

The Analysis of Agrotourist Activity in the North-East Development Region with Emphasis on Neamt County

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify the challenges that restrain the development of the agro touristic heritage of Neamt County and to draw some conclusions regarding the whole process of sustainable development. As a focus of the study, the research brings in discussion the rural community and its involvement in the preservation and integration of the agro touristic heritage. Neamt County has an impressive rural tourism potential, with a recovery and uneven development between 2005 and 2015. The methodological framework consists in quantitative and qualitative methods that allow greater flexibility of data analysis. This study concludes that the agro tourism from Neamt County must be developed by focusing on promoting more the touristic resources and introducing financial instruments for developing this sector.

Keywords: *agro-tourism; arrivals and overnights stays; agrotouristic boarding houses.*

JEL Classification: *O18; Z32.*

Introduction

Rural tourism is first of all a form of expression of ancient human spirit with different nomination: travelling for widening knowledge horizon, living area, establishing and strengthening relations with new communities for mutual economic and cultural advantages. (Ioan, Rădulescu, and Bran, 2014, pp. 16)

Romania is among the countries with a real agro tourist potential; the country has become more and more visible at the European level in the latest years, especially thanks to the landscapes and the wild nature, to which the modern people now want to return. (Avram, 2015, pp. 20)

Tourism in rural area has always been practiced, but was increasingly contoured, appreciated and demanded along with the evolution of civilization, given the industrialization and urbanization phenomena which became harmful factors due to the emphasizing stress in the polluted urban area. (Ogârlaci, 2014, pp 210)

The rural tourism is one of the most effective solutions to harmonize the tourism requirements with the requirements of environment protection and sustainable development. (Iova, A. R., Năstase M. and Lascăr E., 2016, pp. 233)

This paper proposes an analysis of the evolution of Romanian rural area of the North- East development region in its multiple aspects, focusing on the rural tourism in Neamt County. On the background of the concerns raised by demographic imbalances (age, level of school education, birth, etc.), exacerbated by migration to urban areas, but also by serious problems of infrastructure, low living standards, quality and level of employment, the rural area of North East region stands out in utmost through employment in subsistence agriculture, in an aged structure through high unemployment and limited opportunities for employment in other economic areas, but also by entrepreneurship little manifested especially in commercial activities.

Literature Review

A danger to Romanian village is the disappearance of young elites in general and in particular the attraction that urban areas manifest, where living conditions are better, and earnings exceed those of the village. To dampen these negative phenomena that are recorded in the rural compulsory rural development as the main strategic tool used the blurring of social and economic disparities existing to tone existing social and economic disparities, gaps determined by the different endowment of natural resources, human and financial. Development of rural communities can be described as a territorial development approach, including economic, social, cultural, political, fostering endogenous development, mobilizing human and financial resources that contribute to it.

In this context agro-tourism can be a real chance for disadvantaged rural areas, but also for other rural areas of the county of Neamt: realization of a rich natural and cultural potential, decongest busy tourist areas, improving the living standards of the population of those perimeters, stabilizing the local labour by creating new jobs in services, construction, equipment accommodation rapid growth due to lower expenses required to equip their access of disadvantaged groups to these offers to spend the holidays. (Cândea, and Bran, 2001, pp. 152-153)

Development of the rural tourism should be understood as a mechanism which must act in guiding the development of socio-economic phenomena countryside toward individual and community development, leading to improving the welfare of rural and maintain environmental equilibrium. Increase rural welfare is perceived when there is a positive effect to economic and social phenomena that have dominated and still dominates the rural areas, such as:

- stopping the migration of populations from rural to urban areas by creating new jobs in tourism which would motivate the existence and initiative to stimulate action to ensure the basic needs;
- combating poverty
- stimulation and diversification of services;
- equity of opportunity;
- the right to a better life, right to health, education and security.

Agro-tourism, rural tourism component, has the greatest implications for local resources in raising living standards and last but not least in protecting and preserving the natural and human environment in the context of economic activities on ecological principles.

Agro-tourism tourists travel with family and usually come from urban areas. They show respect for the customs of the rural areas and seek information about the places they intend to visit. Agrotouristic services are not for mass tourism. In addition to the benefits from accommodation, catering and other activities or direct selling, agro tourism also brings other benefits such as: recognition and assessment of architectural and cultural heritage.(Zoto, Qirici, and Polena, 2013, pp. 214)

For the county of Neamt - at the current stage, due to the presence of tourist resources exploited and poorly harnessed, agro-tourism is a niche with an important opportunity for growth and therefore remains a sphere of activity that can absorb some of the workforce still available through economic restructuring (especially the women). It should be noted that rural tourism can ensure prosperity to disadvantaged rural areas, can be a cure for less developed regions. This can be achieved through the development of less resource-rich areas with high economic value, but important and attractive tourist resources of natural and man. In this context, rural tourism is considered a lever with which it can alleviate some of the imbalances between regions.

Because of the geographical area to draw attention to Neamt county in terms of tourism, its natural and anthropogenic resources need to be exploited sustainably as a result of reasonable accommodation as they can come into the tourist circuit. In the county of Neamt, components of the natural environment and man-made environment presents a quantitative or qualitative value, aesthetic or cognitive and can become „landmarks” of national importance for the tourism industry. (Cândea et al., 2012).

