

## DEVELOPMENT TRENDS AND PROMOTION METHODS OF THE RURAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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### Abstract

Generally tourism is considered an activity as important as the activity of the following branches: agriculture, industry, trade, etc. Rural tourism is a priority sector of tourism, which includes the development of rural activities and is designed to use local tourism resources (anthropological and natural resources), discovering the rural environment, cultural heritage, local traditions and accommodation structures.

This paper presents the dynamic research and analysis of existing accommodation capacities of the collective tourist structures (boarding houses and agro guest houses). The authors focused on the analysis of the following directions: the allocation of financial resources from the state budget in order to implement tourism policies; the share of tourism contribution to GDP; the trend of tourist and excursionist arrivals; the participants in the domestic and foreign tourism; the evolution of indicators related to collective tourist accommodation establishments (boarding houses and agro guest houses), as well as of those indicating the net use of accommodation capacity and the forecast of possible changes until 2021. The authors studied the main ways of rural tourism promotion, which could facilitate the communication process with potential clients through modern information and persuasion methods and techniques.

**Key words:** rural tourism, accommodation capacity, tourist potential, agro guest houses, efficiency.

According to some authors, rural tourism is defined as "touristic valorization of agricultural spaces, natural resources, rural cultural and architectural heritage, countryside traditions, products representative for the regional identity, ensuring the needs of consumers related to hosting, restoration, leisure activity, animation and various services (adaptation of modern society) into a new kind of solidarity between the town and village. (Talaba I., 2009)

Some Romanian researchers consider that "rural tourism comprises both the tourism activity as such and the economic activity, as a rule, the agricultural one, practiced by the tourist hosts ..., as well as the way of spending free time (Matei V., 2006).

"Rural tourism has a broad motivational basis represented by the return to nature, discovering the traditions, culture, folk creation, practicing some sports, eating fresh food and fruits, etc." (Popescu A., 2014)

The legal aspect of this concept is reflected in the Law on the Organization and Development of Tourism Activity in the Republic of Moldova, which stipulates that "rural tourism is a form of tourism developed in the countryside and oriented

towards the use of local tourism resources (natural, cultural, etc.), learning about the rural environment, its specific activities, local customs and traditions, peasant farms, etc." (Law, 2006).

The concept of rural tourism is relatively new for the Republic of Moldova, as the rural tourism activity started after 2000 and it could be found in the Tourism Development Strategy 2003-2015, as well as in the strategy "Tourism 2020" (Strategia, 2014).

Rural tourism activity is an important factor of economic development and growth due to its peculiarities and contribution to all the branches of national economy, among which we can mention: as means of resource valorization, stimulating investments, creating new jobs, generating national income, as a component part of foreign relations, as means of promoting country's image abroad, etc.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used statistical data offered by the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova, the State Budget Law, the analyzed companies and agro guest houses. The following methods and procedures for data analysis were used:

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observation, comparison, graphical method, table method, mean and relative value method, analytical functions, chronological series, etc.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Republic of Moldova is one of the countries with a diversified tourism product. According to Serafim Florea data, the Republic of Moldova has about 1400 tourist attractions and places of various cultural and historical values (Florea S., 2005).

The Republic of Moldova has over 550 monuments of civil architecture (most are placed in the rural areas), about 180 wine growing enterprises, some of which are specialized in receiving tourists, 5 scientific reserves (with a total area of 19.4 thousand ha), 63 natural-forest reserves with medicinal and mixed plants (over 8009 ha), 41 landscape reserves (34.2 thousand ha), 13 resource reserves (523 ha), 288 natural monuments – geological, paleontological, hydrological, botanical (2906 ha). Besides this there are 433 state protected secular trees in the country and 269 species of animals and plants included in the Red Book of the Republic of Moldova (Coșciug C., 2015).

According to researchers' data, the area of the forest plantations of the country does not exceed 9% of the territory, of which 5% is under state protection.

The elements of rural tourism have been established in the Republic of Moldova since the 1960s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Every year the tourists visit the most advertised tourist places in the rural areas such as Vadul lui Voda, Cubolta, Harjauca, Cubolta, I Vancea, Alexandreni, Orheiul Vechi etc.

Foreign visitors arriving in the Republic of Moldova have a particular interest in the regions that produce original, qualitative wines, have the necessary modernized facilities and practice wine and grape tasting tours.

In 2009, the Tourism Agency was created in the Republic of Moldova in order to coordinate and monitor the tourism activity at macroeconomic level as well as to develop public tourism policies aimed at improving country's image regarding the promotion of tourism potential.

In the last 6 years the Tourism Agency has been allocated financial resources from the State Budget amounting to about 4 million MDL annually.

