

STUDY ON THE QUALITY OF THE AGRITOURISM ACTIVITY PRACTICED IN A PENSION IN RÂNCA-GORJ

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Abstract

In the study carried out by the research team, the first part presents the analysis of the conditions of settlement and accessibility in the area and of the main natural and anthropogenic agrotourism resources in the Rânca-Gorj area, which contribute decisively to attracting tourists to the resort. From the analysis carried out it was found that it has a rich natural and anthropic tourist potential that is not capitalized at a maximum level, because during the off-season, i.e., the warm period, the flow of tourists from the area is much lower than during the period conducive to the practice winter sports. This aspect emerges very clearly from the analysis of the data entered in tables 1-8 and figure 1, where a considerable reduction in the number of tourists and overnight stays, as well as the occupancy rate of the boarding house under study, can be observed during this period. Also, from the analysis of the data in these tables, it was concluded that efficient and modern management is practiced at the guesthouse, which has led to the preservation of a high level of quality of services offered to tourists, even during the difficult period of the pandemic.

Key words: agrotourism, boarding house, tourist potential

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Settlement and position in the territory

The Rânca area is located in the N-E part of Gorj county in the hydrographic basin of the Gilort river, in the ridge area of the Corneșul Mare mountains and on its southeastern slopes, about 18-19 km from the town of Novaci, on the national road DN 67A (Bengesti - Novaci - Obârsia Lotrului - Șugag). The area has a special tourist potential, which has not yet been put to good use. From the examination of the entire tourist potential of the Gorj county, it was appreciated that the Parâng - Novaci tourist area is of particular importance. In this area, the Rânca area stands out as the only area in the whole of Oltenia that offers excellent conditions for mountain tourism and the practice of winter sports (Bădescu, G. et al., 2018; Miluț et al., 2020, www.statiunearanca.ro, www.infopensiuni.ro.).

The resort established itself quickly, in 1934 being visited by 1052 tourists. This success led to the decision of the Minister of Labour, Health and Social Protection no. 54 222 of August 24, 1935, by which the

commune of Novaci "recognizes itself as a climatic locality with all the rights and duties provided for in the laws and regulations regarding hydro-mineral and climatic institutions", decision published in the Official Gazette no. 216 of September 20, 1935. On August 7, 1936, Prefecture Jud. Gorj requested from Banca Populară Gilortul an area of 1000 m² in Rânca mountain, where the National Tourism Office will build a cottage with 13 rooms worth 1 400 000 lei, the architect being Iulius Doppelreiter (Glăvan, V., 1995; www.statiunearanca.ro).

After 1989, hundreds of chalets and guesthouses, hotels, a church were built and ski slopes were laid out for winter sports lovers, Rânca truly becoming the "Pearl of Oltenia". In the minuses chapter, we must specify the lack of an urban plan for the resort and the chaotic way in which it was built (Iagăru, R., et al., 2016, www.statiunearanca.ro).

1.2. The natural setting of the area

It is part of the picture of the tourist potential with great complexity, diversity and landscape attractiveness, which is reflected in its structure and value. The

landscape value and the attractiveness of the places are given by the geological structure manifested by the mountain and submontane relief forms, different in appearance, by the hydrographic network with narrow valleys, steep slopes and the forest cover that occupies most of the surface (Badaluta-Minda, C. and Herbei, M. V., 2021, www.statiunearanca.ro). The most attractive natural resources in the area are: (www.statiunearanca.ro)

- **the spectacular relief forms**, specific to the mountain area, of great landscape attraction, represented by high-altitude peaks, ridges, glacial relief elements (glacial caldera, slope grottoes, ridges); (Bold, O, Stuparu, C, 2007)

- **climate elements** - are favorable for practicing winter sports (the thickness of the snow layer and the duration of its maintenance depending on the altitude), mountain hiking and other forms of tourism, practicable in all seasons;

- **the vegetation**, of an impressive diversity, depending on the altitude (deciduous forests, spruce forests, junipers and alpine meadows, beautified in the warm season by the vivid color of mountain flowers) (Răduțoiu D. et al., 2018).

- **the climatic potential** of the administrative territory of the Râncea resort is characterized by a mountain and submontane climate, with clean, strongly ionized air, free of dust and allergens, recommended for rest, recreation and body recovery.