Development of agro tourism involves mutations in the socio-economic tourist villages from Neamt, resulting in a rupture of the social function of traditional peasant, by waiving provided free and livelihoods independent of them to enter the crowd employees.

Methodology

The statistical data were extracted from the web page of the National Institute of Statistics (<http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo2&lang=ro&context=63>) for the latest ten years (the interval 2005 – 2015), for the following sub-chapters of tourism: (1) – Arrivals of the tourists in structures (establishments) of tourist receiving, and having touristic accommodation functions, sorted by tourist destination and types of tourists, development regions and counties; (2) – Overnights in structures of tourist accommodation, sorted by tourist destination and types of tourists, development regions and counties ; (3) – The existing accommodation capacity, by types of tourism structures, comfort category, development regions and counties; (4) – Arrivals of foreign visitors in Romania, sorted by tourist destination, development regions and counties.

The development work was performed based on bibliographical documentation works of Romanian and foreign literature and various Internet sources. We used documenting, the analysis and data processing from a secondary analysis. The documenting, the analysis and the data processing and the information obtained from the following sources: monographs, scientific papers about tourism and agro-tourism, informative data from the Statistical Yearbook, Regional Development Plan 2014-2020 (North-East) on Rural Development Agency North-East website.

General Presentation of the North-East Development Region

North-East development region is bordered to the north with Ukraine over a length of 184.2 km, south of Galati and Vrancea counties (South-East development region), east border of Moldova with a length of 562.3 km, and the west of Maramures and Bistrița (North-West development region) and Mures, Covasna and Harghita counties of the Central development region- (Regional Development Plan 2014-2020 (North-East) , pp.9)

North-East development region is, unfortunately, the least developed region of Romania. Within the region, the poorest areas are the southern county of Iasi, in southeastern of Neamt county, eastern county of Bacau, Botosani and Vaslui. The west side of this region, which in the years '60-'70 was the subject of forced industrialization, has entered in a slow, but steady process of

deindustrialization in the last two decades, which has aggravated the economic situation of the whole region, eastern region is traditionally underdeveloped.

Rural population is the most dynamic component of the countryside and a potential resource of particular importance for the development of villages, playing a decisive role in defining rural development policies. (Cândea, and Bran, 2001, pp.145)

Romania's population has a high share of rural population, being of 46.16% in 2015. Romanian rural areas of the North-East development region have values above the national average (58.41%). (Table 1.)

Table 1. Characteristics of the North East Development Region in 2015

Development Region	Counties	Population	Rural Population	Area Kmp	Population density person/kmp	Share of rural population (%)
North-East	Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, Vaslui	3,272,118	1,911,182	36,850	88.80	58.41
Romania		19,913,193	9,187,044	238,391	83.53	46.14

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from
<http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=ADM101A>,
<http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=POP106A>

According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the gross rural population places the North-East region sits on the first place with 1,911,182 inhabitants, seconded by South Muntenia region with 1,859,098 inhabitants. Comparative analysis of the rural population by region shows a uniform distribution of the population in the 8 regions. Out of the total rural population of Romania, the largest share is held by the North-East (20.8%). (INS, 2016). The average population density has different values, being 85.53 inhabitants/km² nationally and 44.25 inhabitants/km² in rural areas.

Beside the West-East development disparities, in the North-East region are also highlighted urban-rural disparities in the general level of development, infrastructural facilities of all kinds, and the attractiveness of investments. At the same time there is also an alarming phenomenon linked to the decline of small and medium towns, especially those mono, they being unable to fulfil their urban functions.

Addressing a classification by the prevailing relief formations, we can categories types of rural settlements and specific activities as it follows:

- lowlands - characterized by cluster-type, with economical functions of agricultural cereal and fruit – wine;
- agricultural area of hills - characterized by scattered houses along a side road, with gardens, orchards and vineyards between groups of houses. As economic function, the focus is on fruit viticulture and livestock. One should also note the presence of more complex economic activities, such as those related from the primary processing to upper wood processing industry, and sometimes even mining.
- mountain area - characterized by scattered villages in the mountains, with isolated farms or small groups of houses, many of which are not connected to public utilities: gas, water, electricity.

The main relief units of Neamt County are offset with heights decreasing from west to east - 1907 m on top of the mountain Ceahlău Ocolasul Mare and 169 m Siret valley. Mountains are mostly occupying 51% of the county. Units mountain belong to the central group of the Eastern Carpathians, the main subunits of the county being Stănișoarei Mountains (Vf. Bivolul - 1530 m), Bistrita Mountains (Vf. Budacu - 1859 m peak. Grinties - 1758 m), Ceahlău (Vf. Ocolasu Great - 1907 m) Mountains Tarcău (Vf. Glodu - 1439 m) Mountains Gosmanu (Vf. Murgoci - 1293 m). Follows a series of depressions eastwards (Neamt, Bistrita-Cracău, Tazlău) and

Carpathian hills belonging Subcarpathians Moldova (Pleșu, Horns, Runcu), while being present and corridors Moldova and Siret.

