

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGROTOURISM IN THE ARMENIŞ AREA CARAŞ-SEVERIN COUNTY

Cipriana Sava

Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management Timișoara
Christian University “D. Cantemir” București, Romania
cipriana.sava@gmail.com

Gheorghe Pinteală

Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management Timișoara
Christian University “D. Cantemir” București,

РАЗВОЈ АГРОТУРИЗМА У ОБЛАСТИ АРМЕНИШ У ОКРУГУ КАРАШ-СЕВЕРИН

Abstract

Tourism is present worldwide and attracts a greater part of the population by the year, mainly as a result of the pollution and stress increase in the urban areas, the need for rest, relaxation, knowledge, recovery of health. People's desire to spend more and more time in the country, in the rural area, in places where tradition still exists has led to the development of agrotourism. This „going back to the roots” offers the possibility to preserve the cultural identity of a nation within the context of globalization. The Romanian rural area maintains its archaic features, especially in the mountain area where the natural environment is unpolluted. A special area with numerous natural and anthropic resources, located in the south of the Banat, in Caraș-Severin County, is the Armeniș area. The possibility of a future development of agrotourism in this area of the country would bring about various social, economic and environmental benefits.

Key words: *tourist resources, agrotourism, development.*

Извод

Туризам је присутан широм света и привлачи све већи број људи. Пре свега, због загађења и стреса у урбаним срединама, долази до повећања људске потребе за одмором, опуштањем, сазнањем, побољшањем здравља. Људи желе да што више времена проведу у природи, у руралним срединама где се традиција и даље негује. Све ово је довело је до развоја агротуризма. „Враћање коренима“ пружа могућност очувања културног идентитета нације у контексту глобализације. Румунска рурална подручја негују и одржавају своје архаичне особине, посебно у планинским подручјима где природна средина није загађена. Посебно се може истаћи област Армениш са бројним природним и антропошким ресурсима, које се налази на југу Баната у округу Караш-Северин. Могућност будућег развоја агротуризма у овој области донела би многе друштвене, економске и еколошке бенефите.

Кључне речи: туристички ресурси, агротуризам, развој.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional rural space with archaic skills is more and more difficult to keep and find in Europe. The economic and scientific progress, state-of-the-art technologies have led to leaving rural settlements or to their transformation for the sake of urbanization.

We can perceive the authentic village as the place where the tradition and culture, the identity of a people is conserved.

In Romania, one can identify several types of rural settlements according to the main preoccupation of the inhabitants, the historic area, their geographic position, the distribution of homes and the geometric shape. (table 1)

Table 1 The typology of Romanian villages

No	Classification criterion	Type of village
1.	Main preoccupation of inhabitants	-agricultural; -pastoral-forest; -tree-growing-wine-growing; -with annex occupations;
2.	Historic area	-from Transylvania; -from Banat; -from Dobrudja; -from Bucovina; -from Bessarabia; -from Moldavia; -from Oltenia; -from Muntenia;
3.	Geographical position	-plain; -hill; -mountain; -pond, deltaic;
4.	Distribution of homes	-compact; -scattered;
5.	Geometrical shape	-with isolated houses; -valley; -scattered; -crowded; -liniar, along the road; -rectangular; -compact; -circular; -radial.

Source: after: Bădescu, I., Cristea, D., Dicționar de sociologie rurală, Concepte-Teme-Teorii, ed. Mica Valahie, București, 2011, p.378 și www.enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/sat

In Romania, the village still represents the majority of territorial units: there are 12.957 villages and only 320 towns. Some rural settlements, especially those in the mountain area, keep the customs and traditions intact, being less accessible. In these conditions the development of rural tourism can be supported, especially agrotourism.

ASPECTS OF AGROTOURISM IN ROMANIA

Agrotourism meets the needs of the persons who want to spend their free time closer to the nature, traditions and culture of an area.

By agrotourism we mean the tourism form practised in the rural area where tourists will be provided with accommodation, food and leisure services in the local people's houses or the agrotourist pensions. The meals will be prepared from products obtained at home after traditional recipes, and the tourists will be able to participate in at least one activity around the household.

Generally, agrotourism is a secondary activity, the main one being the agricultural activity.

The motivations of potential tourists for this form of tourism have to do with:

- the desire to know the local customs, traditions and culture;
- the need to escape to a picturesque unpolluted place;
- the practice of sports;
- the need to relax and restore or maintain one's own health;
- the revisit of natal places.

In Romania, this form of tourism has developed recently; the following types of tourist villages have been identified¹:

- ethnographic-folkloric;
- artisanal and artistic creation;
- climatic and landscape;
- fishing and hunting;
- vineyard-fruit growing;
- pastoral;
- for practicing sports.

Rural tourism and agrotourism implicitly have started being recognized by the Romanian authorities since 1972 with Order no. 279 issued by the Ministry of Tourism, which provided the designation of 118 rural localities for tourist activities. Unfortunately, by Order no. 744 of the same ministry, in 1973, the number of localities was reduced to 14. In 1974 the Decree 225 on providing the lodging areas for foreigners was meant to forbid people to accommodate foreign tourists in their houses.

