceni	5	10

Source: National Tourism Authority

The structure of Gorj county accommodation places on types of activities, as resulting from the same table, in 2007, shows that accommodation spaces in hotels and hostels are predominant, with 1094 rooms (54.4%), followed, with a great difference, by the ones in touristic and agrotouristic pensions, with 343 rooms (17.1%) and inns and motels, with 315 rooms (15.6%). The number of rooms in halts and chalets is 145, which is 7.2%, and the lowest weight is held by the number of rooms in cottages 48 (2.4%), followed by the one in camping places 67 rooms (3.3%). The preponderance of the number of rooms in hotels is explained by the development of an itinerant tourism in Gorj county, especially in Tg-Jiu city.

The presentation was made under the form of table for the distribution of touristic accommodation structures due to the fact that this is the only way that can suggestively describe the magnitude of the agrotourism development at the level of this area. The data in Table 2 clearly and realistically describe the fast evolution of agrotourism, including almost all villages and rural areas, ethnographic and cultural-historical areas, which are not capitalized at their real value. The presence of this type of activity in most of localities is

very beneficial, because it has a significant contribution for their durable and sustainable development, from all points of view.

**Table 3. Touristic circulation in Gorj County 1989, 1999, 2009**

Marker Years	Number of tourists			Night passing no.		
	Total	Romanian	Foreign	Total	Romanian	Foreign
1989	182,230	181,185	1,045	318,823	312,438	6,385
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1997	67,320	65,955	1,365	122,809	120,201	2,608
%	36.94	36.40	130.62	38.52	38.47	40.84
2007	51,564	49,371	2193	98,094	92,541	5,553
%	28.29	27.25	209.85	30.76	29.61	86.97
Dynamics 1997/1989	-63.06	-63.6	30.62	-61.48	-61.53	-59.16
Dynamics 2007/1989	-71.71	-72.75	109.85	-69.24	-70.39	-13.03

In order to be able to clearly and explicitly explain the influence of agrotourism activities in the economic and social development of rural areas, table 3 describes touristic circulation, which brings a capital contribution at local and regional level, because tourists' movement from issuing areas to receiving ones as well as spending a time in the visited area is always made with certain expenses, recorded both in the budget of touristic accommodation structures and in the budget of local and regional authorities.

Analysing the dynamics and structure of touristic circulation in the county, table reveals the following:

- the total number of tourists have faced obvious decreases within the analysed period, with a real tendency to decrease towards 2007, when 71,71 % less tourists were recorded compared to main year, 1989;
- the number of Romanian tourists also differs during the analysed period, with spectacular decreases of 72,75 %, in 2007 compared to 1989. Causes are due to: economic conjuncture, population purchase power decrease, price increases for touristic products, alteration of touristic services, especially in big hotels, that could not rapidly adapt to the new requirements of market economy, etc.;
- the number of foreign tourists has known an increasing dynamics compared to 1989, reaching a 30,62 % growth in 1997 and 109,85 %, in 2007, respectively. The explanation of the phenomenon is mostly argued by the spectacular changes occurred in our country after the Revolution in 1989 and after the occurrence of smaller accommodation structures like touristic and agrotouristic pensions, with a rapid and efficient adaption capacity to the new conditions of competition type touristic market.

### Conclusions

The influence of agrotourism activity in Gorj county sustainable development explicitly results from data brief and synthetic presentation, from tables referring to some of the most significant analysis markers of agrotouristic phenomenon. According to the diagnosis made based on data and field researches the conclusion was reached that the agrotourism activity has a very significant impact on the region sustainable development, referring to almost all economic and social-cultural branches by:

- acknowledging tourism and agrotourism as a key factor of local economy and as a generator of new jobs;
- developing the touristic infrastructure and superstructure necessary for the development of touristic systems provided in the development strategy;

- adequate use of resources (including biologic diversity), minimization of negative economic, social, cultural and ecologic impact and maximization of benefits on local communities and upon nature preservation;
- encouraging and involving local communities in the development of agrotourism and making integrate plans for tourism development, including all infrastructure elements in order to avoid coordination-lacking development;
- supporting agrotourism and ecotourism development in mountainous area, national parks, reservations and rural areas

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