Due to favourable conditions, the landscapes, the purity of air, water, mountain areas in Bacau, Neamt and Suceava and the priceless cultural and religious heritage existing North East Region, it has a relatively high tourism potential, which can be compared to other popular tourist destinations in the country and abroad. Along the picturesque region, well-known hospitality, traditions, customs, specific Moldavian gastronomy, traditional wine tasting at Cotnari and Huși give local colour in order to attract tourists.

Rural area in Neamț County is characterized by underdeveloped infrastructure, inadequate social services and housing and by serious socio-demographic pressures, such as aging and poor level of education of the population. Rural development strategy aims mainly improves the living conditions of the population in rural areas and participation in raising overall quality of life. Agro tourism development cannot take place without a recovery in agriculture, because most people in this area ensure its existence through its practice. (Matei, 2014, pp. 274)

The touristic and agrotouristic offer in the mountain area of Neamț County is rather varied and addresses to: 1. ethnographic elements and local traditional manifestation (traditional occupations, traditional technique, folkloric manifestations); 2. historic and architecture monuments (castles, fortresses, archaeological sites, churches, forts); 3. hidrotechnical constructions with touristic unction (dams and artificial lakes).

The Demographic Evolution in the North-East Development Region

The numerical evolution of the rural population, the existence of territorial differentiation with reference to rural population distribution and density are the effect of several social and economic factors which is acting conjugate on the rural population. The dynamics of the rural population is influenced by a number of demographic phenomena such as birth and death rates. It is most important from the consequences point of view.

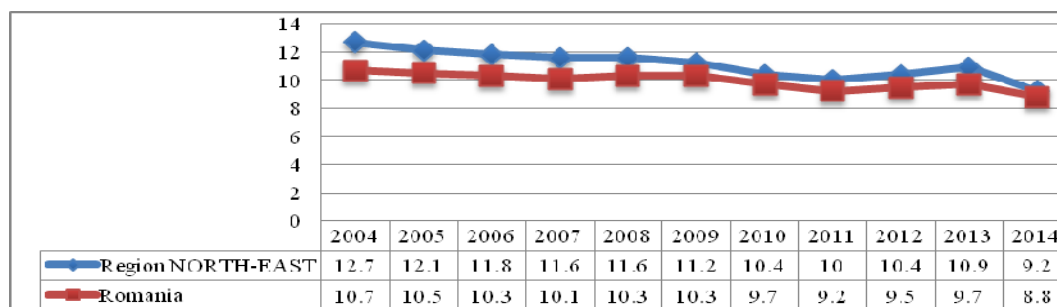


Fig. 1. The birth rate in rural areas in Nord-Est (2004-2014)

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=POP202A>

In the period 2004-2014, although the birth rate in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, the downward trend is highlighted, from 10.7 % in 2004 to 8.8 % in 2014, as presented in fig.1. Unfortunately for Romanian village, the downward trend is recorded in the region of North-East, from 12.7 ‰ to 9.2 ‰ by only 2014. This decline in the birth rate in rural areas of the Northeast region is due to lower voluntary fertility diminution and rural population obvious dependence on agriculture and reducing the economic function of traditional peasant family, who decreased the average size of the family and changing the mode of reproduction. (Câdea and Bran, 2001, pp.146)

If the birth rate is not viewed on a report rigid and immediately with the financial situation, with the living conditions, mortality depends directly on these conditions: the birth rate could be changed through coercive measures, while mortality is subject only to economic, social and natural condition.

For Romanian rural areas, mortality had a higher average of 9.2 ‰ in the communist period (until 1989), a tendency being slowly and gradually installed but steady growth indices to over 14 ‰ (in the late '90). Unfortunately for the rural population of Romania, this indicator was relatively high in the period under review, both at national and regional level (Figure no. 2).

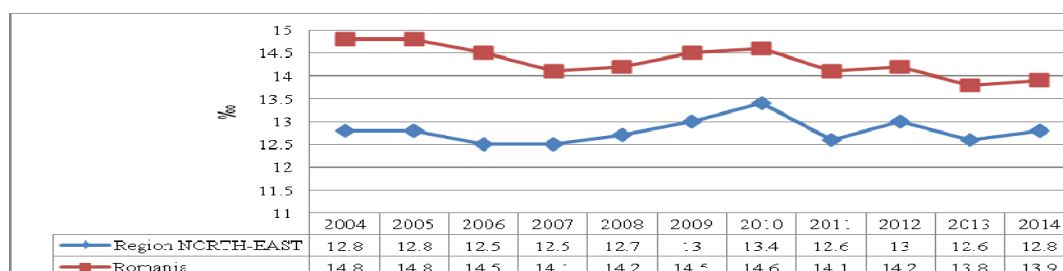


Fig. 2. The mortality rate in rural areas in Nord-Est Development Region (2004-2014)

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=POP207A

The main feature of developments in the last 10 years in rural areas is that it has stabilized around a level of 13 to 14 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants, indicate which places Romania among the countries with overall mortality in rural areas, very high.

