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Rural Tourism Pressure Evolutions in Center Region of Romania

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Abstract

In recent years, agro-touristic boarding houses have occupied an increasing interest in preferences of tourists. This is a positive factor with direct implications on the development of local communities, on the one hand, by increasing income, and on the other by increasing the employment rate. Taking into account these aspects, the paper presents and analyzes the characteristics of the tourist flows in the agro-tourist boarding houses in the counties of the Centre development region, using a relative indicator determined like the ratio of the tourists' overnight stays in the agro tourist boarding houses to the number of the rural population in each county, between January 2010 and January 2018. The conclusions highlight both the increase of the phenomenon of seasonality and the accentuation of the discrepancies between the six counties of the Centre region regarding the valorization of the natural and entropic tourism potential of the rural communities in the this counties.

Keywords:

Tourist flows, rural tourism pressure, seasonality, overnight stays.

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1. Introduction

One of the social aspects of tourist traffic is the tourist pressure on which it is important to focus our attention, because it plays an essential role in the balance between tourism activities and sustainable development. Ensuring such a balance is achieved under the conditions of a deep interaction between environmental protection, socio-economic development and satisfaction of tourists' needs.

Our research highlights in the first part the evolutions of the rural tourism pressure in the counties of the Center region of Romania, and in the second part, the emphasis is on studying the characteristics of trends, seasonal and irregular components of the rural tourism pressure in the counties of the Center region, the analyzed period was January 2010 - January 2018. The Center Development Region, which is the subject of the analysis, comprises the central area of Transylvania with eight counties: Alba, Braşov, Covasna, Harghita, Mureş and Sibiu.

Following the results obtained in the conclusions section, we have formulated a few directions of action for sustainable tourism development.

2. Problem Statement

In most counties in Romania rural areas both through natural heritage and the Preservation of traditions, habits, rural culture constitutes attractions provided to be promoted, the quality and effectiveness of communication [6], with a particularly important role, along with related infrastructure. The intensity of tourist flows in rural areas, their constancy, has important implications regarding the economic and social-political life of the Romanian village [2].

Also, in the context of a competitive and convergent management of local communities' interests, rural tourism is an important form of sustainable tourism where agro-tourism is an important segment that contributes to meeting the needs of tourists with activities and products made in their households [7].

Unfortunately, due to the lack of strategy for this form of tourism, many discontinuities have been registered, especially in the post-1989 period until the accession of Romania to the European Union [13], placing Romania long after the majority European countries. It should be stressed in this respect that in 2017 Romania ranks last in the EU in terms of innovation [5], being with Bulgaria in the group of countries with modest

results in this respect, and 25th in the European Union from the point of view of eco-innovation [4].

A negative phenomenon that affects both tourism in Romania as a whole and rural tourism is the phenomenon of seasonality [12], which gains increasing amplitudes both at the level of Romania and at regional. On the other hand, the regional particularities, the infrastructure and the way in which tourism is considered an opportunity for social and economic development, differentiate both the development regions and the counties in their structure. In this respect, research at regional level [1] highlighted the importance of improving infrastructure and tourism support services in overcoming barriers and increasing efficiency [3].

3. Aims of the research

The main purpose of this research is to identify and measure the rural tourism pressure within the Center Region of Romania and to provide information for decision-makers in the field of tourism to ensure a sustainable tourism.

4. Research Methods

This empirical study represents a statistical analysis of a chronological series and follows the description of the past behavior of the variable called tourism pressure based on past data and the information obtained can be used in predictions on the future evolution of the studied phenomenon. In this sense, the trend was identified, which allowed us to quantify the influence of the factors of seasonality and the irregular component.

Taking into account the different number of communities and rural population to ensure comparability of the obtained performances and the intensity of rural tourism in the eight counties we have chosen as an indicator the rural tourism pressure, calculated as a ratio between the number of overnight stays in the agro-tourism boarding houses in each county in January 2010 - January 2018 [8] (NIS, 2018a) and the population of rural areas in those counties [9] (NIS, 2018b).

The significance threshold used to test the statistical hypothesis on the statistical significance of the models and their parameters was $\alpha = 0.05$ (Confidence level 95%). Data series processing was performed using SPSS.

