

DIGIeconafacugas



GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Tools in ecology



nature



farm



culture



gastronomy



tourism in rural areas



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This manual of the Digi econafacugas project has been elaborated thanks to the documents developed in the two workshops organised in Romania and Spain during the years 2023 and 2024.

It is part of the activity called "Design and realisation of the manual".

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The aim of this activity is the elaboration of a good practice guide containing a summary and citing examples of existing digital tools in the field covered by this project. The aim too, is to promote knowledge about digitalisation in rural tourism and its potential, so that through different activities it can contribute to the fixation of the population in rural areas and to sustainable forestry, agricultural and livestock management.

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Chapter 1. Report of analysis and identification of agricultural, livestock and forestry economic activities, which develop rural tourism initiatives or are potential for development

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Rural tourism is a thriving and diverse sector in Spain, Slovakia, Austria, and Romania, offering unique experiences and attractions in each country.

1. Spain: Spain's rural tourism spans mountainous areas, flatlands near major cities, and boasts a variety of activities, including hiking, mountain biking, and nature tours. Accommodation options range from mountain lodges to eco-friendly hotels, often combined with local gastronomic experiences. Recent developments include enotourism, oleotourism, and original offerings like dancing courses.
2. Slovakia: Slovakia's natural beauty, including picturesque landscapes and mountainous regions like the High Tatras, Low Tatras, and Slovak Paradise, attracts outdoor enthusiasts for activities such as hiking, climbing, and skiing. The country also offers opportunities for cultural immersion in traditional villages and agro-tourism experiences.
3. Austria: Austria's tourism industry is a vital economic driver with a strong connection to other sectors, including agriculture. Rural tourism here combines natural and cultural elements, with a focus on regional cuisine. The country offers a wide range of tourism types, including cultural, wellness, sports, adventure, and gourmet tourism.
4. Austria: Austria's tourism industry is a vital economic driver with a strong connection to other sectors, including agriculture. Rural tourism here combines natural and cultural elements, with a focus on regional cuisine. The country offers a wide range of tourism types, including cultural, wellness, sports, adventure, and gourmet tourism.
5. Romania: Romania's rural tourism sector benefits from a favorable natural environment and a growing interest in

preserving traditions. Visitors can engage in a variety of activities, including farm stays, traditional crafts workshops, and cultural immersion in historic villages. Agrotourism is also prominent, allowing tourists to participate in agricultural activities and experience rural life.

All four countries emphasize the importance of preserving their natural and cultural heritage, offering travelers a chance to explore the unique characteristics of their rural areas.

Overview about the rural tourism in Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania.

1. Overview about the rural tourism in Spain:

What are the local characteristics of rural tourism? (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

Rural tourism in Spain takes place mainly in mountain areas, including low and high mountain areas; next to big cities (Barcelona, Madrid, etc.) there is also rural tourism in flatter areas. Rural accommodation sometimes is in combination with other services (meals, horseback riding, guided tours – nature, walking, biking, etc. – but in most of the cases it is only accommodation in houses. More or less half of the accommodation facilities for rural tourism in are in the autonomous regions of Castilla y León (20,1%), Andalusia (13,8 %) and Catalunya (12,9 %).

Recently, Spain has offers for enotourism (wines), oleotourism (olive oil) and gastronomic tourism in rural areas.

Some of the touristic offers in rural areas are very original, like dancing courses, artisanal workshops, cooking, etc.

It is very common in Spain to do make excursions – also day trips – to the countryside.

40,9% of Spanish population says to have practiced some kind of rural tourism.

Rural tourism in Spain offers a diverse range of local characteristics depending on the region. Here are some common characteristics and activities found in different types of rural areas:

1. Mountain Areas:

- Activities: Hiking, mountaineering, rock climbing, mountain biking, skiing, snowboarding.
- Accommodation: Mountain lodges, rural cottages, eco-friendly hotels.
- Meals: Traditional local cuisine, farm-to-table experiences, local gastronomic festivals.
- Guided Nature Tours: Wildlife observation, birdwatching, nature photography, botanical excursions.

2. Agricultural Plains:

- Activities: Farm visits, agricultural experiences (harvesting, cheese-making, wine production), horseback riding.
- Accommodation: Farm stays, agritourism establishments, rural bed and breakfasts.
- Meals: Locally sourced farm-to-table meals, wine tastings, cooking classes.
- Guided Nature Tours: Agricultural tours, visits to vineyards, olive groves, and fruit orchards.

3. Historical Villages:

- Activities: Cultural and historical tours, visits to monuments and archaeological sites, traditional crafts workshops.
- Accommodation: Historic guesthouses, restored traditional houses, boutique hotels.
- Meals: Local delicacies, traditional recipes, food festivals.
- Guided Nature Tours: Nature walks, visits to natural parks, hiking trails.

What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?

Due to the data of Exceltour and the Banco de España **tourism made 61% of the economic growth of Spain in 2022. The contribution to the GNP (gross national product) was 12,2%.**

It is calculated that in 2022, 72 million of tourists came to Spain (in 2021- 31 million and 2020 19 million).

Income in 2022: € 69 billion (€ 71 billion in 2019).

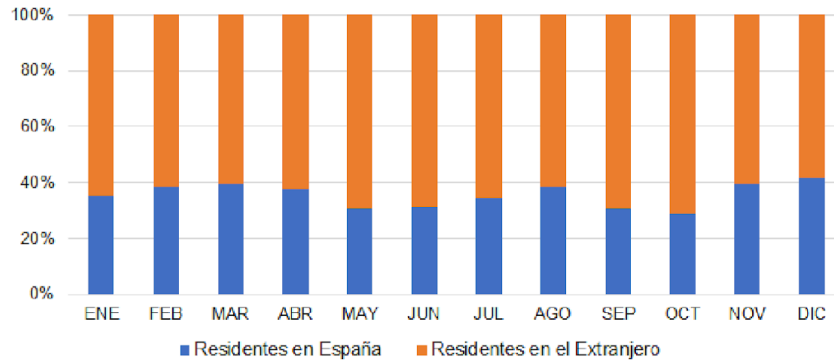
[Translation of the figures in [green](#).]

LLEGADA TURISTAS INTERNACIONALES	VARIACIÓN % 2021	GASTO TURISTAS INTERNACIONALES (MILLONES DE €)	VARIACIÓN % 2021
Andalucía	10.011.512	+135,7	11.981
Illes Balears	13.203.537	+108,8	15.220
Canarias	12.329.171	+134,5	17.425
Cataluña	14.803.187	+155,8	16.461
Comunitat Valenciana	8.606.914	+114,1	10.101
Comunidad de Madrid	6.038.588	+177,4	9.610
Resto de Comunidades	6.568.579	+95,2	6.235
TOTAL	71.561.488	+129,5	87.061

Fuente: Ministerio de Industria, Comercio y Turismo (2023).

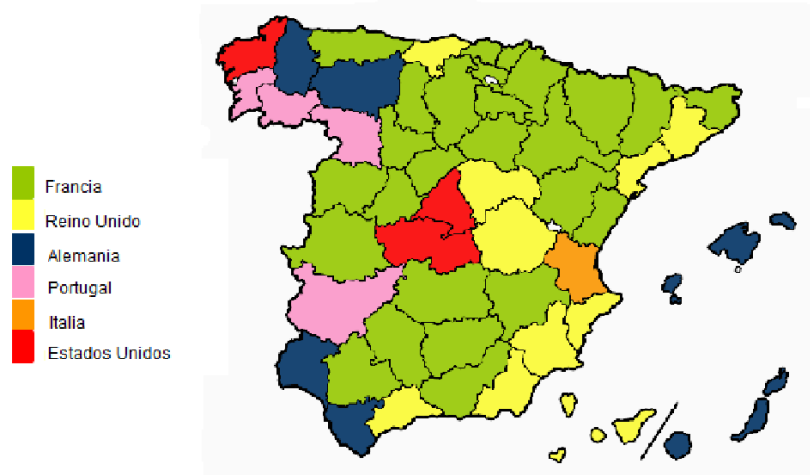
Overnight stays 2019: blue: residents in Spain – orange: residents abroad

Pernoctaciones hoteleras según residencia del viajero. 2019



Country of origin of non-residents' overnight stays in 2018

Principales pernoctaciones hoteleras de no residentes según país de residencia. 2018



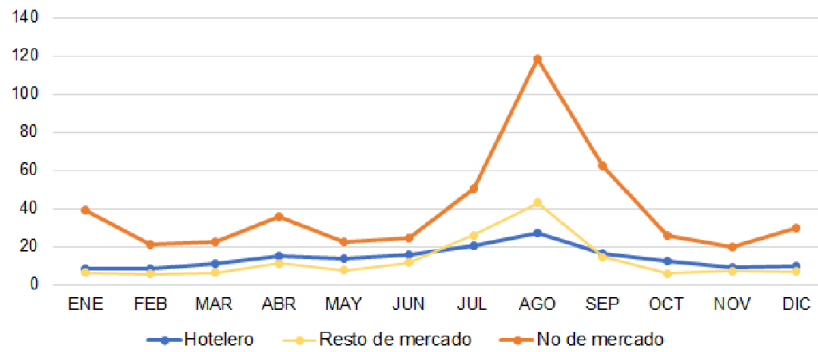
Overnight stays of residents per type of accommodation 2019 (millions)

Blue: hotel

Yellow: others

Orange: non-market

**Pernoctaciones de residentes por tipo de alojamiento. 2019
(millones)**



Non-resident tourists per accommodation 2019

Blue: hotel
the market

Orange: rented apartment

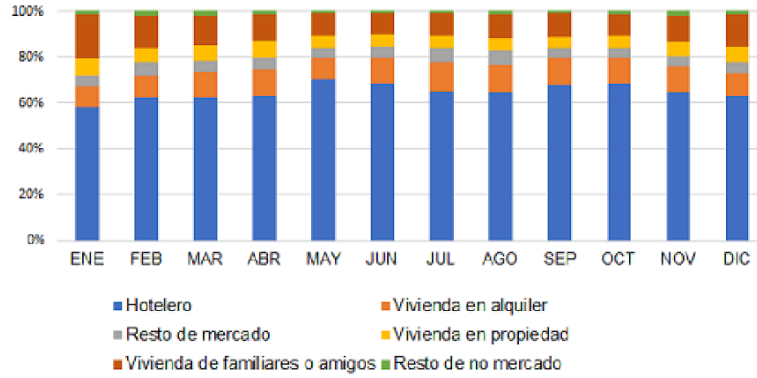
Grey: rest of

Yellow: house ownership
housing

Brown: family's and friend's

Green: Other non-market

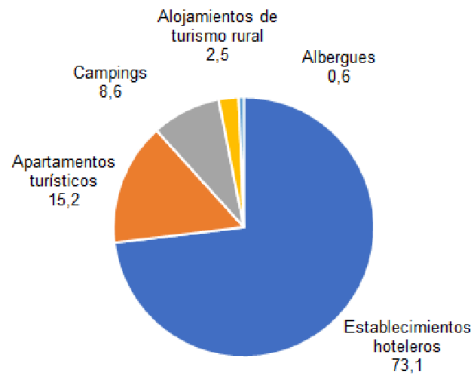
Turistas no residentes según alojamiento principal. 2019



Overnight stays in touristic accommodation, 2019, (%)

(Clockwise: Apartments, Camping, Rural Tourism, Hostel, Hotels)

Pernoctaciones en alojamientos turísticos. 2019 (%)



(Boletín informativo Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 04/2020)

Rural tourism grew between 2014 and 2019 up to 4,4 millions of tourists in rural tourism.

(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/765361/annual-number-of-tourists-in-rural-accommodations-in-spain/>)

Rural tourism – May 2023

Turismo rural - Mayo 2023

Valor/Value Variación/Variation

Pernoctaciones

875.834 3,48

Overnight stays

Estancia media (número de días)

2,40 3,84

Average stay (days)

Grado de ocupación por plaza (porcentaje)

16,25 -0,10

Level of occupancy (%)

Precios alojamientos de turismo rural (índice)

162,49 5,97

Prices for accommodation in rural tourism (indicator)

- Variación: porcentaje sobre el año anterior/Variation: percentage to previous year

(https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176963&idp=1254735576863)

In 2020, 2021, due to COVID, only about 2 millions (1,8 million domestic, 200.000 foreign)

Mainly domestic tourism, but number of foreign tourists in rural tourism is growing.

Profile of tourists: mainly families (close family 37%, extended family 23%, couples 44%)

11.500 rural tourism establishments – Castilla y León: 2.400

In 2021, rural tourism grew 5 points

Average spending € 30/night in 2021 (7% more than before)

According to a report by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, **rural tourism accounted for around 20% of total overnight stays in 2019** (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2020).

To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?