In the North-Eastern region it was recorded the lowest values of mortality (12.8 ‰) in 2014, compared to the national mortality rate (13.9 ‰). Counties with lower mortality in rural areas are: Iasi (11 ‰), Suceava (11.7 ‰), Neamt (12.7 ‰). In these counties, where the overall mortality of rural population is lower, the age structure of the population has a higher percentage of children aged 0-14 years, in parallel with a lower share of the elderly population.

Mortality of rural population depends on a number of factors, among which: the degree of hygienic conditions of its residents; living conditions of residents; especially the provision of hospitals and specialized health personnel.

Natural increase, calculated based on births and deaths, is the essential premise in increasing or decreasing the number of rural population, follows a similar pattern to the two factors (birth and death rates). In rural areas of the region of North-East, the natural increase recorded for the entire analysed period only negative values. (See Figure 3.)

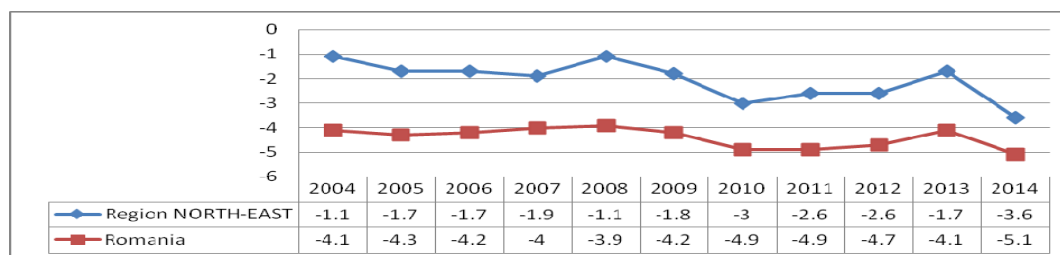


Fig. 3. The evolution of natural growth in rural areas - North-East, (2004-2014), (‰)

Source: Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=POP215A>

Analysis of natural increase of the rural population highlights a pronounced negative phenomenon in the region. Between 2001-2014, the lowest value was -3.6 ‰ (recorded in 2014), thus, being with 1.5 ‰ less than the value recorded nationwide. (Figure 3)

The analysis of the technical, material and supply services

At the end of 2015, in the North-East in tourism were running 830 tourist accommodation establishments (representing 12.17% of those under statistical observation), as it is shows in table below (table no.2).

Table 2. Accommodation in the North-East region, 2015 (number)

Region/County Accommodation	North-East region	Bacău	Botoșani	Iași	Neamț	Suceava	Vaslui
Hotels	122	15	8	30	18	46	5
Apartment hotels/Motels	27	12	0	2	6	6	1
Hostels	23	2	1	4	6	8	2
Holiday villages	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Touristic villas	37	8	0	7	7	15	0
Touristic chalets	25	1	0	1	8	14	1
Bungalows	22	1	0	12	6	3	0
Campings	7	0	0	1	2	4	0
Touristic halting places	7	0	0	1	3	3	0
Tourist halting places	12	2	0	0	9	1	0
School and pre-school camps	7	2	1	1	2	0	1
Touristic boarding houses	218	50	3	28	33	80	24
Agrotouristic boarding	321	36	2	12	133	129	9
Ships accommodation spaces	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Totals	830	129	15	99	234	310	43

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101C>

Looking at the statistics of the North-East Region Development, it can be seen that in Neamț County 234 accommodation units are developed, approximately 28.2% of total housing units in the region. The first position is occupied by Suceava that has 310 accommodation units (37.3%). Together, the two counties, Neamț and Suceava represent 65.5% of total housing units of the North East Region.

Numerical difference between the aforementioned two counties and the remaining counties is evident so, although Bacău County is the 3rd in number of structures, the 129 units cannot compete with Neamț and Suceava Counties. The top 3 in the region is followed at a great distance by Iași (99 units), Vaslui (43 units) and Botoșani with 15 units. (Figure 4).