5. Statistical analysis of tourism pressure from Center Region of Romania

5.1. Evolutions of the rural tourism pressure in the counties of the Centre Region

The study of the mode of manifestation of the rural tourist pressure in the Center region was made on the basis of the monthly data series in 2010-2015 corresponding to the eight counties. An important feature of developments in rural tourism pressure in this development region is the significant seasonal oscillations recorded at the level of each county (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Evolutions of rural tourism pressure in the counties of the Center region during January 2010 January 2018

Taking into account that Braşov County includes areas with a tradition in rural tourism, it corresponds to the most significant monthly evolution of tourist pressure, evidenced by the average monthly increase of 0.95 overnights per 1000 inhabitants in rural areas. Slight increases were recorded in the counties: Sibiu, with a monthly average of 0.44 overnights per 1000 inhabitants in the rural area, respectively Alba and Harghita, with monthly averages of 0.32 and 0.31 overnights per 1000 inhabitants. In the case of the other two counties, Covasna and Mureş, the average monthly increase was quite low.

Compared to 2010, in the year 2017 there were increases of both the tourist pressure and its seasonality (Figure 2). In 2010, the minimum values of the tourist pressure were registered during February-April, as well as in

November, and the maximum values were recorded in August, the month when the county hierarchy according to the number of overnight stays / 1000 inhabitants was: Brasov (106.16) Sibiu (32.02), Alba (23.42), Harghita (15.31), Covasna (10.98) and Mureş (9.04).

Figure 2 Comparative evolutions of the rural tourism pressure in the counties of the Center region in the years 2010 and 2017

In 2017, due to the policies applied at the county level on tourism, there were significant differences. Thus, in August, Braşov county continued to be the first place, with 300.18 overnights/1000 inhabitants, followed by Sibiu (159.19 overnights/1000 inhabitants), Alba (118.20 overnights/1000 inhabitants) and Harghita (98.21 overnight stays)/1000 inhabitants). In the last two places, far behind the other counties were Mureş counties (30.91 overnights/1000 inhabitants) and Covasna (29.23 overnights/1000 inhabitants).

The significantly different evolutions of the Sibiu, Alba and Harghita counties towards the Covasna and Mureş counties are also evidenced by the evolution of the ratio between the number of overnights/1000 inhabitants registered in these counties and the number of overnights/1000 inhabitants registered in Braşov County in August 2010 and August 2017. Thus, while in Sibiu, Alba and Harghita counties there were significant increases (Sibiu from 30.16 to 53.03, Alba from 22.06 to 39.38, Harghita from 14.42, to 38.72) in Mureş County, the increase was insignificant (from 8.52 to 10.30), while in Covasna it decreased from 10.34 to 9.74. This highlights, on the one

hand, a trend of the Sibiu Alba and Harghita counties towards to convergence towards Braşov County, and on the other hand, a negative divergent tendency of the counties of Mureş and Covasna from the point of view of overnights/1000 inhabitants.

Figure 4 The seasonality factors of the rural tourist pressure in the Center region

Developments in rural tourism pressure recorded in the Center region between January 2010 and December 2017 point to a significant seasonal process. At the regional level (Figure 4), the seasonality factors highlight the significant changes in the tourist flow in the agro-tourist boarding houses in the six counties. Compared to the general trend recorded at region level, the average seasonal component developed between -92 overnights/1000 inhabitants in February and 216 overnights/1000 inhabitants. It is worth noting that in December there is a relative maximum relative to the period October - May, due to the increase of the tourist circulation on the winter holidays.

5.2. Characteristics of the rural tourist pressure in the counties of the Center region

The analysis of the components of the evolution of the rural tourist pressure in the counties of the Center region also highlights a number of peculiarities regarding the trend component, whose characteristics are presented in Figure 5 and Table 1, as well as the seasonal component and the irregular component.

In Braşov county, the maximum seasonal component amplitude was registered in 2017 (146.66 overnights/1000 inhabitants), the extreme values

being recorded in March when the number of overnights/1000 inhabitants decreased by 64.41 overnights per 1000 inhabitants, compared to the average trend, such that were recorded 97.16 overnight stays/1000 inhabitants, while the maximum value (94.24 overnights/1000 inhabitants) was recorded in August when the tourist pressure was 300.18 overnights/1000 inhabitants.

In Sibiu, the amplitudes of the seasonal oscillations of the tourist pressure recorded a minimum of -22.36 overnights/1000 inhabitants compared to an average trend of 66.92 overnights/1000 inhabitants, which resulted in an effective number of only 30.13 overnight stays/1000 inhabitants. The maximum value of the number of overnight/1000 inhabitants was recorded in July 2017 (42.13 overnights/1000 inhabitants above the average of 82.39 overnights/1000 inhabitants), which resulted in 159.19 overnights/1000 inhabitants.

