

**DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES OF RURAL TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN THE ALMAJ VALLEY AREA, CARAS-SEVERIN COUNTY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Rural tourism and agrotourism have an extremely important contribution in rural area's development, not only in financial terms but also in terms of increasing and improving the quality of life of residents from these areas. So, the development of these forms of tourism is required in the rural area, both economically and socially. Known as an important ethnographic area of the country, with traditional elements specific, Almaj Valley through natural and cultural potential available, it stands more and more lately by intensifying rural tourist and ecotourist activity. However, tourist infrastructure is very underdeveloped, to rural communities returning the mission to get more involved in this purpose, having in view, the national and international recognition of the high tourism potential of this area

Romanian area still retains, quite well, the traditional, cultural, ethnographic and folklore valences specific to rural areas, providing favorable conditions for development of rural tourism and agrotourism. Romanian villages have a rich tourist potential, having diversified tourist resources: traditions, customs and folk values, cultural monuments, historical and art and an unpolluted natural environment with a rich natural tourism potential.

Almajului Depression known as well as the Almaj Country, Almajului Valley or Bozovici Depression is situated in the South-East side of Banat Mountains, in the south of Caras-Severin county, near the Parallel 45°, being an intramountainous depression, of ellipsoidal form of NE-SW orientation, belonging to Nera basin.

**Keywords:** agrotourism, agri-tourist boarding houses, rural area

**INTRODUCTION**

The region is composed of 15 villages organized in compact settlements at the contact between mountainous area and a depression with a population of about 16,000 inhabitants of Romanian origin. From west to east the following major settlements are found: Borlovenii Noi (village known as Breazova), Borlovenii Vechi, Pataș, Prigor, Putna Prilipet, Eftimie Murgu or Rudaria, Bania, Bozovici, Garbovat, Lapușnicul Mare, Dalboșet, Mocerîș and Șopotu Nou. The entire region is polarized from economic point of view by Bozovici village and from tourist point of view by Eftimie Murgu village. There must be mentioned as well Ravenska village belonging to commune of Șopotu Nou which differs by Czech ethnic population, called by locals as "pemi".

In terms of tourism, Almajului Valley is integrated part of tourist area Caraș-Anina, one of the areas with the highest potential in the Banat Mountains, forming a sub-area with unique characteristic: "Almajului Depression - Minis Gorges" which harmoniously blends two types of tourist attractions: those of ethno-folkloric nature from Almajului area and natural and anthropogenic resources of Minis Gorges area giving the whole region a great cultural and landscape value (DOLANGA, 2000).

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

In this study we used as research methods induction and deduction and comparative analysis. For the analysis we consulted Statistical Yearbooks of I.N.S and Travel Yearbooks.

## RESULTS

One of the essential conditions for the appearance, development and practice of tourism is the existence of a suitable material base consisting of accommodation units, public catering, recreation facilities and treatment for resorts, equipments to provide practicing certain activities with tourism purposes. To all these there are added means of transport and communication ways which have the role to ensure easy access in areas with tourist facilities and objectives. All these form the tourism infrastructure through which the attractive resources of a given territory are exploited in terms of tourism (IANCU, 2014).

In rural tourism areas the accommodation base comprises especially rural boarding houses and agri-tourist boarding houses that often work within peasant households where the tourist, besides accommodation has the opportunity to participate alongside local population at different agricultural activities. Sorted by the number of daisies, rural tourist boarding houses have on one hand the purpose to remove out of isolation some of these activities, to bring financial benefits by providing additional incomes, but as well the one that meets the tourists needs to spend their stay in terms of a disconnected atmosphere and at a more accessible price (RUSU, 2007).

In what concerns the bases of public catering and leisure these are also deficient being resumed only at village shops that can not provide a diversified food and long lasting and at one single restaurant and one cafeteria, both located in Bozovici village and respectively at bars and discos in the village as a means of recreation.

The agritourism offer consists of the whole attractions that may cause visiting certain areas by tourists, as well of network capacity (technical base, infrastructure) to meet, under certain conditions, population's demand (CIOLAC, 2016).

In other words, agritourism offer includes the totality of natural resources (landscapes, climate, vegetation, fauna) and cultural- historical (historical monuments, architecture, museums, memorial houses, elements of ethnography, folklore, folk art, etc.) together with the material basis able to exploit them through agritourism programs.

The tourism resources include the whole of tourism attractions, natural and anthropogenic from an area, region or country. These are generating different forms of tourism being considered constitutive factors of the tourism product (POPESCU, 2016).