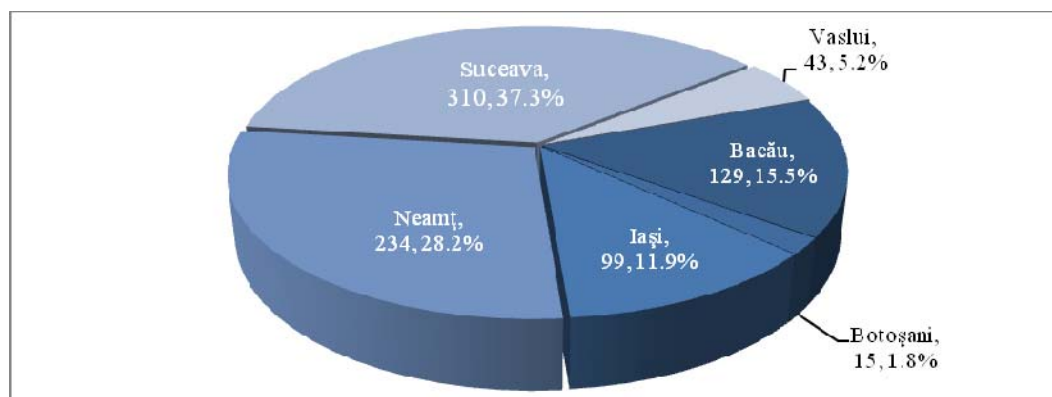


Fig. 4. Share accommodation in North East-2015

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101C>

Following this analysis, it can be stated that in 2015, at the North-East Development Region in the accommodation establishments, the share is owned by agrotouristic boarding houses (539 units) by approximately 64.93%. Of the total of rural tourism in North-East, 81.61% are located in two counties: Neamt (133 agrotouristic boarding houses) and Suceava (129 agrotouristic boarding houses). The analysis conducted revealed that less than 1/3 of the total number of rural tourism is reflected in the four counties of the North East Region (59 agrotouristic boarding houses, 18.39%). This low value for the 4 counties (Bacau, Botosani, Iasi and Vaslui) highlights a direct correlation between the level of poverty in rural areas as compared to Suceava and Neamt, where economic development in the rural areas is much higher.

By numbers, hotels are ranked on second position (122 units, 14.69%). Within the region emerges Suceava with 46 hotel type accommodation units (37.7% of the total number of hotels in the region), especially in the resorts of national interest Gura Humorului, Câmpulung Moldovenesc și Vatra Dornei.

Agrotouristic boarding houses increased importance as more and more tourists are oriented towards accommodations specific to smaller „hospitality industry”, cheaper prices and located in areas more rural or outlying cities. Number of rural tourism increased progressively with a slight inflection specific period of 2010 and 2011, which is based on some economic issues made both at national and European level.

From numerically dominate agrotouristic boarding houses, very popular with foreign tourists, but in terms of accommodations, tourist urban provided with a near double beds. It is noted huge growth in the number of pensions, but somewhat in balance with the available beds.

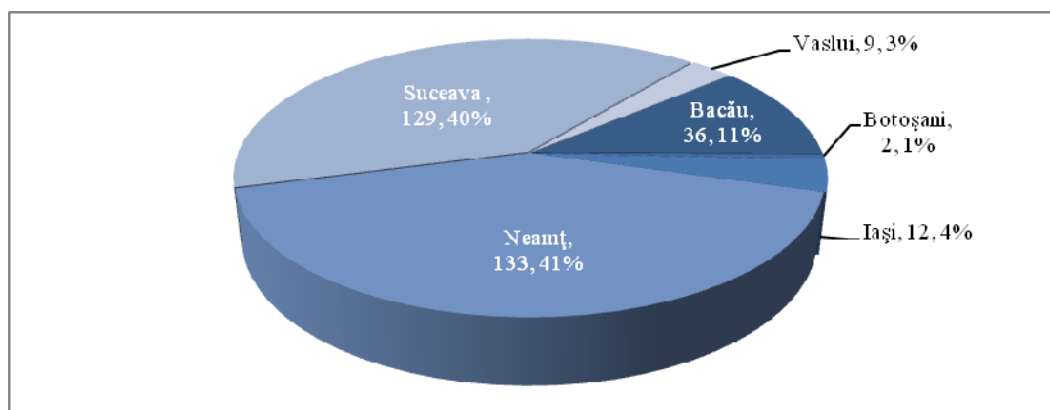


Fig. 5. Share of agrotouristic boarding houses in the North East – 2015

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from

<https://statistici.inse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101C>

In the period 2005-2015, tourist accommodation structures experienced an increasing trend from 42 in 2005 to 133 in 2015, as it can be seen in the following figure. This increase in the number of agrotouristic boarding houses is due to the increasing number of tourists opting for lodging accommodations in these specific „hospitality industry” smaller, cheaper prices and located in predominantly rural. (Stanciu, 2007pp. 50)

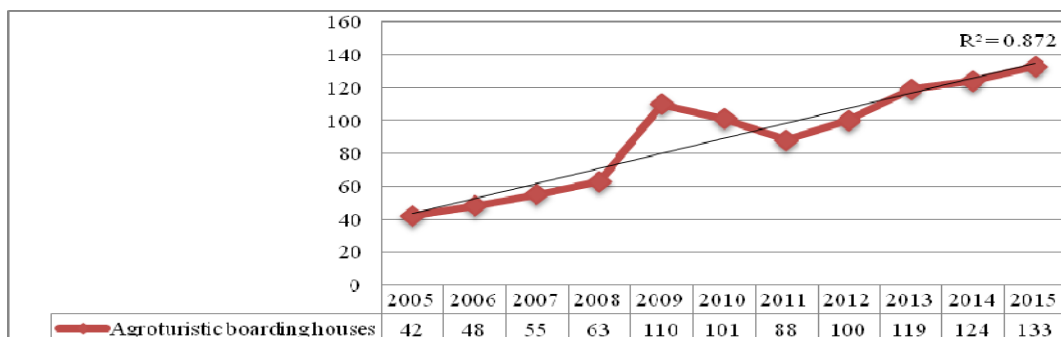


Fig. 6. Evolution of agrotouristic boarding houses in Neamt County, in the period 2005-2015 (number of units)

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101A>

One can appreciate that, in the county of Neamt, most villages present real opportunities and activities related to animal production and processing of agricultural products, as well as an area of great insight into the rural economy able to absorb significant resources, manpower, and namely agro-tourism, given the untapped tourism potential or insufficiently.