- **the course of the Gilort stream**, with numerous spectacular sections of the route;

- **the suitable skiing area** (the Râncea slopes) - they form the basis of the possibility of developing winter sports, associated with a particularly valuable climatic potential for a future mountain resort;

- **three hunting funds** (species with hunting value), existing in the area of coniferous and deciduous forests and valuable sport fishing (rainbow and indigenous trout), in the water of the Gilort stream and its tributaries;

1.3. The cultural-historical framework

One of the most representative objects is the Roman theater in Tg-Jiu, from 1877, the Milescu Theater is recorded in the urban plan of the locality, the fifth building of its kind in the country at that time. After that, the Goratestata Museum (July 16, 1894), the Philharmonic Society 'Lira Goratestata' appear successively, newspapers are printed, an atmosphere of great spirituality is created. It is also the moment when some of the representative buildings of the city of Tg-Jiu are erected: the Administrative Palace of the County, the Municipal Palace (www.parang-ranca.ro, www.statiunearanca.ro).

But, the most important cultural and tourist objective of Gorj county is represented by the Constantin Brâncuși Cultural Ensemble. The creator of the modern school of sculpture, the brilliant Constantin Brâncuși, gave the city of Tg-Jiu several works of inestimable value. Calea Eroilor, as it was named by Brâncuși, is the axis of the sculptural Ensemble from Tg-Jiu, the idea of the future ensemble being outlined by C-tin Brâncuși himself, as early as 1935. A new street was created on his instructions, crossing the city from the east, where the "Column of Endless Gratitude" is located, to the west, where the other works of the sculptural ensemble are located: "Table of Silence", "Chairs Street", "Kissing gate" (www.parang-ranca.ro, www.statiunearanca.ro).

The popular culture of Gorj includes elements of architecture, wood art, ceramics, fabrics, all of which harmoniously intertwine with the art of singing. One of the most beautiful local peasant architectures has developed on the plains of the Gorj. The architecture of Gorj impresses and delights the eyes both by its proportions and by its decoration. In determining the artistic value of the popular architecture of Gorj, the entrance gates to the courtyard occupy a main place. They attract attention by the monumentality of the architecture, by the vigor and richness of the decoration. Numerous centers that flourished on this territory preserve ancient-Neolithic and Roman traditions in the shapes, proportions and decoration of the ceramics

produced by them (Pănoiu, A., 1996). The unglazed vessels made in Târgu Jiu, produced in the last decades only from the wheel of the Cotocu craftsman or those from Glogova, Bârsești, Stroiesti, Ștefănești, Peșteana, Rasova, etc., are a pride of the genre. Folk architecture and technique, traditional peasant households specific to the submontane areas, installations for the artistic processing of wood, dairy products, wool (chest, loom, whorls, spinning forks, pives, putinei, water mills, hydraulically operated threshers, etc.) (Șerban, Al. D., and Mischie, N., 2003).

The Constantin Brâncuși Memorial House, Hobița Village, Pestișani commune, the Ecaterina Teodoroiu Memorial House, today set up as a museum, the Tudor Vladimirescu Memorial House, Cișmeaua Sâmboteanu, built at the end of the 18th century, monuments of church architecture can also be considered as tourist attractions. (Cathedral Church, Holy Voivode Church, Holy Apostles Church, Holy Trinity Church, Saint Nicholas Church), Hobița Museum - Hobița appears in documents from the 16th century as Ohabița, the open-air Ethnographic Museum in Curtișoara was arranged between 1968, contains ethnographic objects, pieces of peasant furniture, Gorje costumes (Vladimirescu, M.V., 2012; Călina, J., and Călina, A., 2021.; Galluzzo, N., 2022; www.academia.edu).

Among the representative monasteries we mention: Icoana Monastery from the Archdiocese of Craiova is located in the picturesque area of the north of Gorj County, at the foot of Mount Parâng, in the village of Cărpiniș in the commune of Crasna, Lainici Monastery is located on the wonderful Defileu of Văii Jiului, it is the link of the believers from Oltenia with the from Transylvania, Tismana Monastery is the oldest monastic settlement in Wallachia, having a primary role in maintaining the Orthodox faith over six hundred years, Polovragi Monastery (Adamov, T., et al, 2020; Călina, J. and Călina, A., 2021, www.academia.edu).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researches carried out in more than 5 years of activity principally aimed the 3 interdependent elements of agritourism and rural tourism: aspects studied and by (Arroyo, C.G., Barbieri, C., Rich, S.R., 2013; Barbieri C., et al., 2016; Niazi, H. et al, 2019, Solymannejad, R. et al, 2022).