Tourism in rural regions is often closely linked to agriculture, as it provides an opportunity for visitors to experience and engage with the local agricultural practices and rural lifestyle. Rural tourism in Spain frequently incorporates agricultural elements, showcasing the agricultural traditions, products, and practices of the region. Visitors can participate in agricultural activities, such as **farm visits, fruit picking, wine tasting, cheese-making, and olive oil production**. Agricultural landscapes and the presence of working farms contribute to the scenic beauty and authenticity of rural tourism destinations.

Various agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities are practiced in nature or rural tourism activities in Spain. Some examples include:

- **Crop Cultivation**: Visitors may have the opportunity to engage in activities such as fruit picking in orchards (e.g., citrus fruits, apples), harvesting olives or grapes, or **participating in organic farming practices**.
- **Livestock Farming**: Rural tourism activities can involve interactions with livestock, such as **feeding animals, milking cows, or observing traditional animal husbandry practices** (e.g., sheep farming, cattle ranching).
- **Wine and Olive Oil Production**: Rural tourism destinations often offer wine tours, **wine tastings, visits to vineyards**, and educational experiences related to wine

production. Olive oil mills and tastings are also popular.

- **Forestry and Woodcraft:** Some rural tourism sites incorporate forestry activities, such as **guided walks** through forests, **mushroom picking**, or workshops on traditional woodcraft techniques.

There is a network for rural tourism ([Home](#) | [RRN \(redruralnacional.es\)](#) offering all kinds of types of accommodation (houses, apartments, hotels, hostels, camping, villas, farm school for children)

The accommodation is often in typical traditional houses (even in abandoned villages).

Agrotourism is mainly focused on small animals (chicken, sheep, goats), horses and donkeys, winery, and horticulture. In rare cases, extensive and transhumant livestock management offers to accompany the wandering herds.

Agrotourism is often combined with artistic routes, cultural routes, gastronomic routes, wine routes, horseback or donkey riding, star watching, massages, SPA, hiking, biking, adventure.

The Spanish climate allows outdoor activities during the whole year.

What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?

Star watching and **SPA/health care** are the most recent offers in rural tourism. Spaniards are very creative and like to share their activities, like cheese making, etc.

Here are some examples of innovative tourism experiences available in rural areas:

1. Agro-tourism and Farm Stays:

- Many rural areas offer agro-tourism experiences where visitors can stay on working farms, participate in agricultural activities, and learn about **sustainable farming practices**.
- Farm stays provide opportunities to engage with rural lifestyles, experience farm-to-table dining, and understand the importance of locally sourced and organic products.

2. **Adventure Tourism:**

- Rural regions often provide adventure tourism activities such as hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and zip-lining to explore the natural landscapes and mountains.
- Canyoning, paragliding, and hot air ballooning are some of the thrilling activities offered in rural areas.

3. **Ecotourism and Wildlife Observation:**

- Many rural areas in Spain are home to unique ecosystems and natural reserves, offering ecotourism experiences.
- Visitors can engage in guided nature walks, birdwatching, wildlife observation, and photography tours to appreciate the rich biodiversity.

4. **Wine and Gastronomy Tourism:**

- Rural regions with vineyards and wineries provide wine tourism experiences, including vineyard tours, wine tastings, and food pairings.
- Gastronomy tourism allows visitors to explore local culinary traditions, participate in cooking classes, and attend food festivals celebrating regional delicacies.

5. **Cultural Experiences and Heritage Tourism:**

- Rural regions often preserve cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and historical sites. Visitors can engage in cultural experiences such as pottery workshops, traditional music and dance events, and visits to historical monuments and castles.

6. **Wellness** and Retreats:

- Rural areas offer wellness retreats focused on **relaxation, meditation, yoga, and spa treatments** amidst tranquil natural surroundings.
- **Thermal baths**, natural hot springs, and wellness centers provide opportunities for rejuvenation and well-being.

7. **Digital Detox** and Nature Retreats:

- Some rural areas promote digital detox experiences, where visitors can disconnect from technology and immerse themselves in nature.
- Nature retreats offer activities such as forest bathing, stargazing, and outdoor yoga to reconnect with the natural environment.

Which economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism activities can be announced?

Accommodation: big variety from rural hotels high standard to camping (houses, apartments, vacation villages, etc.)

Participation in farming activities

Different kinds of sport and adventure activities: hiking, climbing, riding, biking, hang gliding, kite flying, skiing.

Health, wellness and beauty: ayurveda, massage, fasting, SPA

Star watching

Gastronomy: making and tasting wine, olive oil, cheese, marmalades, liquors, traditional sweets, etc.

Alternative and spiritual activities: retreats, meditation courses, Vision Quest

Artisanal and artistic activities: handicraft with stones, wood and cork, painting courses

Specifically, some examples can be provided:

1. Agro-tourism and Local Food Production:

Region: La Rioja, known for its vineyards and **wine production**, offers wine tourism experiences, including vineyard visits, wine tastings, and wine festivals.

Region: Andalusia, particularly the province of Jaén, is renowned for its **olive oil production**. Visitors can engage in olive oil tours, tastings, and olive harvest experiences.

Region: Ribera del Duero, known for its vineyards and wine production, offers wine tourism experiences, including vineyard tours, wine tastings, and visits to wineries.

Region: Sierra de Gredos, famous for its **cherry orchards**, offers cherry picking experiences and opportunities to learn about cherry cultivation and **local fruit production**.

2. Handicrafts and Artisanal Products:

Region: Catalonia, specifically the town of La Bisbal d'Empordà, is famous for its **ceramics and pottery**. Visitors can participate in pottery workshops and purchase locally crafted ceramics.

Region: Castilla y León, particularly the town of Medina del Campo, is known for its **traditional leatherwork**. Visitors can explore leather workshops, learn about the craft, and purchase handmade leather goods.

Region: Salamanca, particularly the town of La Alberca, is known for traditional craftwork, including handwoven textiles, pottery, and woodworking. Visitors can explore artisan workshops and purchase locally crafted products.

Region: Segovia, especially the town of Riaza, is known for its leatherwork. Visitors can visit leather artisans, learn about the craft, and purchase handmade leather goods.

3. Nature-Based Activities:

Region: Pyrenees, located in northern Spain, offers opportunities for **hiking, mountain biking, and wildlife observation**. The Pyrenees region is known for its stunning landscapes, including national parks like Ordesa and Monte Perdido.

Region: Canary Islands, particularly the island of Tenerife, offers diverse nature-based activities, including hiking in Teide National Park, exploring volcanic landscapes, and whale watching.

Region: Picos de Europa National Park, spanning across several provinces including León and Palencia, offers opportunities for hiking, mountaineering, and wildlife observation in a stunning mountainous landscape.

4. Cultural Heritage and Historical Tourism:

Region: Andalusia, specifically the cities of Granada and Seville, offers rich cultural heritage sites such as the Alhambra, Generalife Gardens, and Alcázar of Seville. These cities attract tourists interested in history, architecture, and Moorish influences.

Region: Extremadura, particularly the towns of Cáceres and Mérida, is known for its well-preserved **Roman ruins**, medieval architecture, and UNESCO World Heritage sites. Visitors can explore historical landmarks, museums, and **Roman theaters**.

5. Adventure and Sports Tourism:

Region: Catalonia, specifically the Pyrenees Mountains, offers adventure sports such as rock climbing, canyoning, and white-water rafting. The town of Sort is a popular base for adventure activities.

Region: Canary Islands, particularly the island of Lanzarote, offers opportunities for water sports like surfing, windsurfing, and kiteboarding due to its favorable wind and wave conditions.

Region: Soria, with its diverse natural landscapes, offers adventure activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and rock climbing. The natural park of Laguna Negra and the Natural Park of River Lobos are popular destinations for outdoor enthusiasts.

6. Wellness and Health Tourism:

Region: Galicia, known for its **thermal waters**, offers wellness tourism experiences in towns like Ourense and Caldas de Reis. Visitors can enjoy thermal baths, spa treatments, and wellness retreats.

Region: Balearic Islands, particularly the island of Mallorca, offers wellness retreats, yoga centers, and luxury **spa resorts**, providing visitors with relaxation and rejuvenation in a tranquil setting.

7. Educational and Learning Experiences:

Region: Basque Country, specifically the town of Getaria, offers educational experiences related to **gastronomy and fishing**. Visitors can learn about traditional fishing techniques, visit fish markets, and participate in cooking classes.

Region: Asturias, known for its natural landscapes and traditional farming practices, offers educational programs and **workshops on sustainable farming, cider production, and cheese-making**.

To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?

There were many subsidies during the LEADER era for Objective 1 areas mainly for renovation/construction of rural accommodation facilities. But, also, other financial support

is given by different public entities especially in areas of depopulation/demographic decrease.

Recently a call for projects for "Tourism with experiences/adventures" was launched by the Ministry in order to incentive new ideas of rural tourism especially involving active, individual, hand-on experiences in rural tourism. But the budget was low and the conditions for the applicants were very specific.

The conditions for applicants are a general problem concerning subsidies or calls for projects in Spain. Often it favors big and/or public entities and makes it very hard or even impossible for SMEs to apply.

Public support for rural tourism is often matched with gender policy, enhancing women's participation in economic development.

There are some specific examples of public initiatives to promote rural tourism in Spain. Each initiative focuses on different aspects such as infrastructure development, product diversification, sustainability, and heritage preservation:

- "Plan Nacional e Integral de Turismo" (National Integrated Tourism Plan):

This national-level plan, developed by the Spanish government, includes specific strategies and actions to promote rural tourism.

It focuses on improving the quality and competitiveness of rural accommodations, enhancing infrastructure and services in rural areas, and supporting the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

- "Programa de Desarrollo Rural" (Rural Development Program):

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) provides financial support through the Rural Development Program, which is implemented at the regional level.

These funds are used to support rural tourism projects, such as the renovation of historic buildings for tourist accommodations, the development of nature trails and visitor centers, and the enhancement of local cultural events.

- "Plan Estratégico de Turismo Sostenible de Andalucía" (Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism in Andalusia):

The regional government of Andalusia has developed a strategic plan for sustainable tourism that includes specific actions to promote rural tourism.

It focuses on diversifying tourism products and experiences in rural areas, preserving natural and cultural heritage, and improving accessibility and infrastructure.

- "Camino de Arte Rupestre Prehistórico" (Prehistoric Rock Art Paths):

This public initiative, supported by the Ministry of Culture and regional governments, promotes rural tourism through the creation of thematic routes that connect archaeological sites with rock art.

It aims to enhance the visibility and understanding of prehistoric rock art, while also contributing to the economic development of rural areas.

- "Red de Hospederías de Extremadura" (Extremadura Lodging Network):

The regional government of Extremadura has established a network of rural accommodations, known as the Extremadura Lodging Network, to promote rural tourism in the region.

This initiative supports the renovation and management of historic buildings and rural lodgings, providing quality

accommodations for visitors and generating economic opportunities for rural communities.

- "Club de Ecoturismo en España" (Ecotourism Club in Spain):

The Ecotourism Club, supported by public entities at various levels, promotes sustainable and nature-based tourism experiences in rural areas.

It provides certification and support to tourism businesses that meet specific criteria related to environmental sustainability, cultural heritage preservation, and community involvement.

What are the barriers for rural tourism?

Irregular occupation.

Increasing prices for electricity.

There are several barriers and challenges that can hinder the development and growth of rural tourism. These barriers can vary depending on the specific context and region, but some common ones include:

1. Limited Infrastructure and Services:

In remote rural areas, there may be a lack of proper transportation infrastructure, including roads, public transportation, and connectivity. The availability and quality of accommodations, restaurants, and tourism services in rural regions can be limited, especially in less populated areas.

Little accessibility by public transport.

Little access to internet – difficult for online-working.

2. Seasonality and Tourism Demand Fluctuations:

Rural tourism in Spain often faces seasonality, with peak tourist seasons concentrated in specific periods, such as summer or holidays. Fluctuations in demand can result in challenges for businesses in terms of maintaining consistent revenue and employment throughout the year.

3. Limited Marketing and Promotion:

Some rural destinations in Spain may have limited marketing and promotional efforts compared to more popular urban or coastal areas. **Lack of visibility** and targeted marketing campaigns can hinder the awareness and promotion of rural tourism offerings.

4. Financial Resources and Investment:

Securing financial resources and investment for rural tourism projects can be challenging, particularly for **small businesses and entrepreneurs in rural areas**. Limited access to funding sources, grants, and loans may hinder infrastructure development, product improvement, and marketing initiatives.

5. Perception and Stereotypes:

Rural areas in Spain may face negative perceptions and stereotypes, such as being less developed or lacking modern amenities. Overcoming these perceptions and showcasing the unique cultural, natural, and gastronomic experiences available in rural regions is essential for attracting tourists.

6. Skill Gaps and Capacity Building:

Some rural areas may have a **lack of specialized skills and training among local residents** and tourism providers. Enhancing the skills and knowledge of individuals involved in rural tourism, through training programs and capacity-building initiatives, is crucial for offering high-quality experiences.

7. Environmental and Cultural Sustainability:

Ensuring the **sustainable management of natural resources, protection of cultural heritage**, and responsible tourism practices is essential for the long-term viability of rural tourism in Spain.