Regarding the existing accommodation capacity in 2015, the largest share with 43.9% hold hotels - followed by agrotouristic boarding houses (36.9%), a result of affordability (prices lower) and rural tourism development. The high percentage of hotels can be explained by the fact that these units have a complex profile, a higher level of comfort and provide a wider range of services of quality.

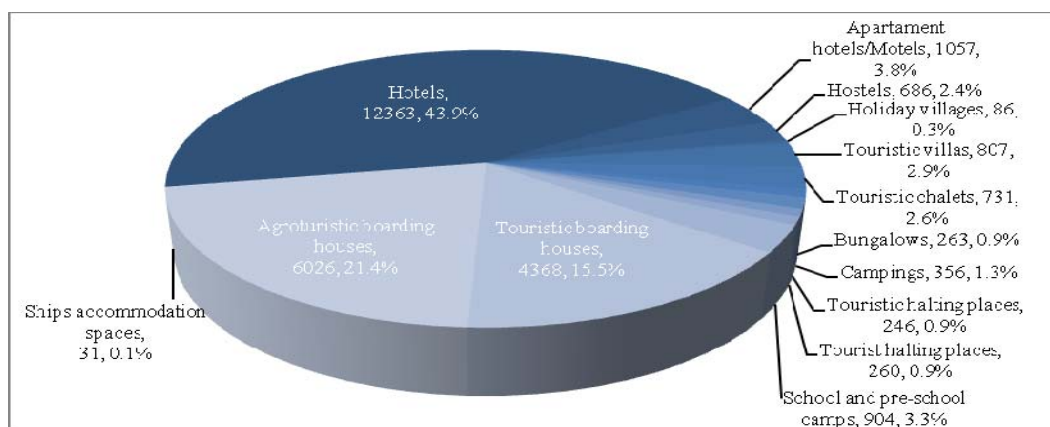


Fig. 7. The share of accommodation in the region of North-East - 2014

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101A>

Analyzing the existing accommodation capacity at county it can be seen that Suceava (36%), Neamt (24.9%) are the strong points of development for the region in terms of this indicator. Close behind are Bacau (16.8%) and Iasi (15.2%).

Table 3. Accommodation capacity in North East - 2014 (number of seats)

Development region/Accommodation	North-East	Bacău	Botoșani	Iași	Neamț	Suceava	Vaslui
Hotels	12363	2048	700	2946	2035	4193	441
Apartament hotels/Motels	1057	388	0	138	217	292	22
Hostels	686	44	52	90	206	237	57
Holiday villages	86	0	0	0	0	86	0
Touristic villas	807	256	0	114	147	290	0

Table 3 (cont.)

Touristic chalets	731	16	0	27	391	284	13
Bungalows	263	16	0	24	119	104	0
Campings	356	0	0	18	92	246	0
Touristic halting places	246	0	0	16	106	124	0
Tourist halting places	260	46	0	0	204	10	0
School and pre-school camps	904	268	130	116	340	0	50
Touristic boarding houses	4368	1089	176	572	680	1725	126
Agrotouristic boarding	6026	564	42	215	2447	2552	206
Ships accommodation spaces	31	0	0	0	31	0	0
Totals	28.184	4735	1100	4276	7015	10143	915

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from

<https://statistici.inse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR102D>

The growth of the number of accommodations in agrotouristic boarding houses during the period 2005 to 2015 recorded in 2016 379% maximum (2,447 places) compared to 2005 when it was recorded the lowest for the period under review (645 seats). In the period 2005-2015, in the Neamt County, tourism capacity in agrotouristic boarding houses recorded annually an average of 1,519.81 seats, an average positive gain of 1,607.30 places, which represents an annual relatively progress of 14%.

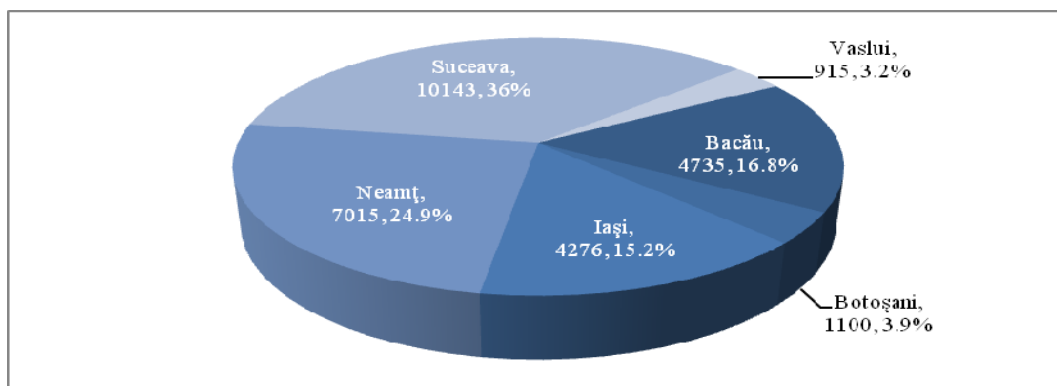


Fig. 8. Share of accommodations counties in North East - 2014 (number of seats)

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from

<https://statistici.inse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR102D>

In conclusion, the supply of accommodation available in Neamt County should be more diversified, additional investment in the field based on a strategy developed at the regional level must be made. The tourist offer must be designed to meet the tourist demand as well on the market.

