

RURAL TOURISM IN SUCEAVA COUNTY BETWEEN 1996-2010: EVOLUTION OF ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY AND TOURISTIC FLOW

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Abstract

Tourism activity has grown faster and complex in recent decades at global and national levels. Among its forms, rural tourism has been given particular attention in the recent years due to his access to a growing number of tourist arrivals following the framework and specific "climate", particularly where consumers are introduced. Suceava County has an impressive rural tourism potential, with a recovery and uneven development between 1996-2010. Tourism phenomenon is sensitive to many factors (natural, political, financial, population characteristics), such as rural tourism in Suceava. In the case of the indices statistically analyzed in this paper, the number of accommodation units, the number of Romanian and foreign tourists, the processing and analysis was performed using *t* test for independent samples.

Key words: Rural tourism, Development, Statistical analysis, Suceava County.

JEL Classification: Q26, Z10

1. INTRODUCTION

The direction of human society development, more pragmatic and aligned to financial policies, has made many times that, regardless of the individual's financial level, tourism activity is highly sought after as a need of relaxation and mental and physical recovery, but also the need of knowing new places.

Rural tourism can be regarded as an antidote to the city and is addressed to a lower category of participants, tourists are attracted by the countryside blended with ethnographic cultural identity that the village offers (customs, costumes, architecture, celebrations) (Muntele și Iațu, 2006).

Important works on this type of tourism were written by Urry (2002), Glăvan (2003), Hall et al (2005 and 2006), Crouch (2006), Smith (2006), Erdeli (2006), Nistoreanu (2006, 2010), Talabă et al (2008), Cawley (2009), Soare et al (2011), but the issue is still open for new additions and nuances. Defining rural tourism, from John Urry until today, raises many issues, for example, the difference between tourism and recreation, between urban and rural destinations. Most attempts have generated discussion aroused due to the relativity of terms because of major differences between the structure and appearance of rural settlements around the globe, and the different living standards that entail specific expectations of the tourists in regarding accommodation and leisure (Kitchin and Thrift, 2009).

European Community Commission states that rural tourism is a "tourist activity conducted in rural areas, consisting of integrated offer relaxation, pointing to a request whose motivation is contact with

the local environment and networking with local society" (Blanca, 2004). The generality of the definition is probably derived from the many differences in terminology perception between EU countries; the proof is an older definition: "form of tourism practiced in rural areas, based on the providing accommodation, food, entertainment and others in the peasant's household, so capitalizing in the best way the natural and human resources of the area and thereby raising the living standards of rural population" (Stănciulescu et al, 1998). At the national level and Suceava's county area, rural tourism is still in its early stages of development, although it has entered the market as an individual form of tourism for several years. The fact that rural tourism is not fully exploited is due to the damaged and precarious infrastructure, lack of promotion at national and international level and lack of facilities and authorities' support for guesthouses or farms owners (Talabă et al, 2008).

The data used is from Official Statistics Suceava County, using the Touristic Breviary of Suceava County the editions of 1996 (with data since 1995) to the edition of 2011 (with data from 2010). The categories selected for analysis were rural touristic pensions, agritouristic pensions and agritouristic farms, noting that in 2005 and 2009 legislation has undergone some changes in terms of accommodation group: between 2005-2008 the agritouristic pensions were included in the rural guesthouses and in 2009 the rural touristic pensions were reverted to agritouristic pensions. This fact did not influence the present research and the processed evidence.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to find out which is the development of rural tourism structures in the last 15 years statistically speaking. For this we wanted to know:

- (1) If the number of rural tourism structures increased significantly between 1995 to 2010;
- (2) The number of Romanian tourists increased at the same time;
- (3) If the number of foreign tourists increased at the same time; and
- (4) Whether there are differences between the evolution of Romanian tourists than foreign ones.