1. attraction for nature beauties, the novelties, the charm and events specific to countryside life;
2. accommodation and meal, without having the pretence to have hotel standards, but to have quality offered with hospitality;
3. transport, access ways to rural area are primordial elements to ensure continuous flow of tourists.

Also, in order to evaluate the agritourist phenomenon during the researched period the following were used (Galluzzo N., 2021):

- observance, getting of information – as basic method, thus being emphasized aspects such as: tourist environment, tourist resources, tourist infrastructure, tourist circulation, etc. (Joshi S., et al., 2020);
- description, presentation of facts – as means to provide, to present all the observed elements (Karampela S. et al, 2019, Phillip S. et al, 2010, Markovic, N. et al, 2016.);
- analysis, investigation – presuppose involvement of a set of instruments, techniques and methods to emphasize and explain the relations established between the elements of the tourist phenomenon (Kubal-Czerwińska, M. et al, 2022);
- diagnosis – through which the opportunities and threats related to different tourist activities are presented, suggesting, at the same time, the possibilities of rehabilitation (in situations of crisis) or improvement of performances (in case of healthy activities).

Comparing and analyzing the internal and the external tourist market of agritourism and rural tourism, the researched area is particularized by the fact that it is considered to be the gifted with the richest and the most varied natural and created by

man tourist resources, fact which confers a great availability for the two types of tourism (Popescu, G. et al, 2022). Purpose of this paper is to define as precisely the area Rânca and show which are the main factors favorably in agritourism activity in the picturesque "North Oltenia."

It also envisages the scientific research on agritourism potential of this area, benefiting from a natural beauty and particular purity, of an ethnographic and folklore thesaurus of great originality and attractiveness represented by: specific architecture, traditional crafts, popular techniques, ancestral customs, religion, holidays, filled with historical monuments and art, archeological sites, museums and so on, (Mărcuță L. et al, 2020). For the conservation of cultural variety, beauty, harmony, purity and order in the Oltenia villages it is necessary that tourism providers to comply with a series of environmental standards imposed by the national authority and European Union (Călina, A. et al, 2017). The ultimate goal of the study consists of monitoring and highlighting agritourism potential, popularize the economic, cultural, ecological advantages obtained from practicing agritourism activity (Flanigan S. et al, 2014; Ciolac, R., et al, 2021; Călina, J. et al, 2022; Abadi, A. and Khakzand, M., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was carried out at the Oaza Linistii (Oasis of calm) guesthouse in Rânca-Gorj, where it is the ideal place to spend time in peace and in full harmony with nature, far from the noise and pollution of large urban agglomerations. The guesthouse operates all the time offering accommodation and a fully equipped kitchen during the week and can be fully rented, (www.infopensiuni.ro).

The guesthouse is located in the Rânca Resort at an altitude of over 1700 m. The resort is in full development, the ski slopes are located on Mount Corneșu and Vârful Păpușa, with different degrees of difficulty, and the snow is quite abundant and with a persistent layer, over a longer period of the

year. There are 5 ski slopes here, three intermediate level, one for beginners, and the one from 2011 with a chair lift, for advanced skiers (www.statiunearanca.ro., www.skiresorts.ro).

In addition to winter sports, the Rânca Resort in Gorj County can also be asserted through the wider promotion of ethno-folkloric values, based mainly on the originality of the Gorje folk tradition and the symbolism of architecture and traditional craft art. In order to increase the visiting period, the area must greatly diversify its offer, by widening the palette of spending free time, rest, recreation and practicing new forms of tourism, in line with the tourist offer of the area as (Firoiu, D., 2003): ethnocultural tourism, mountain tourism, weekend tourism - is an increasingly popular form of tourism and in sustained and continuous evolution, tourism for extreme sports, rural tourism and agrotourism - which benefits from all the assets for development, in the villages neighboring the Rânca resort, with an attractive submontane natural setting, the existence of some rural households that can enter the agro-tourism circuit, with appropriate technical and development facilities. The development and promotion of these forms of tourism will lead to the preservation of traditional Gorje values and sustainable and balanced development of the rural area (www.statiunearanca.ro., www.infopensiuni.ro).