Analysis of tourist traffic in Neamt County

Evolution of the number of tourists arriving in the rural county of Neamt in the period 2005-2015, is the result of the application of theoretical converted into effective demand, on the one hand due to the meet of motivations practice rural tourism, and the other part as a response to quality supply of this type of tourism.

During 2005-2015, arrivals of tourists in Neamt County ranged between 117,344, in 2005 to 130,971 in 2010 and to 182,384 in 2015. The following figure illustrates the situation of tourist arrivals in Neamt County in 2005-2015.

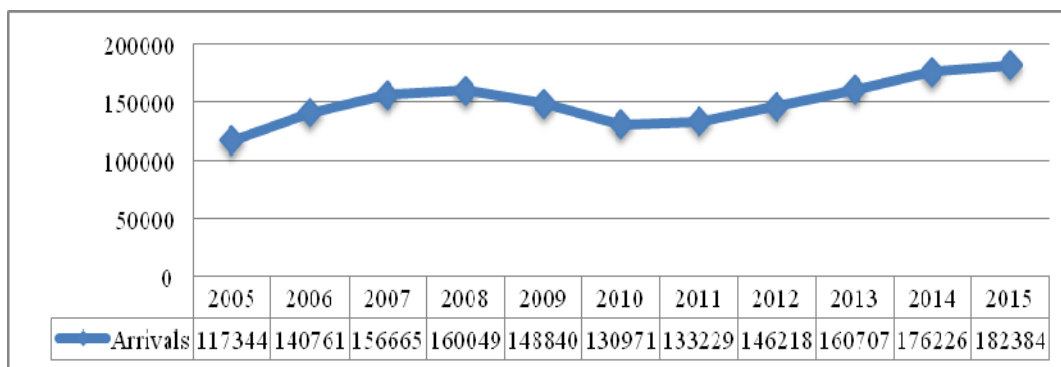


Fig. 9. The evolution of arrivals in Neamț County, in the period 2005-2015

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.inssse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101C>

Noteworthy is the peak reached in 2015 when they recorded 182,384 tourist arrivals, which is an extra of 65,040 tourists compared to 2005. In terms of the number of tourist arrivals, it can be seen that period, it almost halved (from 23,841 foreign tourists in 2005, only 12,391 in 2015). Significant is the increasing number of internal tourists who visited Neamț County. If in 2005 were recorded 93,503 arrivals of Romanian tourists their number peaked 10 years later, when official statistics recorded a total of 169,993 arrivals. Following the analysis showed that for the period under observation, the number of foreign tourists who visited the Neamț County is still a small one compared with that of domestic tourists. In 2015, foreign tourists represented only 6.79% of the total arrivals, remaining 93.21% were Romanian tourists. (Figure 10).

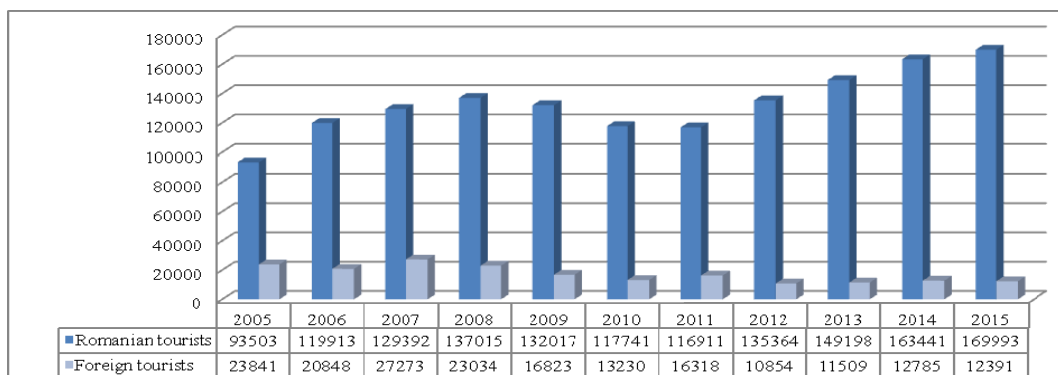


Fig. 10. Evolution arrivals in Neamț County, in the period 2005-2015

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.inssse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101C>

We note that in recent years Neamț County is highlighted as one of the main regions of Romania rural tourism, this being reinforced by the growing number of tourists accommodated here with over 401%. It should also be praised the growing number of foreign tourists has doubled in the period analysed 2005-2015. (Figure 11).

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.inse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101C>

The dynamics of agrotouristic boarding houses overnight stays during the period 2004-2015 recorded in 2015 is of a maximum of 669% compared to 2004 when it was recorded the lowest percent for the period. During 2004-2015, in Romania, the agrotouristic boarding houses overnight stays registered an annual average of 54,993.33 overnight stays, an increase of 6,484.64 positive environment overnight stays, which represents a 19% relative yearly progress.