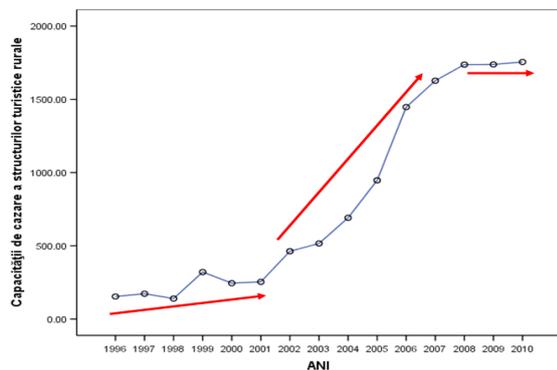


Figure 1 - Evolution of accommodation capacity during 1996 to 2010

To bring an additional argument we considered whether there are statistical differences between the averages of the three periods separated by visual inspection method. Following the Independent Samples T-test test of SPSS we obtained the following results.

When comparing the two periods 1996-2001 and 2002-2007 Levene's test for equal variances analysis of populations from which the two samples come is significant. In this case, $F = 11.986$, $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.006$), which means that we can reject the null hypothesis (we would err in 0.5% of cases if we reject the null hypothesis that states that variances are equal) and therefore we consider that the variances are not equal. The value of t is significant $t(5.207) = -3.636$, $p = 0.014$, which means that we mistake in less than 0.5 of cases if we reject the null hypothesis and we accept the research hypothesis. Therefore, significant differences appear between the accommodation capacity of rural accommodation structures during 1996-1998 compared to the period from 1999 to 2001. Average accommodation capacity in the second period is significantly different (higher) than the first period.

We did the same in the other cases and obtained the following results:

For the comparison of the interval 2002-2007 and 2008-2010 Levene's test is significant, $F = 7.545$, $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.029$), and the value of t is significant, $t(5.009) = -3.976$, $p = 0.011$. Therefore, the average

rural tourism accommodation capacity during 2008-2010 is significantly higher than average accommodation capacity in the past.

To compare averages between 2008-2010 and 1996-2001 Levene's test is significant, $F = 9.077$, $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.020$), and the value of t is significant, $t(5.399) = 52.144$, $p = 0.000$. Therefore, the average rural tourism accommodation capacity during 2008-2010 is significantly higher than average accommodation capacity during 1996-2001. Therefore we can say that the accommodation capacity of Suceava, from 1996 to 2010, has grown significantly.

During the period 2002-2007 the average number of beds in rural tourism structures increased about 4 times compared with the period from 1996 to 2001 (from 2002 to 2007 there were 948 beds compared with 214 during 1996 to 2001).

During 2008-2010 the average number of beds in rural tourism structures increased approximately 2 times compared with the period from 2002 to 2007 (from 2008 to 2010 there were 1743 beds compared with 948 places during 2002 to 2007).

Finally, comparing extremes, between 2008-2010 the average number of beds in rural tourism structures increased approximately 8 times compared with the period from 1996 to 2001 (from 2008 to 2010 there were 1743 beds compared with 214 locations at 1996 to 2001).

On the second research question, if the number of Romanian tourists increased during 1995-2010 we obtained the following graph (Figure 2):

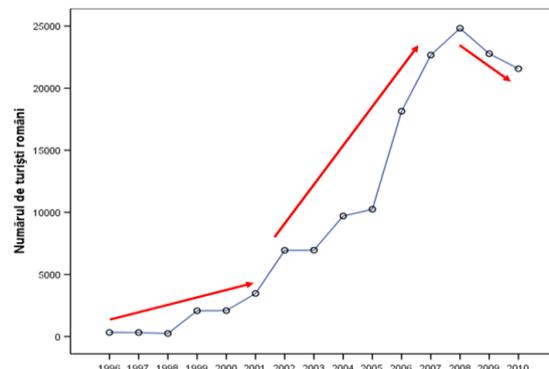


Figure 2 - Number of Romanian tourists in rural tourism establishments in the period from 1996 to 2010

The statistical analysis indicated the following results:

To compare the averages of Romanian tourists in the intervals 1996-2001 and 2002-2007 Levene's test is significant, $F = 12.534$, $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.005$), and the value of t is also significant, $t(5.421) = -4.086$, $p = 0.008$. Therefore, the average of Romanian tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2002-2007 is significantly higher than the average Romanian tourists accommodated in the past.

To compare the averages of Romanian tourists in the intervals 2002-2007 and 2008-2010 Levene's test is significant, $F = 5.697$, $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.048$), and

the value of t is significant, $t(7) = -2.708$, $p = 0.030$. Therefore, the average of Romanian tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2008-2010 is significantly higher than the average Romanian tourists stay in the past.