Table 1 Characteristics of the trends, seasonal and irregular components of the rural tourism pressure in the counties of the Center region

The amplitudes of the seasonal oscillations of tourist pressure in Alba County registered a minimum of -29.69 overnights/1000 inhabitants compared to an average trend of 53.11 overnights per 1000 inhabitants, so that the effective number was only 24.35 overnights/ 1000 inhabitants. The maximum value of the overnight number/1000 inhabitants was recorded in August 2016 (40.07 overnights/1000 inhabitants above the average 45.49 overnights/1000 inhabitants), which led to 92.10 overnights/1000 inhabitants.

Similar developments have the other ones, the registered minima having values in the range of - 18.07 and 5.03 overnights/1000 inhabitants, and the maximum values fluctuating between 12.72 and 16.0 overnights/1000 inhabitants compared to the average trend.

Figure 5 Evolution of trends in rural tourism pressure in the counties of Centre region during January 2010-January 2018

Evolution of the trends of the rural tourism pressure in the counties of Alba, Brașov, Sibiu, Covasna, Harghita and Mureș have a tendency of

linearity (Table 2). This trend is confirmed by the validity of the models (Sig F between 9.85E-57 and 1.45E-22).

Table 2. Characteristics of the trend components of the rural tourism pressure in the counties of the Center region

County		Alba		Brasov		Sibiu	
R. Square		0.9478		0.9322		0.7826	
Sig.F		1.90E-48		9.85E-57		6.53E-33	
Coeff		13.89	0.44	52.23	1.16	1.93	0.63
t Stat		16.67	28.80	29.53	35.95	1.03	18.40
P-value		8.03E-30	1.97E-48	2.42E-49	9.85E-57	0.3056	6.53E-33
Confidence level 95%	Lower	12.24	0.41	48.72	1.09	-1.79	0.56
	Upper	15.55	0.47	55.74	1.22	5.65	0.69
County		Covasna		Harghita		Mures	
R. Square		0.6399		0.9335		0.8725	
Sig.F		1.45E-22		3.95E-57		4.88E-44	
Coeff		8.24	0.13	0.72	0.44	6.13	0.13
t Stat		14.52	12.92	1.08	36.33	21.88	25.51
P-value		9.56E-26	1.45E-22	0.2818	3.95E-57	1.17E-38	4.88E-44
Confidence level 95%	Lower	7.12	0.11	-0.60	0.41	5.57	0.12
	Upper	9.37	0.15	2.03	0.46	6.68	0.14

Source: own elaboration using SPSS

At the same time, the regression coefficients reveal the trend of linear growth, these being statistically significant. Also, the quality of the regression models is evidenced by the values of the determination coefficients that are higher than 60%.

6. Discussions

In Center Region of Romania, rural tourism has recorded a remarkable growth in the last decade and represents an element of analysis that provides multiple information on fluctuations in tourism pressure.

In this context, the rural tourism pressure was analyzed on the counties of the Center Region, taking into account the phenomenon of seasonality. The rural tourism activity conjuncture led to results that highlighted the existence of high rural tourism pressures in this region.

7. Conclusions

Rural tourism, in the conditions of efficient management, can be an important means of efficient capitalization of resources, a creator and user of national income, a creator of new jobs and stimulating investment. On the other hand, increasing the intensity of tourist flows can lead to issues of protection and, implicitly, environmental quality, which are in close link with economic and human development. As a consequence, the activities undertaken in order to develop tourism and in particular of rural tourism must be included in the context of sustainable development.

At the level of the Center development region, and not only in the conditions of increasing rural tourism pressure, there is a need to implement tourism behavioral education programs, both at county level and especially at the level of rural communities. Simultaneously with the process of expanding and practicing tourism in less accessible territories, it is necessary to implement strategies aimed at solving the problems related to the modernization of the infrastructure.

On the other hand, the aging of the population, the high level of poverty and the isolation of some areas in this region lead to the depopulation process being amplified with negative economic and social effects.

The development of rural tourism, increasing the intensity of tourism flows as well as their efficient use could be stimulated by identifying and implementing methods of promoting, stimulating and supporting agrotourism entrepreneurship [11] in order to increase the efficiency of business in the Romanian rural environment. In this sense, it would be worth studying the initiatives of authorities in other states with similar natural heritage (Scutariu & Nastase & Popescu, 2016) [10] in supporting tourism, training human resources, stimulating entrepreneurship and, last but not least, assisting in accessing financial resources.

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