Balancing tourism development with environmental conservation and cultural preservation is a challenge that requires careful planning and management.

8. Regulatory and **Administrative Barriers**:

Complex regulations, **bureaucratic procedures**, and administrative burdens can pose challenges for starting and operating tourism businesses in rural areas.

Simplifying regulatory processes, reducing administrative barriers, and providing support for compliance can facilitate the growth of rural tourism.

Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?

There are specific training needs that have been identified as necessary for rural tourism in Spain. These training needs aim to enhance the skills and knowledge of individuals involved in rural tourism, including entrepreneurs, tourism professionals, local communities, and other stakeholders. Some of the identified training needs for rural tourism in Spain include:

- **Language Skills**
- Hospitality and **Service Skills**:

Training programs that focus on customer service, hospitality management, and interpersonal skills are essential for providing quality experiences to rural tourists. These programs can cover topics such as effective communication, guest relations, problem-solving, and cultural sensitivity.

- Sustainable Tourism Practices:

Training on sustainable tourism practices, such as the principles of sustainability, waste management, energy efficiency, biodiversity conservation, and cultural heritage preservation.

- Nature and Cultural Interpretation:

Training programs that enhance the knowledge and interpretation skills of tour guides and local guides. This training may cover topics such as local history, ecology, flora and fauna, cultural traditions, and storytelling techniques.

- Entrepreneurship and Business Management:

Training on entrepreneurship and business management equips rural tourism entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to develop and manage successful tourism businesses. This includes training on business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, digital skills, and the use of technology in tourism operations.

- Product Development and Diversification:

Training programs that focus on product development and diversification help rural tourism stakeholders identify and create unique and marketable tourism offerings. This may involve training in identifying target markets, designing thematic routes or experiences, creating tourism packages, and collaborating with local suppliers.

- Digital Marketing and Online Presence:

Given the increasing importance of online presence and digital marketing, training on digital skills, social media management, website development, and online booking systems can help rural tourism businesses reach a wider audience.

- Community Engagement and Collaboration:

Training programs that promote community engagement, cooperation, and collaboration are vital for fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among local communities. This includes training on community-based tourism, involving local residents in tourism initiatives, and fostering partnerships with local suppliers, artisans, and producers.

Characterizations of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists

Please describe the characterization of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analyzing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.

Profile of tourists: mainly families (close family 37%, extended family 23%, couples 44%)

Interested and eager to learn.

Spain has a long and very extended tradition to visit the countryside and to buy traditional local products in the respective places. Domestic tourism even nearby the place of residence is very frequent in Spain.

Example 1: Fundación Monte Mediterráneo

Strengths

Unique and interesting agro-ecosystem: dehesa.

Big biodiversity with many rare and endangered species (flora and fauna)

Within a Nature Park and Natura 2000

Nature stone houses

Solar energy supply

Four languages spoken.

Broad offer of documentation (library)

WiFi

Weaknesses

High time input and dedication for small groups

Current renting prices do not cover the costs (manpower)

Instability of WiFi, solar supply in remote areas

Conflicting interest between tourists' activities and farm work or hunting activity (e.g.: free ranging livestock and guardian dogs; limited access to certain areas)

Opportunities

Unique place for photographers, biologists

Remote, peaceful place

Well communicated transport wise

Interesting cultural, gastronomic places to visit nearby

Nice climate during the whole year

Growing demand: domestic and international

Threats

High investments which are amortized only in the (very) long run

High input/investment in marketing and promotion – too expensive

Hard to find the correct target group

Example 2: El Bierzo, Castilla y León

El Bierzo is a picturesque region located in the province of León, Castilla y León, in northwestern Spain, surrounded by mountains.

Strengths

- **Natural Beauty:** El Bierzo's stunning landscapes, surrounded by mountains, valleys, and rivers, attract nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.
- **Agricultural Heritage:** The region's strong agricultural traditions, including vineyards and local products, contribute to its authentic rural appeal.
- **Gastronomy:** Renowned local dishes like botillo and regional wines, especially the Mencía grape variety, enhance the gastronomic experiences for visitors.
- **Cultural Heritage and Pilgrimage:** El Bierzo's role in the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route adds cultural significance and draws pilgrim tourists.
- **Natural and Cultural Attractions:** The presence of natural parks, historic towns, and monuments offer diverse tourism opportunities.

Weaknesses

- **Seasonality:** Concentrated tourism during peak periods can lead to fluctuations in demand and challenges in maintaining year-round economic activity.
- **Accessibility:** Limited access to some remote rural areas may hinder the overall tourism experience and visitor mobility.

- **Marketing and Promotion:** The region may face challenges in effectively promoting its rural tourism offerings due to limited marketing resources.
- **Capacity Building:** Ensuring that local residents and tourism operators have the necessary skills to deliver quality experiences is essential for long-term success.

Opportunities

- **Diversification:** The region can develop new and unique tourism products, such as cultural events, eco-tourism, and adventure activities, to attract different types of tourists.
- **Collaboration:** Establishing partnerships between tourism authorities, businesses, and local communities can enhance marketing efforts and create cohesive tourism experiences.
- **Sustainable Tourism:** Implementing sustainable practices can attract environmentally conscious travelers and preserve the region's natural and cultural assets.

Threats

- **Competing Destinations:** Competition from other rural tourism destinations may impact El Bierzo's ability to attract visitors.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Insufficient investment in transportation and tourism infrastructure could hinder growth.
- **Over-tourism:** The popularity of pilgrimage tourism can lead to over-crowding and strain on local resources and heritage sites.

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2. Overview about the rural tourism in Slovakia:

What are the local characteristics of rural tourism? (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

Rural tourism in Slovakia offers a diverse range of experiences for visitors seeking a tranquil and authentic getaway. The country's natural beauty, with its picturesque landscapes, mountainous regions, and charming rural communities, provides a perfect backdrop for rural tourism activities. Here is an overview of the local characteristics and activities associated with rural tourism in Slovakia:

1. **Mountain Areas:** Slovakia is known for its stunning mountain ranges, including the High Tatras, Low Tatras, and the Slovak Paradise. These areas attract outdoor enthusiasts and adventure seekers who enjoy activities such as hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and skiing (during the winter months). The mountainous regions offer breathtaking views, crystal-clear lakes, and opportunities to explore unspoiled nature.

2. National Parks and Protected Areas: Slovakia boasts several national parks and protected areas, which are ideal for nature lovers and eco-tourists. The Tatra National Park, Slovak Paradise National Park, and Pieniny National Park are popular destinations, offering a wealth of hiking trails, wildlife observation, and guided nature tours. Visitors can witness unique flora and fauna, explore scenic gorges and waterfalls, and learn about the conservation efforts in place.
3. Traditional Villages: Rural tourism in Slovakia often involves staying in traditional villages, where visitors can experience the country's rich cultural heritage. These villages offer accommodations in guesthouses, cottages, or farmsteads, providing an authentic and immersive experience. Guests can enjoy traditional Slovak cuisine, made from locally sourced ingredients, and participate in activities such as folk music and dance performances, traditional crafts workshops, and farm visits.
4. Agro-tourism: Slovakia's fertile plains and agricultural areas provide opportunities for agro-tourism activities. Visitors can engage in farm stays, where they can experience the daily life of farmers, participate in agricultural tasks, and learn about traditional farming practices. This includes activities like milking cows, herding sheep, picking fruits or vegetables, and even cheese or wine making.
5. Cultural Heritage: Rural areas in Slovakia often have a rich cultural heritage, with historic buildings, churches, and castles dotting the landscape. Visitors can explore these architectural gems, learn about the country's history and folklore, and attend local festivals and events that celebrate Slovak traditions.
6. Wellness and Relaxation: Many rural areas in Slovakia offer wellness and relaxation opportunities, with natural thermal spas and wellness centers. Visitors can rejuvenate in hot mineral springs, indulge in spa treatments, and enjoy the peace and tranquility of the surrounding countryside.

In summary, rural tourism in Slovakia encompasses a wide range of activities and experiences. From exploring majestic mountain landscapes and national parks to immersing oneself in traditional villages and engaging in agro-tourism activities, visitors can enjoy a unique blend of nature, culture, and relaxation in Slovakia's rural areas.

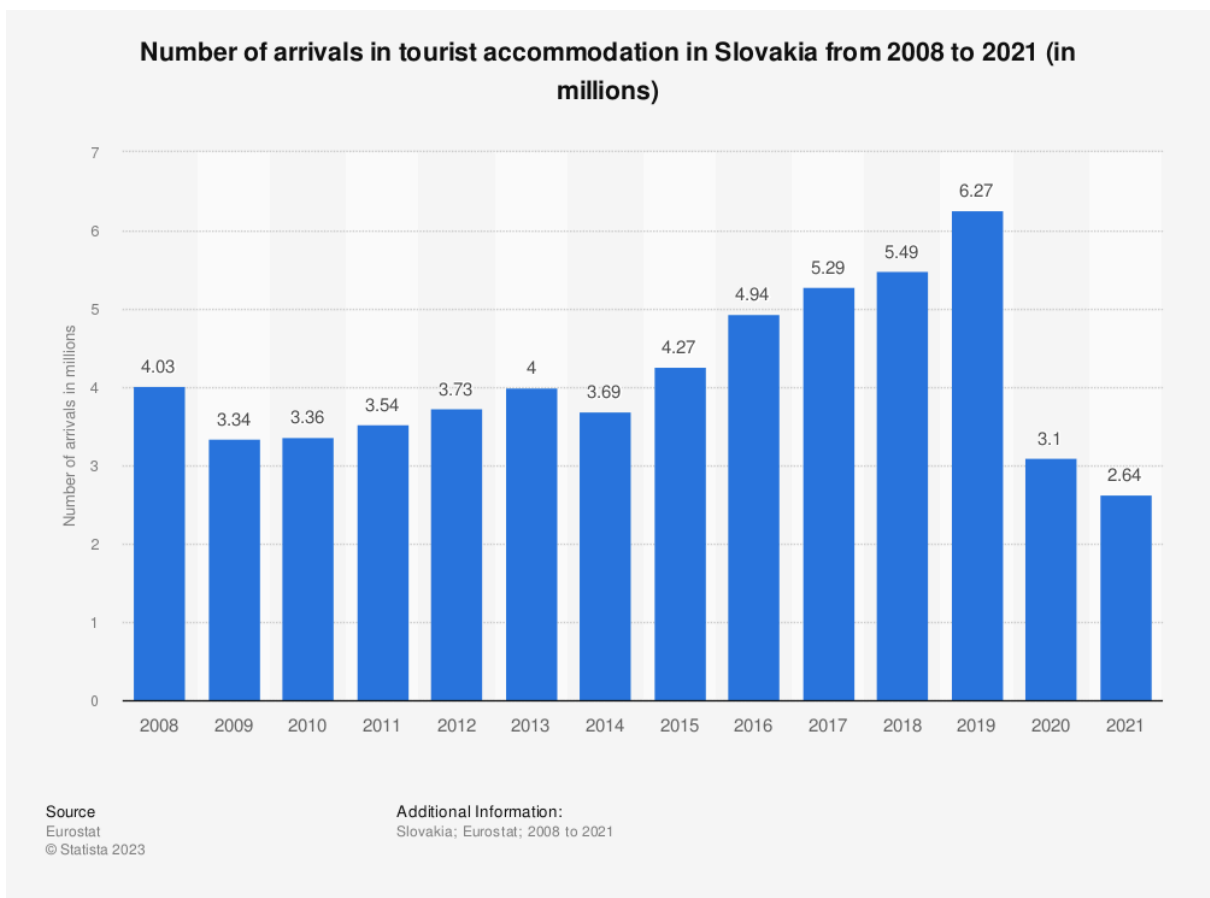
What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?

Tourism plays a significant role in the economy of Slovakia, and both urban and rural tourism contribute to its overall economic importance. While specific data on the proportion of rural tourism within the overall tourism sector in Slovakia is not readily available, rural tourism has been growing in popularity in recent years. Here are some insights into the economic importance of tourism in Slovakia:

1. **Contribution to GDP:** Tourism makes a substantial contribution to Slovakia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the direct contribution of tourism to Slovakia's GDP was 3.8% in 2019, with a total contribution (including indirect and induced impacts) of 8.7%. It is important to note that these figures encompass all forms of tourism, including rural tourism.
2. **Employment Generation:** The tourism industry in Slovakia is a significant source of employment. It provides job opportunities in various sectors, such as accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, travel agencies, and tourist attractions. The exact proportion of rural tourism employment is not available, but rural areas often rely on tourism to generate income and create employment opportunities for local communities.
3. **Regional Development:** Tourism, including rural tourism, contributes to regional development by promoting economic activity in rural areas. It helps diversify local economies, stimulate entrepreneurship, and preserve cultural and natural heritage. Rural tourism encourages investment in infrastructure, accommodations, and

services, which benefits not only the tourism sector but also the overall development of rural communities.