Data presented in fig. 1 indicate a significant increase in 2010, followed by a slower growth.

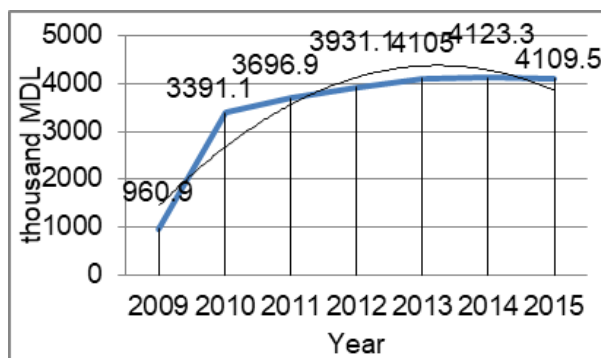


Figura 1 The evolution and the trend of funds allocated from the state budget to the Tourism Agency of the Republic of Moldova

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the State Budget Law data, the period 2009 - 2015

In order to assess the trend of funds evolution, it was used the statistical method of the least squares (Timofti E., 2017), based on the analytical and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree polynomial function ( $\bar{y}_t = a + b \cdot t + c \cdot t^2$ ), where a, b, c are the parameters of the equation and the value of R<sup>2</sup> (R-squared value), obtained as a result of data processing for the period 2009-2015, indicating that the model defined by a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree polynomial function has a higher degree of approximation (accuracy) than the 1<sup>st</sup> degree linear function.

$$\bar{y}_t = -111,3 + 1716,4 \cdot t + 164,03 \cdot t^2$$

$$R^2 = 0.8758$$

The positive values of the parameters b and c denote an upward trend from one year to another, expressed by the positive parameter c = 164.03 thousand MDL.

Both the graphical representation and the analytical model of trend adjustment show that in the coming years, if the economic conditions improve, then the money allocated from the State Budget to the Tourism Agency will register a steady growth.

State policy in the field of tourism development and promotion is manifested through the regulation of tourism activity both internally and externally. Since 2014, the new tourism strategy "Tourism 2020" has come into force.

The revenues from the tourism activity and share of their contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) represent the basic indicators that characterize the place occupied by tourism in Moldova's economy.

Data presented in Table 1 show that the revenues from tourism activity doubled from 708.1 million MDL in 2010 to 1453.2 million MDL in 2015.

Tabel 1

**Dynamics of the macroeconomic indicators of the tourism activity in the Republic of Moldova, in the period 2010-2015**

Indicator	Year					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Gross Domestic Product, mil. MDL	71885	82349	88227	100510	112050	122563
The revenues from the tourism activity, mil. MDL	708,1	860	972,6	1098,4	1314,4	1453,2
The share of revenues from the tourism activity in the GDP, %	0,99	1,04	1,10	1,09	1,17	1,18

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the Statistical Yearbook, NBS

This was possible due to the contribution of the state policy to the development and promotion of tourist activity, increasing the number of Moldovan tourists abroad from 136 thousand people in 2011 to 190 thousand people in 2015 and higher prices for tourism services. The share of tourism revenue in GDP, although it is upwards to 1.18% in 2015, is considered insignificant compared to 5% in Romania, Hungary - 9%; Bulgaria - 8% etc.

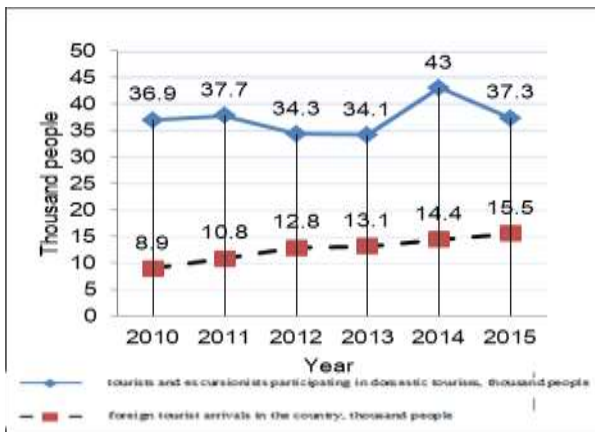


Figura 2 Dynamics of tourists and excursionists participating in the domestic and international tourism in the Republic of Moldova, in the period 2010-2015

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the Statistical Yearbook, NBS

In the dynamics of the years 2010-2015, the number of tourists participating in the domestic

tourism increased slightly, but we could highlight the years 2014 and 2015, when, due to some international projects, a series of festivals and other recreational events were organized in the Republic of Moldova, such as: Strawberry Festival, Medieval Festival, Great Sunday, etc., and as a consequence foreign tourist arrivals in the country have increased from 8.9 thousand people in 2010 to 15.5 thousand people in 2015 or by more than 70%. At the same time, the number of Moldovan tourists traveling abroad also increased from 136.0 thousand people in 2010 to 189.8 thousand people in 2015, i.e. about 40%, out of which to Turkey - 70 thousand people (37%), Romania and Greece - 21.0 thousand people (11.1%), Bulgaria - 56 thousand people (29.6%).