Also, scientific tourism can be successfully practiced in the existing forest protected areas and tourism for meetings and conferences, which registers a strong dynamic at the national level, as a result of the intensification of economic activities, provided that a specific structure is created (accommodation structures with high level of comfort, catering facilities, properly equipped conference rooms).

Regarding the analysis of the tourist activity in the Oaza Linistii (Oasis of calm) Guesthouse, it is found that it has an accommodation capacity of 12 places = Nlf, with equipment corresponding to the 3-star comfort category, for which it received classification (www.infopensiuni.ro). The

period studied was between 2017-2020, during which the data related to the economic indicators, entered in the tables below, were followed, analyzed and interpreted.

From the data contained in table 1, it can be observed a slight annual progressive increase in the number of tourists arriving, from 396 in 2017 to over 468 in 2019, i.e., on average per year, it increased by over 30 tourists. The year 2020 is an atypical year, with the number of tourists arriving dropping considerably, due to the specific conditions of the most difficult year of the pandemic.

Table 1. Number of tourists arriving, 2017-2020

Year	Number of tourists arriving
2017	396
2018	427
2019	468
2020	123

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

Table 3. Tourist demand at rural tourist boarding houses in the locality during 2017-2020

Specification	No. tourists arriving at boarding houses			
	2017	2018	2019	2020
Tourist boarding house 1 - 4 daisies	1428	1634	1852	387
Tourist boarding house 2 - 3 daisies	1247	1437	2086	458

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

Regarding the tourist demand in table 3, an increase in customer preference for greater comfort can be observed, especially due to the isolation conditions imposed by the authorities, during the two years of the pandemic. Tourists prefer structures that are classified at least 3 stars/daisies, which offer conditions for relaxation and leisure, at a sufficiently high quality standard.

Table 4. The average number of tourists arriving per day at the guesthouse 2017-2020

Year	Average number of tourists arriving per day
2017	1,08
2018	1,16
2019	1,28
2020	0,33

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

Regarding the number of tourists arriving per day at the guesthouse, from tab.4 it can be seen that this is a reduced one, a fact primarily due to the lower number of operating days per year, specific to the

Table 2. The number of overnight stays in the period 2017-2020

Year	Number of overnight stays
2017	1188
2018	1281
2019	1404
2020	369

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

The same tendency is manifested, as can be seen from table 2, also in the number of overnight stays, finding from the on-site study, the existence of a higher demand, especially for the days at the end of the week. This indicator was directly correlated with the evolution of the number of tourists arriving during the studied period.

Rânca area, which relies more on focused tourism on practicing winter sports. However, in the analyzed period, there is an increase in the number of tourists arriving per day between 2017-2019 and a sudden decrease in 2020, to 0.33 day⁻¹.

Table 5. The number of tourist-days staying at the guesthouse during 2017-2020

Year	Number of tourists	Overnights	Total number of tourist days (t)
2017	396	1188	470 448
2018	427	1281	546 986
2019	468	1404	657 075
2020	123	369	45 389

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

The total number of tourist days at the guesthouse increased by over 80,000, until 2019, as can be seen from table 5, these being also normal years, unaffected by the pandemic. In 2020, the number dropped drastically, to only 45,389, a fact primarily due to the significant decrease in the number of tourists arriving in that year.

Table 6. Average length of stay at the guesthouse during 2017-2020

Year	Number of tourists	Overnights	Average length of stay
2017	396	1188	3
2018	427	1281	3
2019	468	1404	3
2020	123	369	3

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

The average length of stay at the boarding house under study remained the same throughout the studied period, the 2019-2020 pandemic years, having no favorable or unfavorable effect on this indicator (Table 6).