4. Sustainable Development: Rural tourism in Slovakia often focuses on sustainability and responsible practices. This form of tourism promotes the preservation of natural resources, supports local communities, and encourages the conservation of cultural heritage. By emphasizing sustainable tourism practices, Slovakia aims to ensure long-term economic benefits while protecting its rural areas and their unique characteristics.



Although specific data on the proportion of rural tourism within the overall tourism sector in Slovakia is not readily available, the growing interest in rural tourism suggests that it plays a significant role in the country's tourism landscape. The government and local authorities recognize the potential of rural tourism and continue to promote its

development, highlighting its economic importance and the benefits it brings to rural communities.

To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?

Tourism in rural regions of Slovakia is often closely linked to agriculture, as it provides an opportunity to showcase and promote the agricultural practices, local products, and rural way of life. The interconnection between agriculture and rural tourism varies across different regions and activities. Here are some typologies of agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities that are currently practicing nature or rural tourism activities in Slovakia:

1. **Agro-tourism Farms:** Many rural areas in Slovakia offer agro-tourism experiences, where visitors can stay on working farms and actively participate in agricultural activities. These farms engage in various agricultural practices such as crop cultivation, fruit and vegetable farming, and viticulture. Visitors can assist with tasks like planting, harvesting, and tending to animals, gaining firsthand knowledge of agricultural processes.
2. **Animal Husbandry:** Livestock farming is an integral part of rural life in Slovakia, and some farms open their doors to tourists, allowing them to experience animal husbandry activities. Visitors can learn about and participate in activities such as milking cows, feeding animals, herding sheep, and observing traditional livestock management practices.
3. **Organic Farming:** Slovakia has seen an increase in organic farming practices, driven by consumer demand for healthy and sustainable products. Some organic farms engage in rural tourism, offering visitors the opportunity to learn about organic farming methods, visit organic gardens, and taste organic produce.

4. Beekeeping: Slovakia has a rich beekeeping tradition, and many rural areas are known for their honey production. Beekeepers often welcome tourists to their apiaries, providing insights into beekeeping practices, honey extraction, and the importance of bees in pollination. Visitors can learn about the role of bees in the ecosystem, taste different varieties of honey, and purchase bee-related products.
5. Forestry and Woodcraft: Slovakia is blessed with extensive forested areas, and some rural tourism initiatives focus on promoting sustainable forestry practices. These activities include guided nature walks, forest educational programs, and workshops on woodcraft, showcasing traditional woodworking techniques and the cultural significance of forests.
6. Culinary Experiences: Rural tourism in Slovakia often incorporates culinary aspects, highlighting local and traditional dishes. Many rural accommodations and restaurants source ingredients directly from local farmers and promote farm-to-table experiences. Visitors can participate in culinary workshops, learning to prepare traditional Slovak meals using locally sourced ingredients.
7. Natural Resource Conservation: Some rural tourism initiatives in Slovakia are closely connected to environmental conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. These activities may include guided nature tours, birdwatching, wildlife observation, and educational programs on biodiversity and conservation.

It is worth noting that the specific typology of agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities engaged in rural tourism can vary across regions in Slovakia, depending on local resources, traditions, and the preferences of individual farmers and entrepreneurs.

What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?

In recent years, rural regions in Slovakia have been embracing innovation to enhance the tourism experience and attract

visitors. Here are some innovative tourism offers available in rural regions of Slovakia:

1. Agri-tourism Experiences: Rural regions in Slovakia are offering innovative agri-tourism experiences that go beyond traditional farm stays. Visitors can participate in hands-on workshops such as bread-making, cheese-making, and traditional crafts. They can also engage in activities like grape harvesting, winemaking, and distilling traditional spirits, allowing them to learn about local traditions and take part in unique experiences.
2. Adventure Tourism: Rural areas in Slovakia are tapping into the growing demand for adventure tourism by offering innovative outdoor activities. These include activities such as zip-lining, canopy walks, treetop adventure parks, and off-road vehicle tours. Adventure enthusiasts can explore the natural landscapes, including mountains, forests, and rivers, in thrilling and unconventional ways.
3. Ecotourism and Nature Conservation: Rural regions in Slovakia are promoting ecotourism and nature conservation initiatives to showcase their pristine natural environments. This includes guided nature walks, wildlife watching, birdwatching tours, and educational programs on environmental conservation. Some areas also offer volunteer opportunities for visitors to participate in conservation projects and contribute to the preservation of the local ecosystems.
4. Wellness and Retreats: Rural regions in Slovakia are embracing wellness tourism by offering innovative wellness retreats and spa experiences. Visitors can enjoy yoga retreats, meditation workshops, nature-inspired spa treatments, and wellness activities amidst the peaceful rural landscapes. Some accommodations also provide wellness-focused amenities such as saunas, hot tubs, and wellness centers.
5. Cultural Immersion: Rural areas in Slovakia offer immersive cultural experiences that allow visitors to

engage with local traditions and customs. This includes attending traditional folk festivals, participating in music and dance workshops, and exploring rural museums and heritage sites. Visitors can also interact with locals and learn about their way of life through homestays and community-based tourism initiatives.

6. Digital Connectivity and Smart Solutions: To enhance the visitor experience, some rural regions in Slovakia are implementing digital connectivity and smart solutions. This includes providing Wi-Fi access in accommodations and public areas, offering digital guides and interactive maps for exploring the region, and utilizing technology for online booking systems and virtual tours.
7. Gastronomic Tourism: Rural regions in Slovakia are showcasing their unique culinary heritage through gastronomic tourism initiatives. Visitors can enjoy food and wine tours, visit local food producers, participate in cooking classes to learn traditional recipes, and explore food markets and festivals celebrating local cuisine. Some areas also offer farm-to-table experiences, where visitors can directly taste and purchase local products.



These are just a few examples of the innovative tourism offers available in rural regions of Slovakia. These initiatives aim to attract a diverse range of visitors and provide them with memorable and unique experiences that showcase the region's natural, cultural, and gastronomic assets.

Which economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism activities can be announced?

Developing rural tourism in Slovakia can involve various economic activities that can contribute to the growth and sustainability of the sector. Here are some economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism in Slovakia:

1. Accommodation and Hospitality: Developing a range of accommodation options suitable for rural tourism, such as guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, farm stays, eco-lodges,

- and boutique hotels. Investing in hospitality infrastructure can attract tourists and provide them with comfortable and authentic experiences.
2. Agri-tourism and Farm Experiences: Encouraging agricultural and farming activities that offer unique and interactive experiences for tourists. This includes agri-tourism activities like fruit picking, wine tasting, cheese-making, bread-making, and organic farming practices. Providing opportunities for tourists to engage in hands-on agricultural tasks and learn about traditional farming practices can enhance their experience.
 3. Local Food and Gastronomy: Developing culinary experiences that highlight local food and gastronomy. This includes promoting farm-to-table practices, establishing local food markets, organizing food festivals, and supporting local producers. Encouraging the use of local ingredients and traditional recipes can create opportunities for rural restaurants, cafes, and food-related businesses.
 4. Handicrafts and Artisanal Products: Supporting and promoting local artisans and craftsmen by showcasing their traditional skills and crafts. This can involve establishing craft workshops, organizing artisan fairs and markets, and providing training and support to local artisans. Artisanal products, such as pottery, woodwork, textiles, and traditional crafts, can be marketed to tourists as unique souvenirs.
 5. Outdoor Activities and Adventure Tourism: Expanding outdoor activity offerings to attract adventure-seeking tourists. This can include developing hiking and cycling trails, adventure parks, rock climbing sites, water sports facilities, and winter sports activities. Providing equipment rental services, guided tours, and adventure packages can further enhance the tourism experience.
 6. Nature Conservation and Eco-tourism: Promoting eco-tourism initiatives that focus on the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources. This can

involve organizing guided nature tours, wildlife watching experiences, and educational programs on environmental conservation. Encouraging responsible tourism practices and supporting conservation efforts can contribute to the long-term sustainability of rural tourism.

7. **Wellness and Retreats:** Developing wellness and retreat facilities that cater to tourists seeking relaxation and rejuvenation in rural settings. This can include spa resorts, wellness centers, yoga retreats, meditation centers, and nature-based wellness activities. Creating opportunities for visitors to unwind and reconnect with nature can be a significant draw for rural tourism.
8. **Cultural Heritage and Events:** Showcasing the rich cultural heritage of rural areas by organizing cultural events, festivals, and exhibitions. This can involve promoting local traditions, folklore, music, and dance performances. Supporting the preservation of historic sites, traditional architecture, and cultural landmarks can enhance the tourism appeal of rural regions.

Investing in these economic activities can help develop rural tourism in Slovakia, diversify the local economy, create employment opportunities, and improve the quality of life for rural communities. Collaboration between the government, local authorities, tourism organizations, and private enterprises is essential to foster the growth of rural tourism and ensure its sustainable development.

To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?

Rural tourism in Slovakia is promoted through various public initiatives aimed at highlighting the unique features and attractions of rural areas. The government, tourism organizations, and local authorities collaborate to support and develop rural tourism in the country. Here are some ways in which rural tourism is promoted through public initiatives in Slovakia:

1. **Marketing Campaigns:** Public initiatives promote rural tourism through marketing campaigns that showcase the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and unique experiences available in rural areas. These campaigns often involve online and offline promotional activities, including websites, social media platforms, brochures, and travel guides. They target both domestic and international tourists, raising awareness about rural tourism opportunities in Slovakia.
2. **Destination Branding:** Public initiatives work on developing and promoting specific rural destinations as attractive tourist destinations. They create destination brands that highlight the distinct characteristics and offerings of rural areas, such as natural landscapes, traditional villages, and cultural heritage. This branding helps position rural regions as desirable places to visit, encouraging tourists to explore beyond urban areas.
3. **Tourism Infrastructure Development:** Public initiatives focus on enhancing tourism infrastructure in rural regions. This includes improving road networks, signage, parking facilities, and public amenities to facilitate access and movement within rural areas. Investments are made in the development and maintenance of hiking trails, cycling routes, and other outdoor recreational infrastructure that supports rural tourism activities. Training and
4. **Capacity Building:** Public initiatives provide training and capacity building programs for local communities, tourism providers, and entrepreneurs in rural areas. These programs aim to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver quality tourism services and experiences. Training may cover topics such as hospitality, customer service, sustainable tourism practices, and product development.
5. **Financial Support and Grants:** Public initiatives offer financial support, grants, and incentives to encourage the development of rural tourism. Funding may be provided for infrastructure projects, business startups, product

diversification, marketing campaigns, and sustainable tourism initiatives. These financial incentives help attract investment, stimulate entrepreneurship, and drive innovation in the rural tourism sector.

6. Collaboration and Networking: Public initiatives foster collaboration and networking among stakeholders in the rural tourism sector. This includes facilitating partnerships between tourism providers, local communities, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Collaborative efforts enable the exchange of knowledge, sharing of best practices, and coordination of initiatives for the sustainable development of rural tourism.
7. Policy and Regulation: Public initiatives involve the development of policies, regulations, and guidelines that support and regulate rural tourism activities. These policies aim to ensure the sustainability, quality, and responsible management of rural tourism, taking into account environmental, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

By implementing these public initiatives, Slovakia promotes rural tourism as a valuable component of its overall tourism strategy. The focus is on leveraging the unique assets of rural areas, fostering community engagement, and ensuring the long-term sustainability and economic benefits of rural tourism.

What are the barriers for rural tourism?

While rural tourism in Slovakia has great potential, there are several barriers that can hinder its development and growth. These barriers include:

1. Limited Infrastructure: Some rural regions in Slovakia may have limited infrastructure, including transportation networks, roads, and public facilities. Insufficient infrastructure can make it challenging for tourists to access and explore rural areas, limiting their overall experience.

2. Lack of Marketing and Promotion: Rural areas often face challenges in effectively marketing and promoting their tourism offerings. Limited marketing budgets, lack of awareness, and inadequate promotional activities can make it difficult for rural regions to attract tourists and compete with more established destinations. Seasonality:
3. Seasonal fluctuations can be a significant barrier for rural tourism in Slovakia. Many rural areas rely on specific seasonal activities or natural attractions, which can result in a limited tourist flow outside peak seasons. This can lead to economic challenges and difficulties in maintaining tourism-related businesses throughout the year.
4. Limited Diversification of Activities: To attract a wider range of tourists, rural regions need to diversify their tourism offerings. This can be a challenge if there is a lack of resources or entrepreneurial mindset among local communities. Limited diversification can lead to a narrow range of activities, which may not appeal to a broader tourist base.
5. Skill Gaps and Training Needs: Rural communities and tourism providers may lack the necessary skills and training to deliver high-quality tourism experiences. Training programs and capacity-building initiatives are essential to enhance hospitality, customer service, marketing, and sustainable tourism practices.
6. Funding and Financial Support: Access to funding and financial support can be a significant barrier for rural tourism development. Limited access to capital for infrastructure improvements, business start-ups, marketing campaigns, and product development can hinder the growth of rural tourism initiatives.
7. Limited Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement: Effective collaboration and engagement among stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, tourism organizations, and private enterprises, are crucial for the success of rural tourism. Lack of collaboration and coordination can lead to fragmented

efforts and hinder the overall development of rural tourism.