In 2015, 249 accommodation establishments were registered in the Republic of Moldova with a total accommodation capacity of 25,300 places. Tourist boarding houses and agro guest houses constitute only 26 establishments (the share of 10.4%), their accommodation capacity consisting of 909 places recording a decrease of 0.5% compared to 2009. The housing for tourists in the boarding houses and agro guest houses shows a considerable decrease from 12.3 thousand people in 2009 to 9.3 thousand people in 2015 or by 25%, while the share of tourists staying in the boarding houses in the total of accommodation establishments records a clear downward trend (Table 2). Thus, the rural tourism offer can be considered a low one.

Tabel 2

**The evolution of indicators of collective tourist accommodation establishments (boarding houses and agro guest houses) in the Republic of Moldova, in the period 2009-2015**

Indicator	Year						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total boarding houses and agro guest houses, establishments	15	13	15	19	19	24	26
The share of boarding houses in the total of accommodation establishments, %	6,02	5,2	6,07	7,3	7,1	8,72	10,4
Accommodation capacity of the boarding houses, places	913	743	813	905	867	990	909
The share of accommodation capacity of the boarding houses in the total of accommodation capacity, %	3,2	2,62	2,95	3,2	3,0	3,46	3,59
Tourists staying in the boarding houses, people	12346	13290	11701	11570	11526	8208	9283
The share of tourists staying in the boarding houses in the total number of tourists staying in collective tourist accommodation establishments, %	5,42	5,78	4,71	4,31	4,24	2,9	3,32

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the Statistical Yearbook data, NBS

The net use index of the accommodation capacity in the tourist boarding houses and agro guest houses (fig. 2) in 2009 was of 19.0% recording a

decrease from year to year and in 2015 it constituted 10.7%, i.e. a decrease of 8.3 pp.

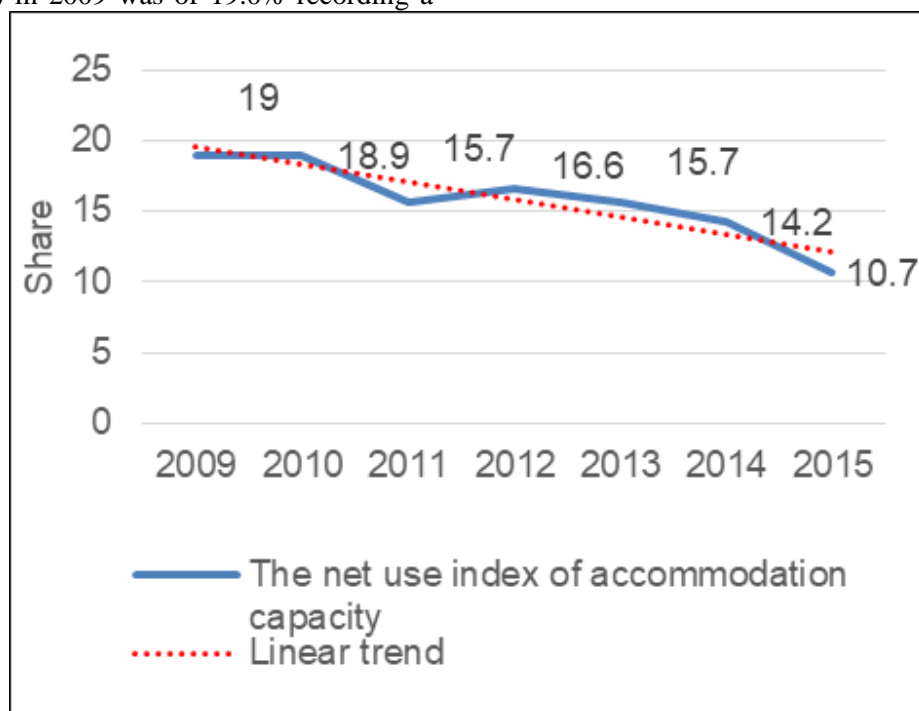


Figura 3 Evolution and trend of the net use index of accommodation capacity in the boarding houses and agro guest houses in the Republic of Moldova, in the period 2009-2015

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the Statistical Yearbook data, NBS of the Republic of Moldova

The analytical adjustment was then performed using the linear equation  $\bar{y}_t = a + b \cdot t$  in the period 2009-2015.