Table 7. The accommodation capacity in operation (places-days) of the pension in the period 2017-2020

Year	Number of operating days	Accommodation capacity in operation
2017	165	1.980
2018	182	2.184
2019	219	2.628
2020	65	780

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

Analyzing the data in table 7, we found that the evolution of the number of days of

Table 8. The utilization index of the accommodation capacity in operation I_u , of the pension in the period 2017-2020

Year	Total number of tourist days (t)	Accommodation capacity in operation (C.C.F.L.)	The utilization index (I_u)
2017	470 448	1 980	23.72
2018	546 986	2 184	25.05
2019	657 075	2 628	25.02
2020	45 389	780	5.81

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

Regarding the utilization index of the accommodation capacity in operation from table 8, it can be seen that it was generally good, until 2019, comparable to its evolution at the national level. The year 2020, being an inauspicious year also regarding this indicator, because it also dropped considerably, to only 5.81%. The low percentage this year was primarily due to the reduced number of tourists who were able to be accommodated at the guesthouse, this being restrictive due to the additional hygiene rules imposed and the larger areas, intended for tourist accommodation in maximum safety conditions, required during the pandemic. The occupancy rate of the boarding house during the analyzed period was a very

operation of the boarding house had an increasing trend, until 2019, with the boarding house operating on average over 185 days annually, even if the maximum influx of tourists was in the cold winter months, as the specifics of the Rânca Resort are based on the practice of winter sports. In the year of the peak of the pandemic with major restrictions both nationally and internationally, the number of operating days was considerably reduced, being only 65 days.

The evolution of the accommodation capacity had the same upward trend until 2019, decreasing to only 780 days in 2020, due to the fact that during the pandemic, the guesthouse had to comply with a series of strict rules. These required the reduction of the number of tourists staying in the guesthouse, to half of the maximum capacity, and the observance of mandatory hygiene days, during which additional cleaning measures had to be taken, specific to combating the contamination with COVID.

good one, exceeding the annual average of approximately 17%, in boarding houses of the same type in Romania, this, as can be seen from figure 1, was over 35%, in the first 3 years of study, which proves that it far exceeded the national average and approached the degree of use of over 36% at the national level, from hotel structures. In 2020, it was reduced to less than half, standing at only 17.2%, a percentage that is above the national average.



Figure 1. The degree of occupation (Go %) Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [26].

CONCLUSIONS

The Rânca resort in Gorj county is an extremely valuable tourist area, where the mountain potential and ethno-folkloric values specific to this county are best highlighted. In addition to the beauty and purity of the unique mountain landscape, the promotion of tourist activity is also based on a message that emphasizes, mainly, the originality of the popular tradition, the traditional architecture rich in symbolism and the ethno-folkloric manifestations of the villages bordering the Rânca mountain area.

From the study carried out on the main indicators of the tourist activity that reflect the quality of services offered to tourists, we found that the guesthouse has a high-performance and modern management, which is mainly focused on respecting and promoting within it, a culture of quality. All the main analyzed indicators were located in the period 2017-2020, at least at the same level as the national average or exceeding in normal years by almost double the indicators at the national level, specific to such tourist structures. The pandemic period had a very unfavorable effect mainly on the tourist circulation in the guesthouse, all indicators registering low values in the year of maximum pandemic. These were not directly influenced by the

quality of management, a phenomenon that was demonstrated by the level of over 17.2%, of the degree of occupancy in 2020, this year also being above the national average of 16.9%, recorded in normal years, from a tourist point of view, not affected by the drastic restrictions of the pandemic years.

In order to increase the number of days of operation and the other indicators directly related to it, it is absolutely mandatory that the guesthouse under study and implicitly the Rânca Resort diversify its leisure activities a lot, especially during the off-season, specializing in winter sports, when the influx of tourists is greater. During the summer period with good climatic conditions, other forms of tourism should also be highlighted, such as: ethnocultural tourism, through which the specificity of the Rânca-Novaci area, which is similar to that of the local Hungarian population over the mountain, from the villages of Mărginimea Sibiului, which left its mark on customs related to sheep farming and transhumance, traditions, folklore, languages and folk costumes.

Also, greater emphasis must be placed on the development and promotion of weekend tourism on a larger scale - which has very favorable conditions for development, due to the proximity to several urban centers in the counties of Gorj, Dolj, Vâlcea, Olt, Mehedinți and others. With great potential for development in the area is also rural tourism and agritourism, scientific tourism and especially tourism for meetings and conferences, forms of tourism that are not sufficiently exploited in the Rânca area, due to the lack of adequate infrastructure. At the same time, there must be a better promotion of all the advantages that can be obtained by practicing rural tourism and agritourism, an aspect also noticed by other researchers in our country or worldwide, in the areas where they have carried out such research.

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