8. Perception and Image: Some rural areas may face challenges in overcoming negative perceptions or stereotypes associated with rural tourism. Misconceptions about limited amenities, lack of modern facilities, or limited entertainment options can discourage potential tourists from considering rural areas as attractive destinations.

Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including the government, tourism organizations, local communities, and private sector actors. Strategies focusing on infrastructure development, marketing and promotion, capacity building, funding support, diversification of activities, and stakeholder collaboration can help overcome these barriers and unlock the full potential of rural tourism in Slovakia.

Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?

Yes, there are several training needs that are identified as necessary for rural tourism in Slovakia. These training needs aim to enhance the skills and knowledge of various stakeholders involved in rural tourism, including local communities, tourism providers, entrepreneurs, and service providers. Some of the potential training needs for rural tourism in Slovakia include:

1. Hospitality and Customer Service: Training programs focusing on hospitality and customer service are essential to ensure high-quality visitor experiences. This includes topics such as effective communication, cultural sensitivity, guest satisfaction, conflict resolution, and the provision of personalized and memorable service. Sustainable
2. Tourism Practices: Training on sustainable tourism practices is crucial to ensure that rural tourism activities are conducted in an environmentally and

- socially responsible manner. Topics can include waste management, resource conservation, eco-friendly practices, responsible visitor behavior, and the promotion of local culture and heritage.
3. Entrepreneurship and Business Management: Training in entrepreneurship and business management can help local communities and tourism providers develop and operate successful rural tourism businesses. This may cover topics such as business planning, financial management, marketing and branding, product development, and effective business operations.
 4. Marketing and Promotion: Training in marketing and promotion is necessary to effectively promote rural tourism offerings. Topics can include digital marketing, social media strategies, content creation, branding, market research, and the development of tourism packages and itineraries.
 5. Tour Guiding and Interpretation: Training programs for tour guides and interpreters are essential for providing engaging and informative experiences to visitors. This can involve training in storytelling, interpretation techniques, local history and culture, natural and cultural heritage, and guiding best practices.
 6. Food and Beverage Services: Training in food and beverage services is important to enhance the culinary experiences offered in rural tourism. This can include topics such as food preparation and presentation, food safety and hygiene, menu development, local gastronomy, and the promotion of local and sustainable food products.
 7. Language Skills: Developing language skills among tourism providers, especially in popular foreign languages, can facilitate effective communication with international tourists and enhance their experience. Language training programs can focus on English, German, Russian, or other languages depending on the target market.
 8. Digital Skills and Technology: Training in digital skills and technology can help rural tourism stakeholders leverage online platforms, digital marketing tools, reservation systems, and social media to promote their

offerings, engage with customers, and improve overall business operations.

Identifying and addressing these training needs can contribute to the professionalization of rural tourism in Slovakia, improve service quality, enhance visitor satisfaction, and support the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the sector. Public initiatives, tourism organizations, vocational training institutions, and industry associations can collaborate to design and deliver training programs tailored to the specific needs of rural tourism stakeholders.

Characterisation of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists

Please describe the characterisation of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analysing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.

The profile of nature tourists in Slovakia can vary, but there are certain characteristics that are commonly associated with this group. Nature tourists are individuals who are attracted to the natural beauty, biodiversity, and outdoor recreational opportunities that rural areas in Slovakia have to offer. Here is a characterization of the profile of nature tourists in Slovakia:

1. **Nature and Outdoor Enthusiasts:** Nature tourists are typically passionate about nature and outdoor activities. They enjoy exploring and experiencing natural landscapes, such as mountains, forests, lakes, and rivers. They engage in activities like hiking, trekking, cycling, birdwatching, wildlife spotting, fishing, and camping.
2. **Interest in Biodiversity and Conservation:** Nature tourists have a keen interest in biodiversity and conservation. They appreciate the unique flora and fauna of the regions they visit and seek opportunities to learn about and observe the natural environment. They may

participate in eco-tourism activities and support initiatives focused on nature conservation.

3. Cultural and Heritage Appreciation: While nature is a primary draw for these tourists, they also appreciate the cultural and heritage aspects of the destinations they visit. They have an interest in local traditions, rural lifestyles, traditional crafts, and indigenous knowledge related to agriculture, livestock, and forestry.

4. Seek Authentic Experiences: Nature tourists value authenticity and seek experiences that allow them to connect with local communities, traditions, and natural resources. They prefer immersive experiences over mass tourism and enjoy interactions with local residents, learning about traditional agricultural practices, and tasting local cuisine.

5. Environmental Awareness and Responsible Travel: Nature tourists tend to be environmentally conscious and prioritize responsible travel practices. They are mindful of their impact on the environment and seek accommodation, activities, and services that align with sustainable tourism principles. They respect local cultures, minimize waste, and follow Leave No Trace principles.

An example experience analyzing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities in Slovakia:

Internal Environment:

- Strengths: Abundance of natural landscapes, diverse flora and fauna, rich cultural heritage, traditional agricultural practices, local expertise in farming and forestry, potential for agri-tourism experiences.
- Weaknesses: Limited infrastructure, lack of diversification in rural tourism offerings, seasonal fluctuations in activities, limited marketing and

promotion, skill gaps among local communities and service providers.

External Environment:

Opportunities: Growing demand for nature-based tourism experiences, increasing interest in sustainable and authentic travel, potential for collaboration with local farmers and producers, access to EU funding for rural development projects.

Threats: Competition from other destinations, changing weather patterns affecting seasonal activities, environmental degradation, changing consumer preferences and travel trends.

Barriers to the development of economic activity:

- Limited financial resources and access to funding for infrastructure development and business start-ups.
- Lack of awareness and marketing efforts to promote rural tourism offerings.
- Seasonality and fluctuations in visitor numbers, leading to economic challenges.
- Skill gaps and the need for training and capacity building among local communities and tourism providers.
- Limited collaboration and networking among stakeholders.

Overcoming these barriers requires addressing infrastructure gaps, enhancing marketing and promotional efforts, providing financial support and training programs, fostering collaboration, and diversifying rural tourism offerings to attract a wider range of tourists.

3. Overview about the rural tourism in Austria:

What are the local characteristics of rural tourism? (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

More than almost any other sector, Austrian tourism plays an important role as a link between economic, natural and

cultural dimensions: Not only is the tourism and leisure industry one of the most important economic sectors in the country, but it is also closely interwoven with other sectors and thus an essential driver of regional development. At the same time, tourism is a small-structured interconnected economic system: around 90 percent of the companies in tourism and the leisure industry are SMEs.

Numerous sectors such as trade, transport, construction and last but not least agriculture interact with the tourism industry. Tourism is thus much more than a service sector that focuses solely on the demands of its holiday guests. The industry also makes a valuable contribution to the all-embracing quality of life in Austria. For example, in the form of infrastructure, cultural and leisure activities or better local and long-distance public transport. And last but not least, also in connection with agriculture.

The natural and cultural landscape is not a backdrop, but an important component of the tourist offer. The range of typical regional dishes and culinary traditions based on local agricultural production is increasingly becoming the focus of the tourist offer. Thus, the offers in the field of nature education are also increasing.

While recreational tourism was the most important form of tourism for a long time, today it can be said that a variety of types of tourism are represented in Austria, such as cultural and city tourism, wellness and spa tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism or gourmet tourism. Whereas tourism is important in winter as well as in summer - also in rural regions

Specifically, it can be divided into the following sectors:

- Summer tourism: mountain sports and seaside tourism
- Winter tourism
- Cultural tourism
- City tourism
- Congress and other business tourism

- Spa and wellness tourism
- Agri-tourism

The starting point for rural tourism in Austria is excellent. Austria has a large number of lakes and mountains. The wine regions are also a popular tourism hotspot.

As can be seen in the figure below, rural tourism in Austria shows a west-east divide. While the mountain regions are almost entirely dominated by tourism, tourism east of Schladming, for example, is lower, with the exception of some thermal spa regions in eastern Styria and the area around Lake Neusiedl, which has seen large increases in overnight stays in recent years.

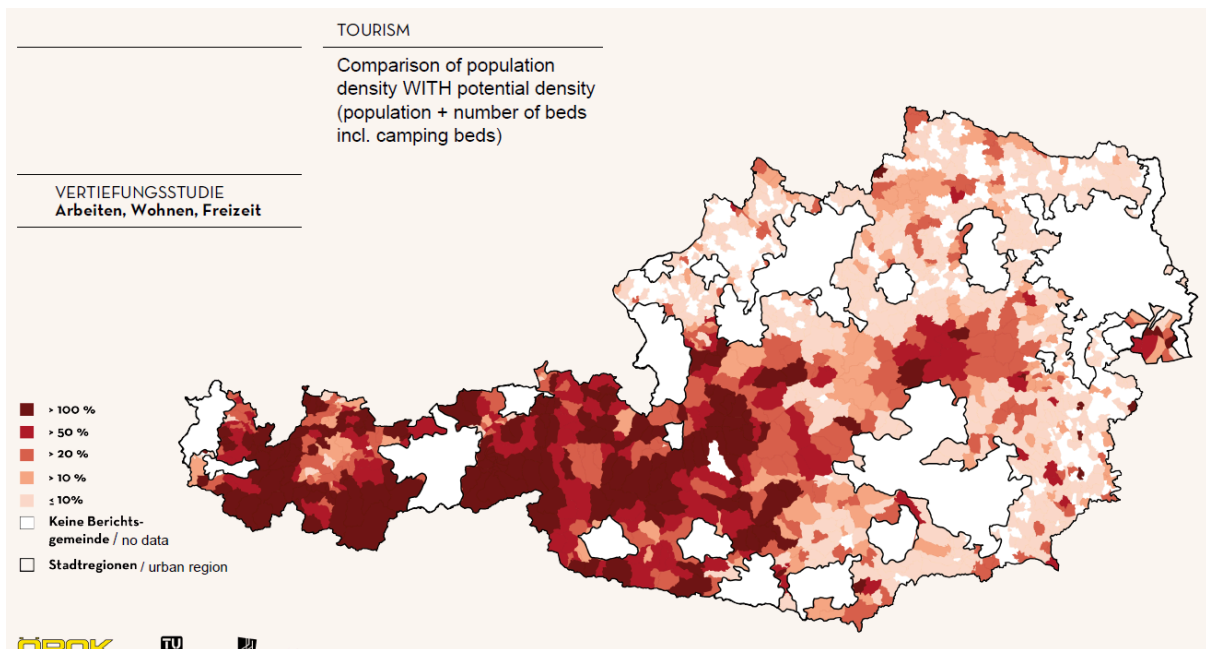


Figure 1: Comparison of population density WITH potential density (population + number of beds)

Austria's Alpine regions are a big draw for outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers. The Austrian Alps offer opportunities for skiing, snowboarding, hiking and mountaineering, while tranquil lakes and picturesque landscapes provide a peaceful backdrop for relaxation and outdoor activities.

What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?

In Austria, tourism is gaining in importance every year, even though there was of course a slump during the pandemic. Around 300,000 people are employed directly or indirectly (full-time equivalent) in the Austrian tourism industry in over 90,000 businesses. With a GDP share of about 16%, the tourism and leisure industry makes a significant contribution to Austria's economic performance. Especially in alpine regions, Austria is dependent on tourism.

With 80.5 million overnight stays, around 67 percent of tourist overnight stays in Austria took place in rural areas in 2017. Urban areas recorded a significantly lower share of tourist overnight stays in 2017, at around 18 percent (22.0 million tourist overnight stays).

Even fewer tourist overnight stays were made in Austrian small towns and suburbs in 2017, which accounted for a share of approximately 15 percent with 18.6 million tourist overnight stays in the same year.