The calculations  $\bar{y}_t = 20,729 - 1,225 \cdot t$ ,  $R^2=0,856$  and the presented graph show that the net use index of the accommodation capacity had an average annual decrease of 1,225% and by 2021, if no improvement activities are applied, this indicator will reach 9,6% .

Among the factors determining this decrease we could mention the high prices for accommodation services as well as tourists choice to visit only the picturesque places in the country, the increased concentration of the accommodation establishments in Chisinau and in the Central region, the insufficient valorization of the tourist potential and the inadequate design and poor management of tourist destinations.

It should be mentioned that Butuceni agro guest house, situated near the most important archaeological and historical monument of the Republic of Moldova, having the status of historical-cultural Reserve and Outdoor Museum – Orheiul Vechi and located about 45 km from the capital, provides international quality tourism services within a project initiated in 2013 in collaboration with Greece, Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. In 2016 the agro guest house

was awarded the International Quality Certificate, which enabled it to be included in the international CerTour tourism network.

In this case the concept of tourism is focused on the active rest, the tourists being involved in various activities and the basic objective proposed by the owner is that anyone who has passed the threshold of this establishment feels like being home, has a good mood and remains with a pleasant memory.

The Net Use Index of accommodation capacity of Butuceni agro guest house in the period 2010-2014 varies between 36.7 - 54.0% and the value of 100% is reached in the weekend (August).

The agro guest house management is focused on the efficient management of its activity.

The activity of forming and promoting the image of the Republic of Moldova and the tourist product under competitive conditions aims to facilitate the communication with customers through informative, persuasive and reminder advertising.

The ways and means of promoting tourism are very diverse:

Advertising or publicity as:

- weekly journals, magazines, brochures, catalogs, business cards, guides - for example "Moldova Turistica" (Touristic Moldova), "Drumul vinului" (The Wine Road), "Drumul manastirilor" (The Road of Monasteries);

- luminous panels, interactive information and promotion panels, posters;
- different objects: calendars, pens, folders, note books, etc.;
- audio-video means: movies, CDs / DVDs, slides;
- TV; TV advertising - one of the most efficient types of promotion;
- mobile telephony; Internet - on-line promotion (sites, social networks, GPS, interactive games - Geocaching, etc.);
- tourist portals offering different services in a virtual space, on the World Wide Web, for example, one can find extensive information about the tourism in the Republic of Moldova on the website of the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism ([www.moldova-tourism.md](http://www.moldova-tourism.md)), on the website of the National Tourism Association ([www.antrim.md](http://www.antrim.md)) or on [www.moldovaholiday.md](http://www.moldovaholiday.md) etc.;
- promotional events such as international exhibitions in the field of tourism organized and conducted by the MoldExpo International Exhibition Center, etc.;
- organizing information sessions and tours.

Thus, a large variety of forms and methods including the interactive ones are used for the positioning of rural tourism in the Republic of Moldova, such as the interactive game Geocaching, the distribution of which is becoming popular in Moldova. The essence of the game consists in the search for so-called caches, which are recommended to be placed only in a place that represents a natural, historical, cultural or geographical interest. As a rule, all objects of rural tourism are located in the bosom of nature, in picturesque places, which can interest not only the owners of GPS navigators, but also the people interested in the history of their native land, geography, its traditions and culture. Currently, the site of the game Geocaching has turned into the largest database of attractions of the whole world ([www.geocaching.com/](http://www.geocaching.com/), [www.geotrekking.plus.ro.](http://www.geotrekking.plus.ro/)), which ensures a regular flow of tourists to the countryside of the Republic of Moldova.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the trend regarding the evolution of funds from the State Budget records a tendency of average annual growth of 164.03 thousand MDL and the share of the revenues from tourism activity increased from 0.99% up to 1.18% in 2015, but these levels are considered insignificant.

The dynamics of the tourists participating in the domestic tourism increased insignificantly and the foreign tourist arrivals in the country increased from 8.9 thousand people in 2010 up to 15.5 thousand people in 2015 or by 70% more.

The calculations show that the net use index of accommodation capacity in the tourist boarding houses and agro guest houses decreased on average by 1,225% annually (the period 2000-2015), and by 2021, if no improvement activities are implemented, the indicator will reach - 9.6%.

The above-mentioned data demonstrate the need for a number of measures that would contribute to more effective development of rural tourism in the Republic of Moldova. Among them we could mention the following: it is necessary to create a clear vision and strategy for attracting national and international tourist flows, to create an attractive system of quality tourist services, to attract investment projects, including from donors and international programs and to promote sustainable rural tourism.

Only by constant evolution, finding new, original solutions in the organization of reception and service of guests in the country we can count on a constant flow of tourists and economic prosperity of rural areas in the Republic of Moldova.

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