¹ Glăvan V.,2005,Turism rural,agroturism,ecoturism,Editura Universitatii Lucian Blaga,Sibiu (pp.80-90) and Nistorescu,P.Gheres,Marinela (coordonatori),2010, Turism rural-tratat,Ed.ASE, Bucuresti (pp.81-82)

After a long period of time, the idea of rural tourism comes back to the attention of authorities: they approve the Government Ordinance no. 62/24.08.1994 and the Law no. 145/31.12.1994 for the approval of the Government Ordinance no. 62/24.08.1994 regarding the establishment of facilities for the development of rural mountain tourism, the Danube Delta and the Black Sea coast.

A year later they issue the Order of the Minister for Tourism no. 20/04.04.1995 regarding the norms and minimum criteria for the classification on stars of tourist pensions and agrotourist farms.

Another measure was the Government Ordinance no. 63/1997 regarding the establishment of facilities for the development of rural tourism that led to Law no. 187/14.10.1998 for the approval of this ordinance.

The classification on flowers (daisies) for accommodation facilities in the rural area was specified by Order no. 61/27.04.1999 for the approval of the methodological norms and criteria regarding the classification of tourist accommodation facilities.

The elimination of the term “agrotourist farm” was made in the year 2000 by Order no. 510/28.06.2002 for the approval of the methodological norms regarding the classification of accommodation facilities.

Order 65/2013 for the approval of the methodological norms regarding the issue of classification certificates for tourist accommodation and food facilities, of tourism licences and certificates comprises in Annex 1.5 definitions and compulsory minimum criteria regarding the classification of tourist accommodation and food facilities – tourist pension and agrotourist pension. This order was slightly changed by Order no. 221/07.07.2015, the changes referring to agrotourist pensions, precisely to services of food, their location and area.

Agrotourist pensions can be classified from 1 to 5 daisies. They must be located in an unpolluted environment, the minimum area of the pension must be 1000 m², and the number of rooms is 8.

All these legal endeavours are meant to support the development of tourism in Romania’s rural areas. Several organizations were established for this, the most important being the Romanian Federation for Mountain and Rural Development (FRDMR) and the National Association of Rural, Ecologic and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC) established in 1991, and 1994 respectively.

According to the statistics, the number of accommodation facilities – agrotourist pension – has increased, as well as the tourists’ interest for agrotourism. (table 2)

Table 2 Evolution of accommodation facilities and capacity – agrotourist pension – and number of tourist arrivals in these facilities in Romania

No.	Indicator	u.m.	Year 2014	Year 2015	Year 2016
1.	Total of accommodation facilities	number	6130	6821	6946
2.	Agrotourist pensions	number	1665	1918	2028
3.	Total accommodation capacity	beds	311288	328313	328888
4.	Capacity of agrotourist pensions	beds	30480	35188	37394
5.	Total of accommodated tourists	persons	8465909	9921874	11002522
6.	Tourists accommodated in agrotourist pensions	persons	549302	672756	813454

Source: National Statistics Institute, series TempoOnline, www.insse.ro

The predominant agrotourist pensions are the ones classified at category 3 flowers (daisies), they evolve upwards (table 3), in 2016 they represented 55,67% of the total number of accommodation facilities of this type.

Table 3 Evolution of the number of agrotourist pensions according to the category they belong to

No.	Category (no. of daisies)	Year 2014	Year 2015	Year 2016
1.	5	20	19	19
2.	4	177	214	229
3.	3	837	1021	1129
4.	2	579	607	598
5.	1	52	57	53

Source: National Statistics Institute, series TempoOnline, www.insse.ro

The interest for the Romanian agrotourism is increasing both with Romanian tourists and with foreign tourists. Prince Charles of Wales conducts a very good campaign promoting it.

AGROTOURISM IN ARMENIȘ AREA, CARAȘ-SEVERIN COUNTY

Caraș- Severin County is located in south-west Romania, in the historic region of Banat and stretches on an area of 8514 km². It borders the Timiș County to the north and north-west, Hunedoara and Gorj to the east, Mehedinți to the east and south-east. In the south and south-west the Danube forms the frontier with Serbia.



Fig 1. Map of Caras-Severin County
Source: <http://www.comune.ro/?judet/ijud13/>

Administratively speaking, the County is made of 2 cities, 6 towns, 69 communes and 287 villages, and has its headquarters in Reșița.

The relief is varied, but predominantly with a mountain area (65% of the territory), which is an advantage for the development of agrotourism. The climate is continental-moderate with sub Mediterranean influences. The hydrographical network is well represented by a series of rivers, part of the Danube (60km), natural and anthropogenic lakes, subterranean waters and thermos-mineral springs. The flora and fauna harmoniously blend with the relief and the climate, being well represented.