In the period 2004-2015 the number of overnight stays in agrotouristic boarding houses, in the county Neamt, ranged between 12.531 in 2004, 63.231 in 2010 and 83.862 in 2015. The chart above illustrates the situation during overnight stays in agrotouristic boarding houses 2004-2015. Noteworthy is the peak reached in 2015 when there were 83.862 overnight stays, which represents a plus of 71.331 overnight stays compared to 2004. For the period covered under observation indicator of overnight stays of foreign tourists indicator increased by 199.86%, from 739 nights spent by foreign tourists in 2004 to 2,216 in 2014 (Figure 12).

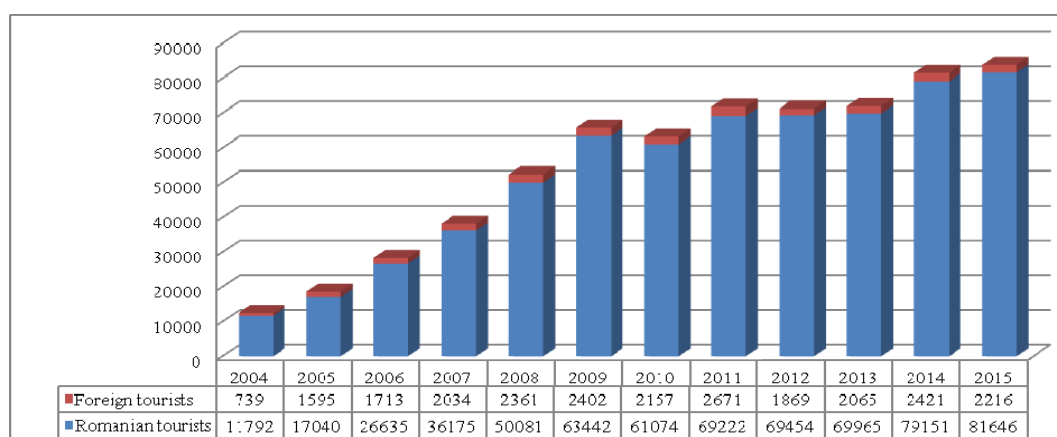


Fig. 12. Evolution of overnight stays in agrotouristic boarding houses in Neamt County, in the period 2004-2015

Source: Own calculations based on data retrieved from <https://statistici.inse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101C>

Being aware of the results of the analysed area is of a great importance in order to increase the number of Romanian tourists who spent the night in agrotouristic boarding houses in Neamt County. If in 2004 were recorded 11,792 overnight stays of Romanian tourists their number peaked 11 years later, when official statistics recorded a total of 81,646 overnight stays. As at national level, the number of foreign tourists who choose to stay overnight in accommodation specific rural area is very small compared to that of domestic tourists (foreign tourists accounting for the county of Neamt only 2.64% of all overnight stays in rural areas, the remaining 97.36% were Romanian tourists).

Conclusions

Analysing agro tourism in the county of Neamt, the following representative elements can be drawn:

- Agro-tourism in Neamt county has a high potential growth due to cultural heritage and natural attractions, partly capitalized in the communes: Agapia, Alexandru cel Bun, Ceahlău, Pângărați, Poiana Teiului.
- Realistic analysis of the agro-tourism offer in Neamt County, led to the conclusion that rural heritage is insufficiently exploited tourism and agro-tourism product is crystallizing.

- Number of foreign tourists who visited Neamt County has not increased significantly. In my opinion, this is mainly due to the poor quality of services and insufficient promotion of agro tourism. Because Romanian agro tourism in general and in particular to the Neamt County can substantial progress is urgently needed to improve those aspects.
- Neamt County owns 41.4% of agrotouristic boarding houses of the North-East and 6.9% of Romania's agrotouristic boarding houses.
- Although it has a remarkable potential for tourism, the county is positioned in the lower half of the national ranking counties in the tourist intensity.
- A major problem is the seasonality of rural tourism extremely unbalanced. This feature is checked, unfortunately at the Neamt County where we find that attending tourism takes place in summer and in autumn, spring and winter we deal with an off-season attendance very low in some rural locations close to even zero.
- Following the analysis, it can be said that the offer of accommodation available for Neamt County should be diversified by investing in the field. These investments should be developed taking into account the existing tourism demand in local and regional profile. Another aspect to be highlighted when developing strategies at central level are to reduce the negative effects of seasonality on deals.
- In conclusion, an opportunity for rural tourism in Neamt County is the development of clusters including tourism activity developed alongside economic sectors where there are components (textiles, agriculture, etc.) to help develop locally integrated and innovative tourism products (culinary tourism products, tourism linked to fashion, adventure tourism). In my opinion, agro-tourism must assess more rigorously the chances of recovery and at the same time, once again become one of the key industries of Romanian rural economy. By developing rural tourism could take a number of positive effects on the local rural community, such as: creating new jobs, faster integration of rural communities as well as increase in household incomes in rural areas.

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