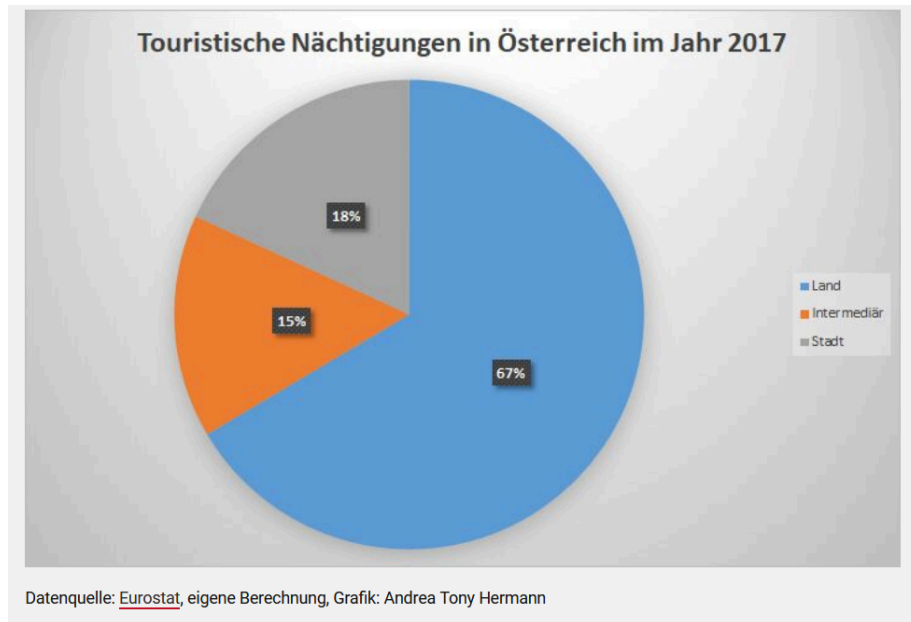


Figure 2 Tourist overnight stays in Austria, blue: country, grey: intermediate, orange: city:

Compared to the EU average, the Austrian value of tourist overnight stays in rural areas is very high. Across the EU, around 38 percent of tourist overnight stays in 2017 were in cities, around 32 percent in small towns and suburbs and only around 30 percent in rural areas.

In the EU country comparison of tourist overnight stays in rural regions, Austria leads the list of EU-28 countries ahead of Greece, Croatia and Denmark. The high share in Austria is due to the Alpine regions (especially Tyrol and Salzburg).

To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?

Rural guest accommodation is a relevant element of the Austrian tourism economy; about every 30th tourist overnight stay in Austria takes place on a farm. Every second overnight stay involves a guest from Germany, which means that rural

guest accommodation is particularly strongly focused on the German market.

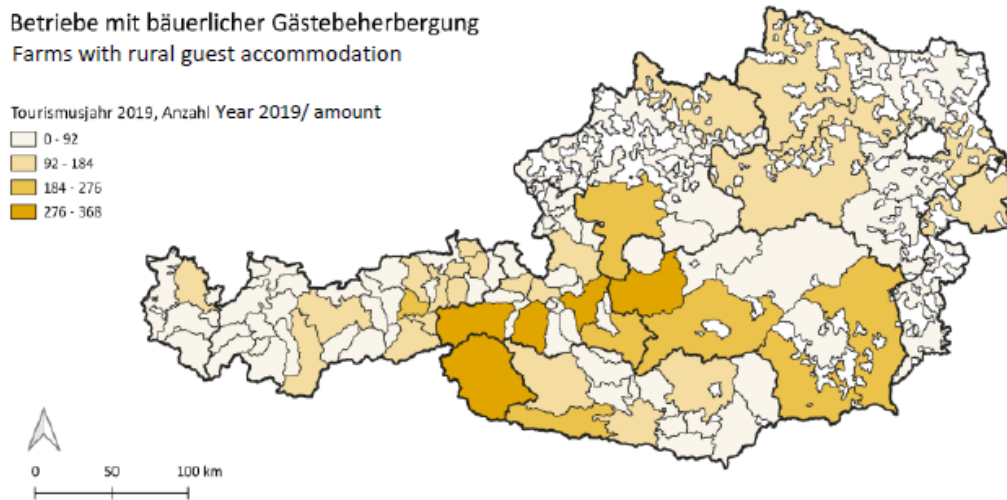


Figure 3 Quelle: Evaluierungsprojekt Cluster Urlaub am Bauernhof

In Österreich sind die touristischen Aktivitäten landwirtschaftlicher Betriebe unter der Bezeichnung Urlaub am Bauernhof (UaB) bekannt. Durch die Gründung des Vereins „Urlaub am Bauernhof“ im Jahr 1991 wurde diese Bezeichnung zu einer qualitätsgeprüften Marke.

The development in the past years has been consistently positive. Furthermore, the situation shows great regional differences. In the period from 2014 to 2019, the number of rural accommodation establishments declined in a large part of the tourism regions, as did the number of related overnight stays. This goes hand in hand with the structural development of agricultural businesses.

Thus, the secondary activity of rural guest accommodation leads to a regular employment of about 4,400 workers and 1,400 irregularly employed workers in UaB enterprises. In other

rural accommodation enterprises it leads to a regular employment of about 10,500 workers and 4,200 irregularly employed workers.

The share of women is about 60 %. Due to the additional demand (e.g. in the regional gastronomy or leisure industry) as well as income-induced effects, rural guest accommodation leads to an additional employment of about 3,400 workers away from the farms (regional employment effects). In total, rural guest accommodation leads to an annual gross value added of about EUR 300 million.

Rural guest accommodation not only contributes to the (at least partial) utilisation of agricultural labour, it also ensures the continued existence of one third of the farms, whereby the importance of secondary tourism activities is particularly pronounced in tourism-intensive regions.

Analyses show that the secondary activity in guest accommodation is of central importance for UaB enterprises. It ensures the survival of one third of the farms - especially in tourism-intensive regions. In addition, it is responsible for more than 40 % of the income of the B&Bs on average. The share of income largely corresponds to the labour input, i.e. the labour productivity in guest accommodation largely corresponds to that of the main activity. For women, the share of work in guest accommodation is above average.

The broad tourism offer of the farms is to be considered essential. This is based on the resources of the farm and increases the attractiveness of the product agrotourism.

Several effects of agrotourism go hand in hand with the main task of accommodating tourists:

- Culture and customs are brought into focus
- The new tasks on the farm contribute to job creation.
- Because of diversification, new products and offers are often developed within the framework of the quality certificate.

- Tourists boost direct sales, as they not only spend the night on the farm, but also consume or buy the farm's own products.
- Positive changes in the daily life of the family members of the farm, as agrotourism contributes to the increase of the social status of the farm family.
- The changes in the economic and social sphere in rural areas lead to an increased appearance of women in agriculture.

What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?

In general, a trend towards "proximity tourism" can be observed in rural tourism. Above all, the focus is shifting to regional food shopping.

Digitalisation has also found its way into tourism. On the one hand, this concerns advertising, but also tourist offers directly in the regions.

New offer in the mountain areas: New sports and trends are emerging in some regions. For example, mountain biking downhill is becoming more and more important in some areas of Salzburg. In Saalbach, for example, the largest bike region in Austria has been established. More than 90 km of lines & trails and 9 mountain railways on 7 mountains provide boundless biking experiences. On the one hand, an alternative can be offered in winter when there is a lack of snow, and in summer the establishments are fully booked.

Farm holidays: this form of holiday will continue to be pursued and expanded.

Nature education: Nature mediators try to work more closely with tourism businesses to present the special features of the regions. In the area of the national parks, national park rangers enable better visitor guidance.

Regionality: especially in rural tourism, more and more emphasis is being placed on the special features in the

region. Old traditions are reactivated and regional products are used in catering.

Camping: During the pandemic, camping in Austria got a boost again. - This also applies to offers directly on farms. There are now several platforms that arrange camping sites on farms.

<https://www.schauaufsland.com> ,

<https://www.urlaubambauernhof.at/de/erlebnisse/camping-hund/camping>

On the one hand, this enables farmers to earn a direct income through rentals, and on the other hand, guests usually also buy products from direct marketing.

Culinary offers: Some regions focus in particular on regional speciality. Especially worth mentioning here are the wine regions in Austria

Seasonal cultural events in rural regions: Many regions offer concerts, operas or caberets during the summer months. This offers artists the opportunity to be active during the summer, as many theatres close during the summer in the cities. There is an additional offer for the REgions. E.g. concerts in quarries, on lake stages, in castles

Which economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism activities can be announced?

Rural tourism is already very widespread in Austria. However, an east-west divide is noticeable. Especially popular are regions with specific characteristics. (mountains, lakes). Some regions have special features regarding their agricultural production: e.g. wine regions.

- The following trends will become even more important in the futureTrend towards sustainability
- Focus on regional products
- Development of new offers, also to mitigate the effects of climate change

To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?

Austrian tourism is very strongly supported by the association Österreich Werbung. Its budget is made up of membership fees from the members of the association, the Republic of Austria, represented by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economics, and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, as well as contributions from the tourism industry in the context of participation in specific marketing activities. The association's task is to promote Austria as a holiday destination. With its 21 locations, Österreich Werbung is currently working on 27 markets of origin and, in cooperation with AUSSENWIRTSCHAFT AUSTRIA, on a further 8 potential markets.

In the field of agri-tourism, there are special support schemes via the CAP. In the LE 14-20 programme, the strengthening of agricultural enterprises with tourism offers was supported within the framework of various measures. Here, the aim was to strengthen the diversification of the farms towards tourism services; in addition, cooperation is supported via a special funding line "Cooperation of small economic operators with regard to tourism services" and "Establishment and operation of clusters". The overarching objectives of the measure and the respective project type are to create and secure jobs in rural areas and to make a proactive contribution to the sustainable development of rural areas. Similar approaches are also included in the new funding period.

Currently, the embedding of UaB enterprises in regional networks - apart from the UaB association - in connection with their secondary activities in guest accommodation (e.g. in regional tourism initiatives) is primarily characterised by personal networks and regional specificities; an institutionalised exchange with all regional tourism associations or other initiatives for regional development does not take place.

At regional level, rural regions in particular benefit greatly from Leader projects. In this way, the region can be made more attractive and innovations can be implemented.

What are the barriers for rural tourism?

With regard to barriers, a distinction must be made in Austria between regions that are well developed for tourism (Alpine region and lake regions).

One problem of tourism in rural areas can be seen in the often poor accessibility. Public transport is not developed enough for the specific region and is often inappropriately timed.

The status quo of tourism mobility in rural areas shows that cars, motorbikes and motorhomes/caravans play the primary role, accounting for 83% of the main means of transport for travel between 2011 and 2018. However, it is precisely this individual transport that conflicts with the sustainable development of tourism and the sought-after travel motives such as intact nature and recreation.

The consequences caused by traffic range from noise and pollutant emissions to land consumption and fragmentation to emissions of climate-damaging gases and have a negative impact on people and the environment. Consequently, a shift in tourism mobility in rural areas from individual transport to public transport is necessary. However, the mobility offers of many rural regions are not or not sufficiently geared to the needs of tourists, which is why holistic concepts consisting of a combination of push and pull factors are needed to enable or accelerate a shift.

An environmentally friendly, holistic and demand-oriented mobility concept that takes into account the needs of tourists can not only reduce environmental and health impacts, but also contribute to the provision of public services and social participation by offering a more comprehensive range of services that could be co-financed by tourism.

In some places, the recreational path network with hiking, cycling, riding and water paths is insufficiently developed. In less touristic regions, the lack of infrastructure in terms of catering establishments such as restaurants or shops can also be a problem.

The intensification of agriculture, especially in favourable areas, can also have a negative effect on the tourism industry. In mountain areas, the abandonment of alpine farming is a problem for tourism, as cultivated cultural landscapes are lost: idyllic alpine pastures with cattle and sheep, meadows become overgrown and forested.

Climate change is also a major challenge for winter tourism. Last year showed that a lack of snow can also occur in supposedly snow-sure regions. Without artificial snow, skiing would be possible in very few regions. In terms of sustainability, however, snow production must be questioned, even if great efforts are made to keep the use of resources as low as possible.

The corona virus has had a negative impact on tourism in recent years.

The shortage of labour is becoming an increasingly urgent problem, especially in tourism - particularly in rural areas. According to the Chamber of Commerce, 30,000 additional people are currently needed. This also applies to the alpine huts needed for soft tourism in summer.

Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?

Tourism is currently characterised by a strong shortage of skilled workers. There are different training paths to become active in tourism. These range from apprenticeships to higher schools.

In the agricultural sector, the Organisation Urlaub am Bauernhof offers various advisory services and training courses.

The Economic Development Institute of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber offers a wide range of further education programmes. These range from gastronomic topics, marketing topics, languages, tourist guide activities to the culture of complaints.

In the field of nature education, there are different providers throughout Austria. The Austrian-wide platform for nature education, which is coordinated by the university college of agrarian and environmental pedagogy, provides a uniform certification and quality management.

Characterisation of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists

Please describe the characterisation of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analysing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.

People and their motivations to holiday in rural areas vary.

The following characteristics apply to many:

- **Enjoying nature:** Outdoor activities, biodiversity, cultivated cultural landscape
- **Sports opportunities in rural areas:** Winter sports such as skiing, cross-country skiing etc., cycling, swimming, sailing, surfing, horse riding...
- **Prefer individual tourism:** no mass tourism,
- **Sustainable holiday:** shorter journey
- **High recreational value:** relaxing, calmer environment
- **Culinary quality:** regional Specialities

Example 1

Farm Holiday: Moar zu Lessach hut <http://www.moar-lessach.at/>

typical agricultural dairy farm in a nature park. The farm is run on a full-time basis, and a hut is also rented out for tourists.