The richness of the tourist natural and anthropogenic resources has led to the development of several forms of tourism, among which we mention: wellness, leisure, mountain, winter sports, extreme sports, hunting and fishing, cultural, speleological, scientific, ethnic, industrial, rural tourism.

Table 4 Evolution of the accommodation facilities and capacity – agrotourist pension – and of the number of tourist arrivals in these facilities in Caraş-Severin County

No.	Indicator	u.m.	Year 2014	Year 2015	Year 2016
1.	Total of accommodation facilities	number	188	231	235
2.	Agrotourist pensions	number	57	71	79
3.	Total accommodation capacity	beds	7998	9159	9316
4.	Capacity of agrotourist pensions	beds	1086	1352	1575
5.	Total of accommodated tourists	persons	122762	171626	181195
6.	Tourists accommodated in agrotourist pensions	persons	12685	20394	24457

Sursa: Institutul Național de Statistică, serii TempoOnline, www.insse.ro

The number of agrotourist pensions in this county increased significantly between 2015-2016 (22 facilities) compared to 2014, and so did the accommodation capacity. The number of people who choose to spend their free time in an agrotourist pension in 2016 almost doubled in comparison with the number registered in 2014, these tourists making up 13,5% of the total number of tourists accommodated in Caras-Severin County in 2016 (table 4).

The development of agrotourism in this county has many opportunities, many mountain villages being able to increase their incomes.

Armeniș area is located in Caraş- Severin County, 75 km away from Reșița and 25 km away from Caransebeș, the access being made on roads E70, DN6 and the railway Caransebeș-Orșova.

Geographically speaking, this area is located on the depression corridor Timiș-Cerna, between the east edge of the Semenice Mountain and the west edge of the Țarcu Mountain, at an altitude of 337 - 343 m, in some places with an altitude up to 618 m. The climate is one of transition between steppe and mountain with mild winters and quite warm summers with Mediterranean influences.

The localities in this area are Armeniș, Feneș, Sat Bătrân, Sub Margine and Plopu. The area is 14.337 ha, the population is 2.393 persons, the number of households is 755, and the number of houses is 933.

The activities specific to the area are from the agricultural, zoo technical and tree growing fields, 20 natural bodies being authorized in agriculture and commerce.

The existent natural and anthropogenic sights can sustain the development of agrotourism in the area. We mention here the incredible landscapes, the gorges of the rivers Alb, Lung and Timiș, Plopului Valley, “Piatra Scrisă” Monastery Armeniș, Saint Nectarie Monastery, the traditional costume, the customs and traditions of the place.

In the Armeniș administrative area there are protected areas in the Natura 2000 site, Teregovei Gorges with an area of 289,10 ha and Țarcu Mountains with an area of 58,657 ha.

An attraction is the European bison Reservation Măgura Zimbrilor from Plopu where, in May 2014, the first animals were reintroduced into the wilderness. Currently, in this area there are 30 European bisons, 20 of which are free, and 10 are in the rewilding area. Restoring the population of free European bison in the Țarcu Mountains is included in the project „LIFE-Bison: Urgent measures for the recovery of the musk ox population in Romania”, financed by the European Commission through the programme LIFE and implemented by WWF Romania and Rewilding Europe. A visiting centre was opened for visitors. Scientific data about the European bison are interactively presented by means of the biggest holographic projection in Europe (fig. 2,3).



Fig. 2 The European bisons from Armeniș
Source: www.wwf.ro



Fig 3. Landscape from the European bison Reservation

Source: www.wwf.ro

Annual events that can attract more tourists:

- The Day of Armeniș celebrated on the Ascension Day, 40 days after the Resurrection, as well as the celebration of the patron saint of the churches in Armeniș, Sat Bătrân and Sub Margine;
- “Balul Izmenelor” (Ball of pants) organized in February;
- The religious celebration (Ruga) of the gypsies from Armeniș – 14 October, on the occasion of Saint Parascheva;
- The religious celebration (Ruga) in Feneș 26-27 October, on the occasion Saint Dimitrie;
- Folklore Festival “Sandu Florea” from Armeniș in May-June;
- Christian camp in Plopu (organized since 1983, usually in August).

So far, tourists haven't had the possibility to spend time in an accommodation facility because there is no such facility here.

The authorities have identified 178 uninhabited buildings and a surplus of rooms in the 755 households since, on average, the number of people living in a household is three. 7 of the 20 natural bodies authorized for agricultural and commerce activities showed an interest to involve in agrotourist activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Agrotourism is suitable especially for mountain areas where the pollution sources are reduced and the local culture and crafts are still kept alive. Tourists show growing interest for this form of tourism.

The Armeniș area in Caraș-Severin County presents part of the elements necessary for agrotourism:

- natural attractions;
- lifestyle;
- unaltered folklore;
- authentic traditional costume;
- road and rail transport.

At the moment, there are no accommodation and food facilities, and the human element existent here has no training in tourism.

Local people are not immune to the tourists who come to see the landscapes and the European bison, to the idea of income and lifestyle increase. Therefore, the development of agrotourism will not be late to occur.

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