To compare the averages of Romanian tourists in the intervals 2008-2010 and 1996-2001 Levene's test is not significant, $F = 0.018$, $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.897$), and the value of t is significant, $t(7) = -21.454$, $p = 0.000$. Therefore, the average of Romanian tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2008-2010 is significantly higher than the average of Romanian tourists accommodated during 1996-2001. During the period 2002-2007 the average number of tourists accommodated in Romanian rural tourism has increased about 9 times compared with the period from 1996 to 2001 (from 2002 to 2007 were 12,444 Romanian tourists accommodated during 1420 compared with 1996 to 2001).

During 2008-2010 the average number of tourists accommodated in Romanian rural tourism increased approximately 2 times compared with the period from 2002 to 2007 (from 2008 to 2010 there were 23,053 Romanian tourists accommodated compared with 12,444 Romanian tourists in 2002-2007).

Finally, comparing extremes, between 2008-2010 the average number of tourists accommodated in Romanian rural tourism has grown about 16 times compared with the period from 1996 to 2001 (from 2008 to 2010 were 23,053 Romanian tourists accommodated compared with 1420 tourists in the period 1996 to 2001)

On the third research question, if the number of foreign tourists increased during 1995-2010 we obtained the following graph (Figure 3):

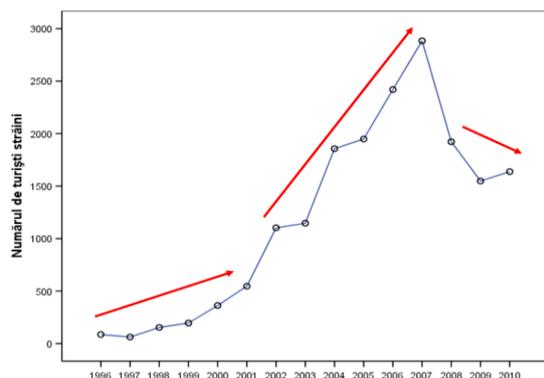


Figure 3 - Number of foreign tourists in rural tourism establishments in the period from 1996 to 2010

As a result of statistical analysis we obtained the following results:

To compare the averages of foreign tourists in the intervals 1996-2001 and 2002-2007 Levene's test is significant, $F = 5.097$, $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.048$), and the value of t is significant, $t(5.705) = -5.614$, $p = 0.002$.

Therefore, the average of foreign tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2002-2007 is significantly higher than the average foreign tourist accommodated in the past.

To compare the averages of foreign tourists in the intervals 2002-2007 and 2008-2010 Levene's test is not significant, $F = 2.476$, $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.160$), and the value of t is not significant, $t(7) = 0.448$, $p = 0.668$. Therefore, the average of foreign tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2008-2010 is not significantly higher than the average foreign tourist accommodated in the past.

To compare the averages of foreign tourists in the intervals 2008-2010 and 1996-2001 Levene's test is not significant, $F = 0.000$, $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.997$), and the value of t is significant, $t(7) = 10.996$, $p = 0.000$. Therefore, the average foreign tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2008-2010 is significantly higher than the average of foreign tourists accommodated in the period 1996-2001.

During the period 2002-2007 the average number of foreign tourists accommodated in rural tourism increased approximately 8 times compared with the period from 1996 to 2001 (from 2002 to 2007 there were 1893 foreign tourists accommodated compared with 235 during 1996 to 2001).

During 2008-2010 the average number of foreign tourists accommodated in rural tourism declined slightly compared to the period 2002-2007 (from 2008 to 2010 there were 1703 foreign tourist accommodated compared with 1893 foreign tourists accommodated during 2002 to 2007). This is explained by the fact that the average of foreign tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2002-2007 was obtained from a constant increase of foreign tourists from 1103 to 2884 and the average of foreign tourists accommodated in rural areas during 2008 to 2010 was obtained following a numerical decrease from 1923 to 1638. In other words, what was gained in the number of foreign tourists, during the increasing period between 2002 and 2007, was lost in a shorter period of time between 2008 and 2010.