Internal environment:

Streghts: Varied landscape, nature park, hiking possibilities, not far from the nearest ski area, secluded location/no neighbours, possibility to get to know a farm, traditional but comfortable furnishings in the house "cottage flair", but comfort like dishwasher and sauna, Possibility to get fresh milk in the barn every day, Sale of farm products, WIFI, own garden, promotion via the platform "Holiday on a farm"

Weeknesses: few indoor attractions nearby /rain programme, Arrival by public transport is not possible, resaurants and supermarkets cannot be reached on foot, no childcare facilities, No catering facilities

External Environment:

Opportunities: Growing demand for nature-based tourism experiences, increasing interest in sustainable and authentic travel, Additional income besides agricultural production

Threats:

Very high safety requirements that have to be met on the farm

Difficulties in getting additional staff to clean the hut.

4. Overview about the rural tourism in Romania:

What are the local characteristics of rural tourism? (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

Romania has a favorable natural environment rural tourism purposes, and thus has the opportunity to act in the direction of preparation and promoting rural tourism offers to be aligned to international standards.

Because rural tourism is based on the characteristics of rural space and represent a desideratum of the existing socio-economic interests at the local level, the factors of influence on this type of tourism can be structured and that the bio-psychosocial factors, such as:

- modern Trend underscores the need to lead a healthy life, the concept is one of utmost topicality, rural areas are favorable to carrying out leisure activities, nature walks, cycling, climbing, etc., the countryside is considered the healthiest, tonifica^nd body through clean air, unpolluted, quiet living environment devoid of major stress conditions;

- -It is very beneficial for children. This environment is conducive to health, children, vigorita^t,ii through both natural and nutrition through the link designed with nature, with an important role in shaping their formation, personality.

- Charged atmosphere of tranquility and peace, the stress, the rhythm of the city accelerated are the elements that have favored the orientation of tourists towards the place that offers the peace and tranquility much desired.

Any household that wants to enter the agrotourism circuit must first be assessed, and in possession of a certificate of conformity, certificate showing that a plurality of conditions requested.

At the moment, in Romania there are mainly two types of tourist structures of accommodation that are found in rural areas: touristic pensions and agrotouristic:

- touristic pensions – are structures of reception for tourists that offer the hosting and serving of the meal; they can make available between 3 and 20 rooms, operating in the homes of the owners or in real estate who are independent, who can provide and means of leisure;
- boarding houses agro – tourist structures with the same functions as the guest house, having 3 and 10 of the rooms, in the same housing with the owner which ensures all the raw materials and food from their own resources or local.

The demand for practice rural tourism was increased from year to year as a result of changing conditions of life and mentalities regarding practicing forms of tourism including tourist presence in nature and active participation of the implementation of specific operations.

Romania has a rich natural and cultural potential in rural areas, which is a great advantage for attracting tourists to rural tourism and agro-tourism.

Increasing interest in rural tourism development and agro-tourism in Romania is based on:

- hospitality offered to tourists in rural areas by hosts (mountain areas, protected areas, traditional villages, agro-tourism, cultural heritage, wellness and relaxation)
- preserving traditions, customs and their valorization within the rural areas and agro-tourist boarding houses in Moldova, Apuseni, Bucovina, Maramures, Transylvania, Dobrogea, including the Danube Delta;
- the existence in many rural areas of traditional activities, a low degree of industrialized activities and pollution;

- existence of natural resources unaltered by industrial activity;
- the high quality of the services offered as well as the authentic, natural and traditional products and preparations offered within the agro-tourist boarding houses;
- possibility for tourists to participate in the activities within the household and to get in touch with the style and way of life specific to the Romanian rural areas;
- existence of associations working in the field of rural tourism and agro-tourism, which aim at developing this form of tourism, guaranteeing the quality and authenticity of rural products and services.

What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?

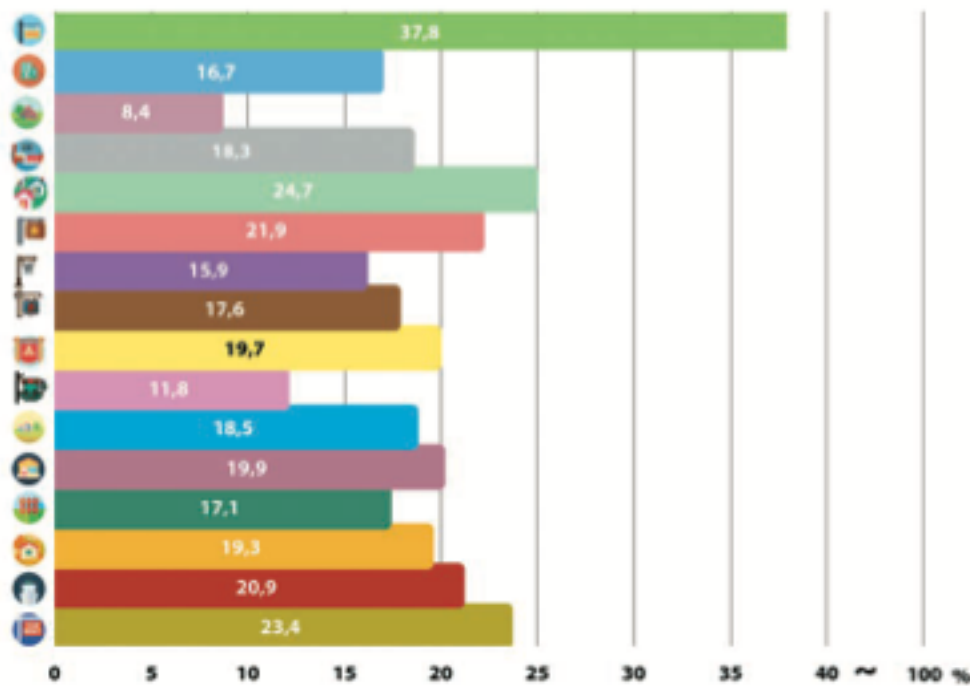
Tourism is an important sector of the economy of Romania. In 2019, tourism directly contributed RON 31.6 billion to Romania's economy, equating to 3.0% of total GDP. The sector directly supported 412 649 jobs, representing 6.3 % of total employment in Romania. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic saw tourism employment fall to 393 427 jobs in 2020, or 6.1% of the workforce.

International arrivals at the border totalled 5.0 million in 2020, a decrease of 61% when compared to 2019. International nights in registered accommodation declined by 81.1% to 1.0 million in 2020. An initial recovery in 2021 saw international nights return to 1.8 million, an increase of 83.7% compared to 2020. However, this remained 65.4% below the 2019 level. Romania's main source markets in 2020 were Germany, Italy, and France based on arrivals in accommodation units.

In 2021, domestic tourism remained a driver of recovery, totalling 19 million nights and 91.2% of total nights in accommodation establishments. After falling 44.4% in 2020, domestic tourists (in all accommodation types) recorded 8.5 million tourists in 2021, 20.2% below pre-pandemic levels.

Rural tourism occupies in 2022 roughly 28% out of the total touristic capacity in Romania.

Net use indices of the tourist accommodation capacity in use, by type of establishments of tourists' reception with functions of tourists' accommodation, in 2022





In Romania, the agro-tourism can contribute to sustainable development in rural areas through:

- sustainable use of tourism resources and maintaining the natural, cultural and social diversity of rural areas;
- integration of agro-tourism into national and local development planning and strategy;
- supporting local economies in the social and economic development of the community, but also in protecting nature and cultural values;
- development and promotion of local tourist offer.

After 1990, rural tourism started to develop in Romania. The core was the Moieciu-Bran area, and then the phenomenon spread throughout the country, as tourists began to prefer unpolluted air and tranquility in rural areas instead of hotels (Bran et al, 1997, p.128). Thus, the facilities for the development of rural tourism in the mountain area, the Danube Delta and the Black Sea coast were started.

The Romanian village is an original tourist product that generates tourist flows because it is based on:

- a wide range of natural and cultural resources;
- various tourist facilities and tourist experiences;
- traits of the specificity and uniqueness of our country: people, history, culture, traditions and customs.

The development of private property in Romania has led to an increase in accommodation capacity in agro-tourist boarding houses. Thus, according to the data in table no. 1, there is an increase in the number of accommodation places of the agro-tourist boarding houses from 9405 in 2004 to 30480 in 2014, which represents a growth of 3.4 times. This increase is due to the demand for holidays in rural areas of Romania, especially the demand from foreign tourists.

From 2004 until 2014, the trend of increasing accommodation capacity in agro-tourist boarding houses has been maintained, even during the economic crisis of 2007-2011.

This growth is based on investments made in rural areas in order to start a family business as a source of permanent income generated by rural tourism or as an additional income from agro-tourism.

If we consider the total accommodation capacity, there is only an increase of 12.8% in 2014 compared to 2004, when in the case of accommodation places (number of beds) in agro-tourist boarding houses and rural tourist boarding houses, there was an increase of 224%. This highlights the higher dynamics recorded by the rural tourism segment, including agro-tourism, in Romania.

However, this superior development in the case of rural tourism and agro-tourism does not indicate a mass tourism that contravenes the principles of sustainable tourism. This is evidenced by the data in.

In 2004, the accommodation in rural tourist boarding and agro-tourist boarding houses accounted for only 3.41% of the total existing accommodation capacity in Romania compared to 9.8% in 2014. It should also be noted that in Romania, accommodation is also carried out in the homes of the locals, without this being included officially in the tourist circuit. Therefore, the segment of rural tourism and agro-tourism is higher than that recorded in the statistical data, which means

that rural tourism and agro-tourism represent a strong motivation among tourists, especially foreigners.

- Rural tourism and ecotourism are economic activities supported by the European policy for rural development and nature conservation, being considered on the one hand possibilities for diversification of the rural economy, and on the other hand important sources of income for the administrations of protected areas.
- • In the case of Romania, the importance of the resources, although very rich and diversified, for the development of tourism in general and of rural tourism and ecotourism in particular is relatively low, as long as they are not integrated into competitive tourist products, alongside basic tourist services and complementary, adapted to the specifics of resources and individualized by local characteristics
- • The low degree of use of the tourist capacity (below 15%), the short duration of the stay (two days) and the low proportion of foreign tourists are the most important challenges for the development of rural tourism and ecotourism in Romania
- • The general infrastructure and the level of development have an important effect on tourism
- • In the development of ecotourism development strategies, adaptation to local conditions, the implementation of zoning works, ensuring accessibility using low-polluting means of transport, the expansion of research into ecotourism products or their various components must be taken into account.
- • Tourist circulation trends allow the establishment of agro and ecotourism guesthouses either through new constructions or through the transformation of existing

ones using the financial resources made available through the National Rural Development Program

To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?

What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?

Romania is one of the most biodiverse countries in Europe. The 27 national and natural parks, the Natura 2000 network and the cultural and historical heritage make this country an ideal ecotourism destination.

Through the Association of Ecotourism

The network of ecotourism destinations in Romania

An **ecotourism destination** is a micro-region with remarkable natural and cultural assets, where sustainable tourism can be conducted, offering integrated experiences with minimal environment impact, by aggregating a network of complementary ecotourism service providers under the same common marketing and development strategy.

The areas most suitable for ecotourism are, however, among the least developed in Romania, with low revenues, no economic opportunities and, many times, jeopardized by an “industrial” approach to development: deforestation, mass tourism or other activities that place nature and the unique values of the area at risk.



To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?

There are just dispersed small local initiatives done mainly by public authorities that initiate rural tourism promotion. There is no coherent initiatives done at a national scale on rural tourism.

What are the barriers for rural tourism?

Rural tourism and agro-tourism represent a very important form of tourism for Romania, which contributes to the satisfaction of the tourism motivations specific to this tourist segment and also represents an alternative offered to the local communities to obtain an income.

Therefore, for its development it is necessary to consider:

- general infrastructure that negatively affects this form of tourism;
- inappropriate legislation in the field that does not provide enough facilities to local communities;
- infusion in rural areas of elements specific to urban tourism, which affect the specific characteristics of rural tourism and agro-tourism.
- Reduced mobility - infrastructure, trails, public transport to reach rural areas.
- Low quality of life for the local communities and access to fair payed jobs that lead to the abandonment of rural areas in search of higher salaries in urban areas
- Social infrastructure - there is still no access to quality public services services
- Lack of a coherent national strategy for developing and promoting rural tourism
- Development of the institutional capacity for the absorption of European funds
- Stimulating entrepreneurship for young people from rural areas
- Preservation of rural cultural heritage
- Development of authentic rural tourism products
- Availability of information on rural tourism and ecotourism destinations
- Promotion on the international market

In Romania, rural settlements with a tourist function, namely tourist villages, are not homologated and legalized by legislation, therefore they have not been identified, organized, arranged and promoted. In the rural area only the rural tourist boarding houses is promoted, without mentioning the ethnographic area it belongs to. Therefore, in many rural areas, rural tourist boarding houses were built without respecting local specific architecture and without the use of environmental friendly building materials. This is very dangerous for rural tourism because it leads to the loss of local identity and the transmission of specific elements of urban settlements.