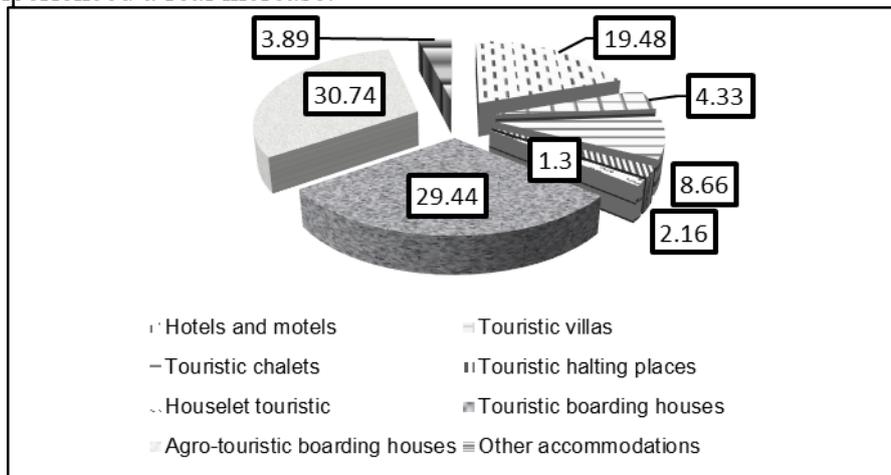
The material base of rural tourism consists of the totality of peasant households equipped to receive tourists, attested in this direction and connected to certain form of organization.

The peasant household represents the cell of human settlement of village type. Functionally, it consists of an agro-economic micro platform consisting of the house itself, the auxiliary spaces (summer kitchen, warehouses, etc.) and of household annexes (stables, hay barn, cages) (IANCU, 2014).

The structure of accommodation establishments by category, in the county of Caras-Severin, in the year 2015 is showed as follows, Figure 1.

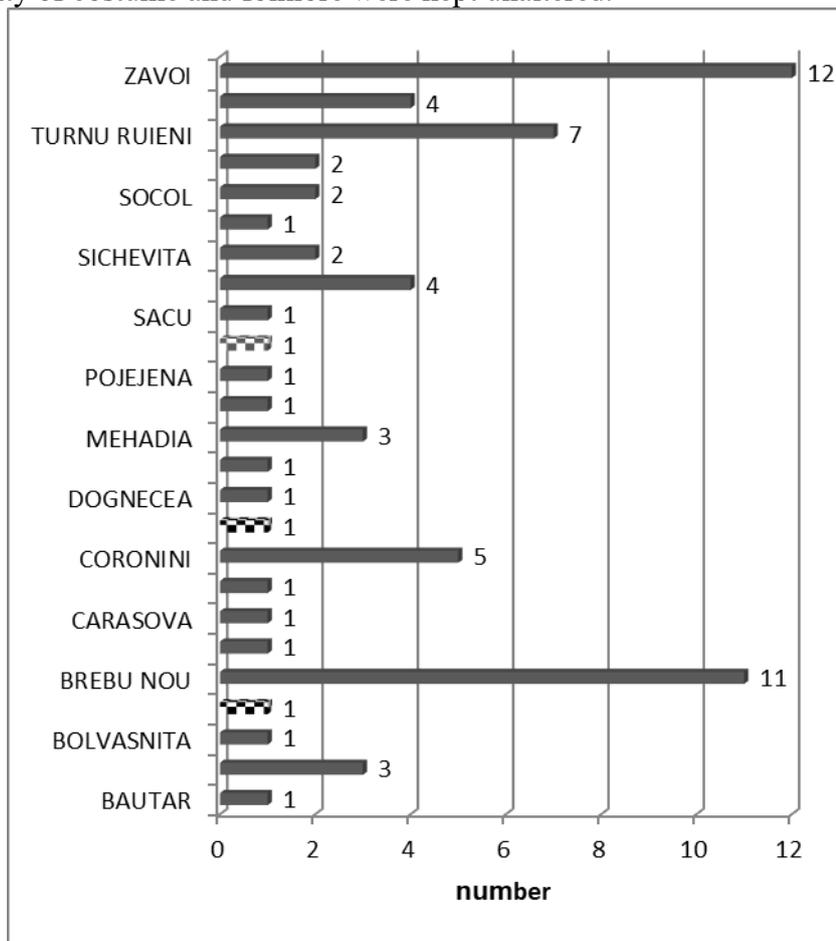
Agri-tourist boarding houses represent the main accommodation unit in the county of Caras-Severin, with a share of 30.74%, followed by tourist boarding houses with 29.44%. The high percentage of these accommodation structures is due to the fact that, Caras-

Severin county has a high tourist potential, and in recent years the tourism activity in this area has experienced a real increase.