Finally, comparing extremes, between 2008-2010 the average number of foreign tourists accommodated in rural tourism increased about 7 times compared with the period from 1996 to 2001 (from 2008 to 2010 there were 1703 foreign tourists compared with 235 foreign tourists accommodated in the period 1996 to 2001).

To check if there are significant differences between the average number of Romanian and foreign tourists in each of the three periods, and to make the comparison, we converted raw scores to standardized z scores. Then we applied the Independent Samples T -test in SPSS. The results are:

During 1996-2001, comparing the average number of Romanian tourists versus foreign tourists accommodated in rural tourism in Suceava we obtained: $F(0.05) = 0.434$ and $t(10) = 0.972$, $p = 0.354 > 0.663$. This means that there are no

significant differences between the average Z scores of the Romanian number of tourists accommodated in rural tourism in Suceava compared with the average Z scores of foreign number of tourists accommodated in the period 1996-2001.

For the period 2002-2007, comparing the average number of Romanian tourists versus foreign tourists accommodated in rural tourism in Suceava we obtained $F = 0.05$ ($p = 0.992$) and $t(10) = -1.224$, $p = 0.249$. This means that there are no significant differences between the average Z scores of the Romanian number of tourists accommodated in rural tourism in Suceava compared with the average Z scores of foreign number of tourists accommodated in the period 2002 to 2007.

For the period 1996-2001 and 2002-2007, these latest results are a proof of the fact that fluctuations in the number of Romanian tourists versus the number of foreigners is following an approximate symmetry, which can be confirmed by visual inspection of comparative graphs (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

For the period 2008-2010, for comparing the average number of Romanian tourists versus foreign tourists accommodated in rural tourism in Suceava we obtained: $F = 0.217$, $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.666$), and $t(4) = 5.226$, $p = 0.006$. This means that there are significant differences between the average z scores of the Romanian number of tourists accommodated in rural tourism in Suceava compared with the average Z scores of foreign number of tourists accommodated in the period 2008 to 2010. In the latter case there are significant differences between the averages of the two standardized groups, which indicates that the decreasing number of foreign tourists is significantly greater than the decrease in the number of Romanian tourists, indicated also in graphics. Also, the visual inspection of graphs suggests that the downward trend in the number of tourists was first evident in the foreign tourists in 2007, and in 2008 for the Romanians, somehow suggesting that the downturn started abroad and foreign tourists were the first to have quit attending rural tourist areas, while the Romanians did the same but later.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the results indicate that the ability of rural tourist accommodation structures increased significantly between periods visually defined as follows: between 1996-2001 and 2002-2007 by four times between 2002 to 2007 and from 2008 to 2010 by 2 times, and between 2008-2010 and 1996-2001 by 8 times. These intervals were determined visually, the cutting point was marked between 2001 and 2002, and the next one between 2007 and 2008 marking the start of the economic crisis. On the one hand, the average Romanian tourists were accommodated in rural tourism in the three periods was significantly higher each time. Between 1996-2001 and 2002-2007 average of tourists increased 9 times between 2002 to 2007 and from 2008 to 2010 by 2 times, and from 2008 to 2010 and from 1996 to 2001 16 times. On the other hand, the average number of foreign tourists accommodated in rural tourism has increased significantly between 1996-2001 and 2002-2007, increasing to 8 times. Between 2002-2007 and 2008-2010 there was not a significant increase, the averages being statistically equal. This means that what was won by 2007, before the crisis, was lost after this year. Finally, the comparison between the number of Romanian and foreign tourists showed that the number of foreign tourists decreased significantly from Romanian tourists in the same period, namely between 2008 to 2010. On the other hand, the number of Romanian and foreign tourists was approximately symmetrical between 1996 and 2007. But with the start of the crisis, the first ones who did not accommodate in the rural tourism structures were the foreign tourists, which occurred sometimes in 2007. And this, probably because the economic crisis was felt first in Europe, affecting, therefore, as is logical, primarily the foreign tourists. Romanian tourists have begun to occupy a smaller number of rural tourism structures around 2008, therefore later. We can speculate saying, that we felt crisis later. It remains to be investigated whether the same thing happened to the other tourist structures and if the phenomenon has a national spread. At first glance, at least by 2008 the situation appears relatively similar at the level of national tourism (Ilieş et al, 2011).

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