**Figure 1. Structure of material and technical base of accommodation by categories of tourist accommodation establishments, Caras-Severin, 2015**

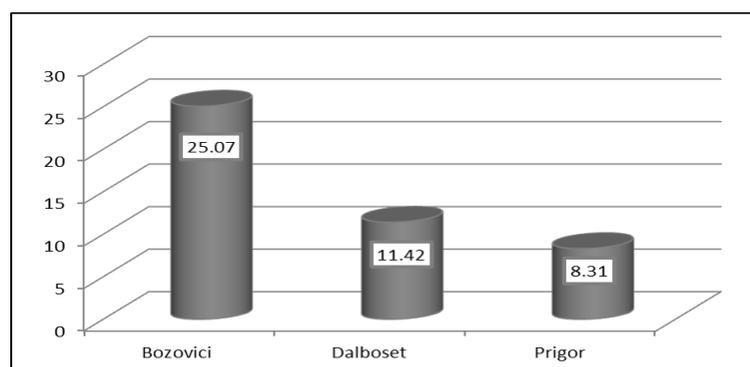
Travel enthusiasts in the middle of rural traditions can spend unique moments in the traditional rural landscape from Banat, in an unpolluted environment, where the richness and originality of costume and folklore were kept unaltered.



**Figure 2. Distribution of agri-tourist boarding houses on the county localities, 2015**

From the point of view of areas attractiveness, opportunities to practice agritourism in the county exist in all tourist areas, unfortunately the infrastructure is not sufficiently developed to expand this type of tourism.

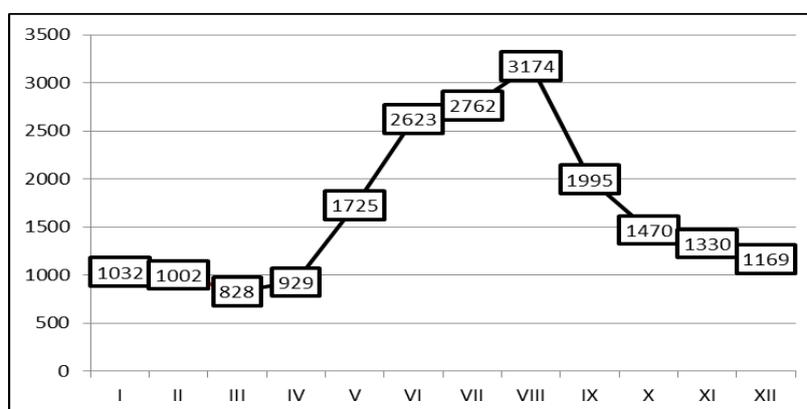
In Caras-Severin county, the practiced tourism in rural areas knows a quite intense activity. Currently, though Caras-Severin county has on its whole a significant number of agri-tourist boarding houses - 71 boarding houses in the year 2015, Almajului Valley, has a small number of agritourism units, only three, one for each locality: Bozovici, Dalboșet and Prigor. Despite its extraordinary natural and anthropogenic potential this issue is considered as one of the most important factors hindering the introduction of this region into a tourism circuit well organized to enable the best exploitation of all its resources, namely the almost complete lack of approved accommodation units (WWW.INSSE.RO, 2016).



**Figure 3. The capacity utilization index of tourist accommodation in service, agri-tourist boarding houses, Almajului Valley, 2015**

As regards the capacity utilization degree in operation, in the case of agri-tourist boarding houses from Almajului Valley there can be noticed, that the highest value is recorded in Bozovici locality, 25.07%, exceeding even the county average for this type of accommodation structures - 22.6% and the lowest value of this indicator is recorded in the Prigor locality - 8.31% (WWW.INSSE.RO, 2016).

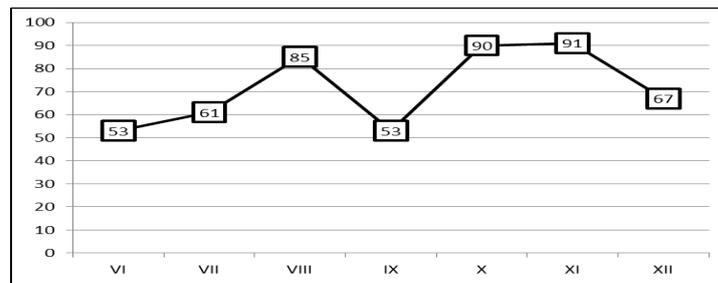
The tourists accommodated in the existing agri-tourist boarding houses, in the year 2015, at county level accounted for 11.88% of total tourists, 91.88% being Romanian tourists and 8.12% foreign tourists. Between the period 2000-2015 the number of tourists arriving in agri-tourist boarding houses increased by 54.67 times.



**Figure 4. The structure of tourist arrivals in agri-tourist boarding houses by months, Caras-Severin county, 2015**

The number of tourists arriving in agri-tourist boarding houses has increased during the period 2005-2015 by 15.58 times. The number of tourists accommodated in existing tourist boarding houses at the level of Almaj Valley area is very low, only 3.84%, compared to the potential of the region and to tourist arrivals frequency in the area. This is due to the fact that within the studied area the accommodation infrastructure is underdeveloped.

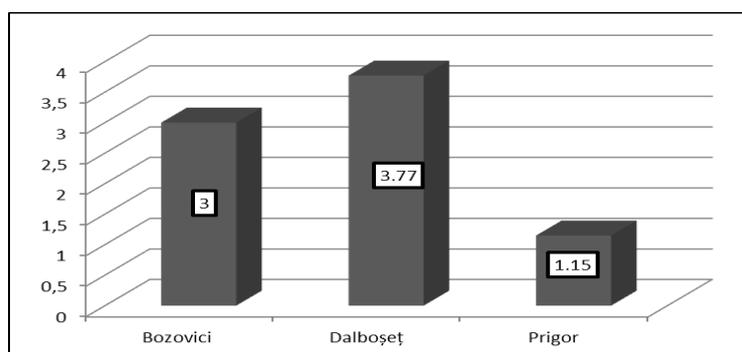
As regards the distribution of tourist arrivals in agri-tourist boarding houses in Caras-Severin county there can be seen a concentration of these in summer months from June to August. The maximum value, 3174 tourists was recorded in month of August, and the minimum one in month of March - 828 tourists (WWW.INSSE.RO, 2016).



**Figure 5. The structure of tourist arrivals in agri-tourist boarding houses by months, Bozovici locality, 2015**

The analysis of tourist arrivals in agri-tourist boarding houses from Bozovici locality indicates that these are concentrated in the second half of the year, between the months of June and December. It was also observed that in August and October-November there are recorded the highest values of this indicator.

The lack of adequate and approved accommodation units included in the database of specialized bodies adds as well the issue of the impossibility of precise determination of tourist flows, thus making impossible to establish an accurate estimation of tourist traffic. For Almajului Valley unfortunately, there is no data regarding tourist flows, number, frequency and their origin can not be determined with precision, nor their favorite season for practicing tourism, there can only assume that it is more intense in summer season when weather conditions allow the installation of tents in areas like Rudariei Gorges. Precisely for this reason the practiced tourism in this area is often ranged in itinerant tourism classification and of the weekend one.



**Figure 6. Average length of stay in agri-tourist boarding houses, Almajului Valley, 2015**

In the year of 2015, the average length of stay has recorded in the Almajului Valley a value of 2.64 days/ tourist, classifying below the county average value, in agri-tourist boarding houses, 3.16 days/ tourist. The highest value of this indicator was recorded in the

locality Dalboșet, exceeding the county average, 3.77 days/ tourist and the lowest value in the locality Prigor, of only 1.15 days/ tourists (WWW.INSSE.RO,2016).

Following the analysis performed, it is necessary that agritourism in Caras- Severin county and especially within Almaj Valley to quickly assess its chances of launching and to become one of the key branches of the county economy. Through this it would achieve a number of remarkable positive effects, notably: the creation of new jobs, the geographically transfer in terms of resources, layout and land use, equilibrating the balance of payments, a faster integration through Romania tourism within European Union. There must also taking in consideration the fact that agritourism has a greater impact than other activity at the development of other industries too. It is necessary to perform a brief analysis to determine the main priorities for the development of rural tourism and agritourism in our county, especially since it faces profound changes in recent years imposed by the transition process to market economy.

## CONCLUSIONS

A strength of the region is represented by the anthropogenic heritage of ethno-folkloric nature, very rich and preserved in large part as well due to isolated position of villages in the Almajului depression. This heritage consists of a series of buildings such churches, monasteries, houses built in traditional style, but its uniqueness lies primarily in immaterial dowry consisting of customs and traditions specific to Romanian village, as well as of historical past who put the footprint especially over the spiritual dowry by all personalities who have given.

By analyzing all these aspects of tourism at Almajului Valley level, along with the proposals and developing opportunities at local level, county and regional level, there is observed primarily the low level of tourism activity supporting initiatives and concrete measures taken in this regard. Therefore it requires as fundamental measure the need to consider tourism as an activity that can contribute to both economic revitalization of the area by the additional revenues that it generates, as well to preserve the traditional specific of the area by tourist valorification of ethno-folkloric elements of popular costumes, customs manifestations of popular character specific activities and crafts.

These initiatives must start locally by involving public authorities in taking measures and designing financing projects, attracting investors and funds aimed at supporting and implementing these projects and informing local people of the benefits that rural tourism can bring. It is necessary also the ongoing collaboration across the three levels: local, county, regional, given the importance it has today the overall development strategy at the level of regions and areas.

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