Consequently, in order to maintain the characteristics specific to the Romanian rural tourism, all measures must be taken to preserve unaltered and to protect the natural and cultural resources specific to rural areas and to establish strategies at central and local level for the promotion of rural tourism and agro-tourism, both internally as well as internationally.

SWOT Rural Tourism and ecotourism in Romania

Strengths

- Tourism representation at the central public authority level
- The national tourism brand almost exclusively promotes tourism products that include services and activities specific to rural tourism and ecotourism, emphasizing wild nature and cultural heritage
- High level of development of tourism associations that ensure the promotion of rural tourism and ecotourism, stimulation of entrepreneurial initiatives
- High-value, diversified and accessible tourist potential (protected areas, forests, cultural landscapes)

- Reduced tourist density in most protected areas and rural areas
- The offer of rural tourism and ecotourism products is in an intense development process that tends to include more and more valuable and unique aspects of rural life, but also of well-preserved nature inside and outside protected areas
- Events organized to keep alive and revive traditions and increase tourist attractiveness
- The administrations of the protected areas have developed ecotourism programs that are available in Călimani, Cheile Bicazului-Hășmas, Comana, Cozia, Domogled-Valea Cernei, Lunca Muresului, Semenic-Cheile Carasului, Vânători-Neamt, Rodnei Mountains

Weaknesses

- Very low degree of use of the tourist capacity, this being used in a proportion of only 13%, varying between 10% in the North-East region and 17% in the West region
- Very poor representation of foreign tourists in tourist traffic (8%)
- The average length of stay is very short, with episodic and insignificant overruns, highlighting an acute lack of complementary services intended to motivate the extension of the stay
- Reduced qualification for tourism of entrepreneurs and their family members, with a significant impact on the quality of services
- Disproportionate representation of regions in rural tourism products, with a concentration in Brasov county

- The non-existent or damaged arrangement of the majority of tourist attractions, with the exception of religious objectives
- Numerous accommodation structures intended for rural tourism and ecotourism are new constructions, whose architecture, size, location, interior design, conception is discordant compared to the traditional local context, aiming to capture the tourism-agriculture segment, motivated by romantic notions regarding rurality, the desire of spectacle, disneyification, myths, legends, rural clichés
- In the protected areas, only tourists with medium incomes are attracted, while in developed countries ecotourism is a form of tourism accepted by the segment with high incomes
- Nature-centered tourism products emphasize the adventure and relaxation component, relying on superficiality and less on education, learning, deep and authentic experiences, respectively the key characteristics of ecotourism products
- Weak connections with international networks for the promotion and distribution of rural and ecotourism products

Opportunities

- The European programs for the promotion of quality and sustainable tourist destinations allow participation in thematic competitions of Romanian rural tourism and ecotourism products
- The emergence of a European tourism policy, which builds competitiveness on the basis of diversification, innovation, professional skills, the extension of the tourist season and the consolidation of the knowledge base.

- Diversification of the rural economy and obtaining income in protected areas have a priority position for tourism in the sphere of solutions, highlighted by the components of specific community policies (rural and environmental development).
- Ecotourism is the form of tourism with the most dynamic evolution, recording annual growth rates of 20%, six times higher than the growth rate of the tourism industry in general.
- The green economy, a strategic vision developed at the UNEP level for the preparation of the Rio+20 high-level conference, which will take place in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, includes investments and the development of ecotourism, emphasizing its role in job creation, community involvement local and poverty reduction.
- In the National Rural Development Program, "Encouraging the diversification of the rural economy and improving the quality of life in rural areas" has an important budget allocation (338.3 million euros) for the creation and diversification of tourist facilities and the development of tourist attractions. The Environmental Sectoral Operational Program through axis 4 and the Regional Operational Program through axis 5 also provide financial resources for investments in rural tourism and ecotourism.

Threats

- The negative image formed internationally for Romania.
- The continuation of illegal forest cutting in the context of an ineffective, corrupt and bureaucratic legal regime, which does not sanction either the owners, the exploiters or the intermediaries.
- Weak awareness, even among the rural population, of the heritage values represented by old buildings, furniture,

costumes, tools and other elements of the traditional rural dowry.

- The high rate of poverty among the rural population, which encourages on the one hand the undervaluation of some heritage elements, and on the other hand discourages entrepreneurial initiative, especially on the part of young people.
- The initiation and consolidation of small and medium enterprises focused on rural tourism and ecotourism is a difficult process, as is accessing European funds.
- Urbanization of the rural environment, by taking over the facilities for living, but without preserving the traditional elements of the buildings (architecture, wood and stone decorations, furniture, flooring, fireplaces and stoves, etc.).
- The international and national economic and financial crisis, the influence of which is highlighted by the unfavorable evolution of key tourism indicators both at the national and regional level
- • Strong international competition and the weakening of the position of European destinations compared to those in North and South America, especially in the ecotourism component

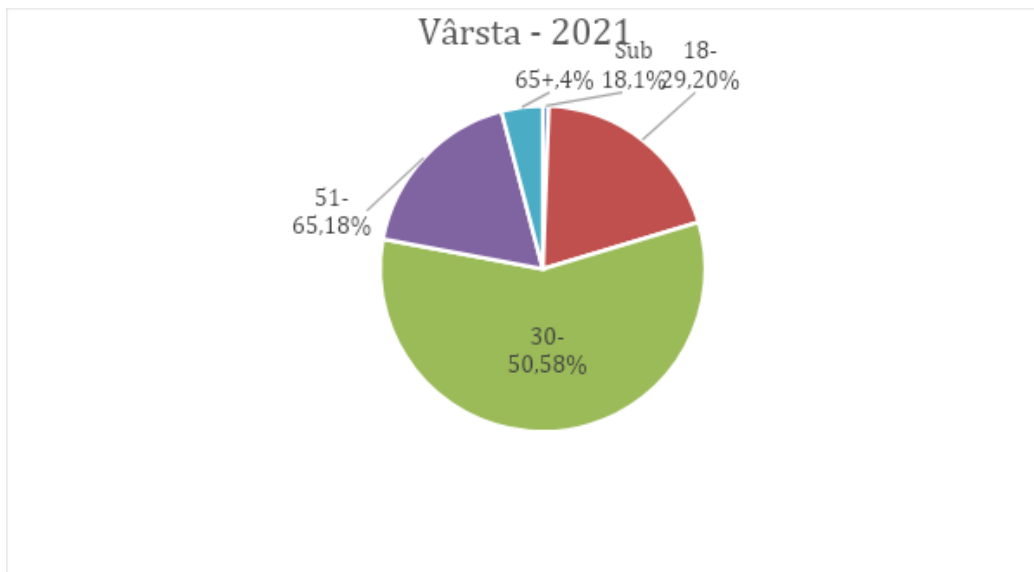
Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?

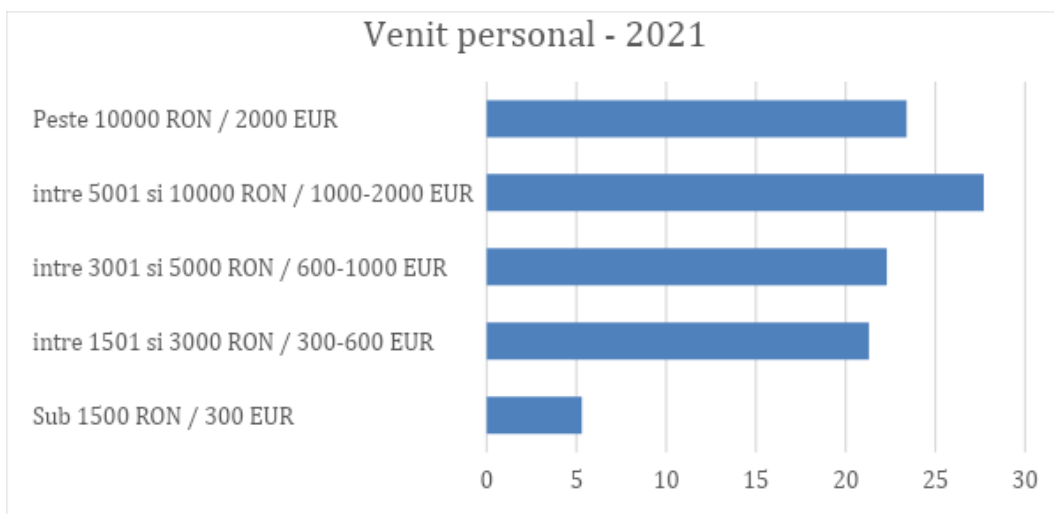
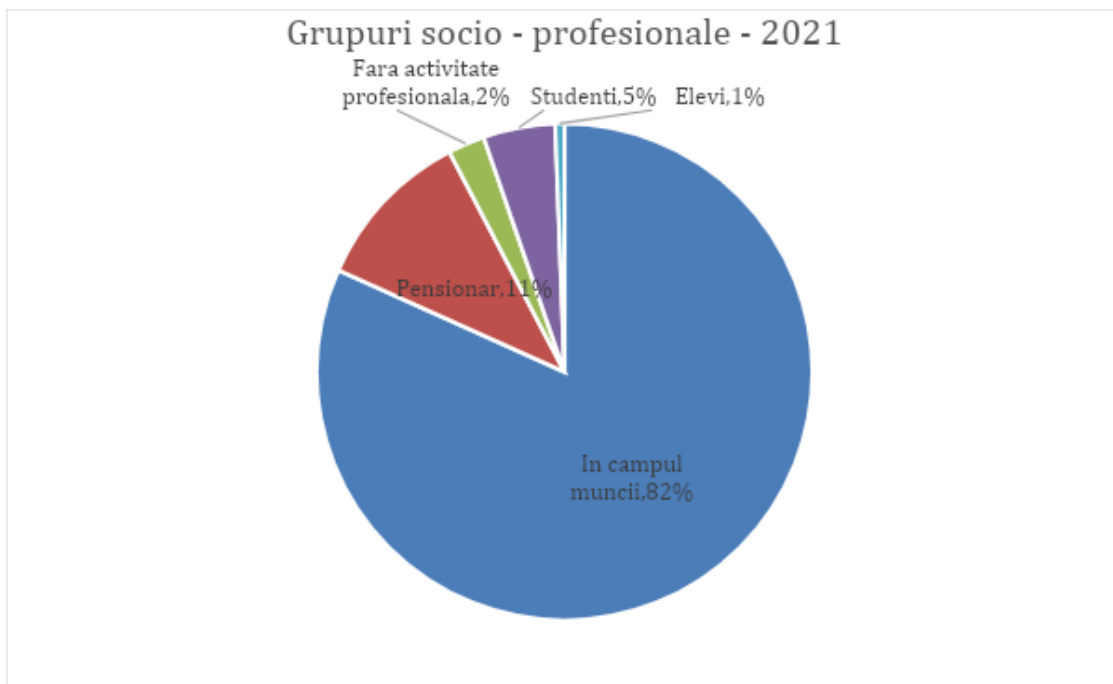
The main training need identified were on the following topics:

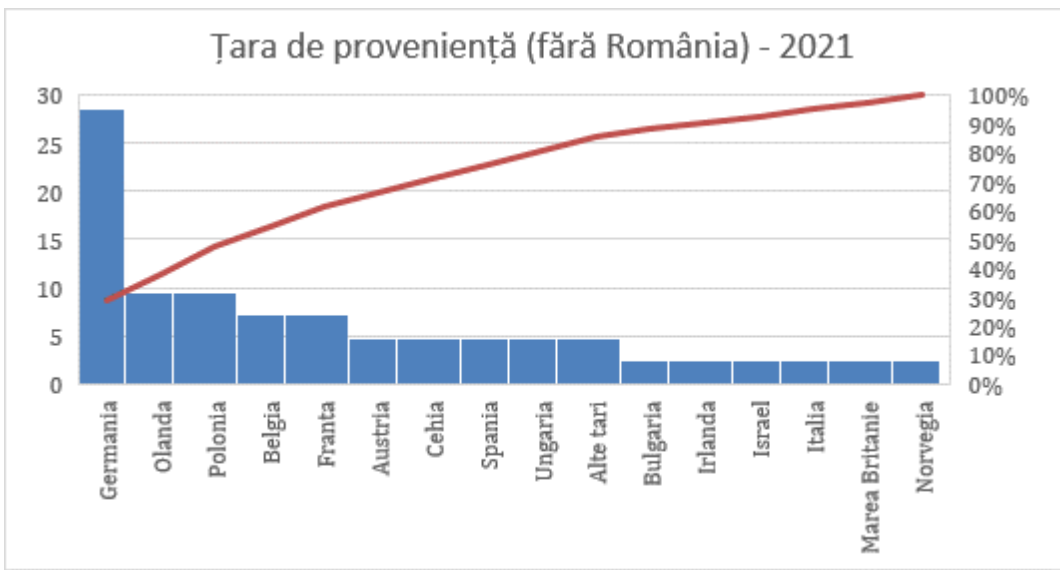
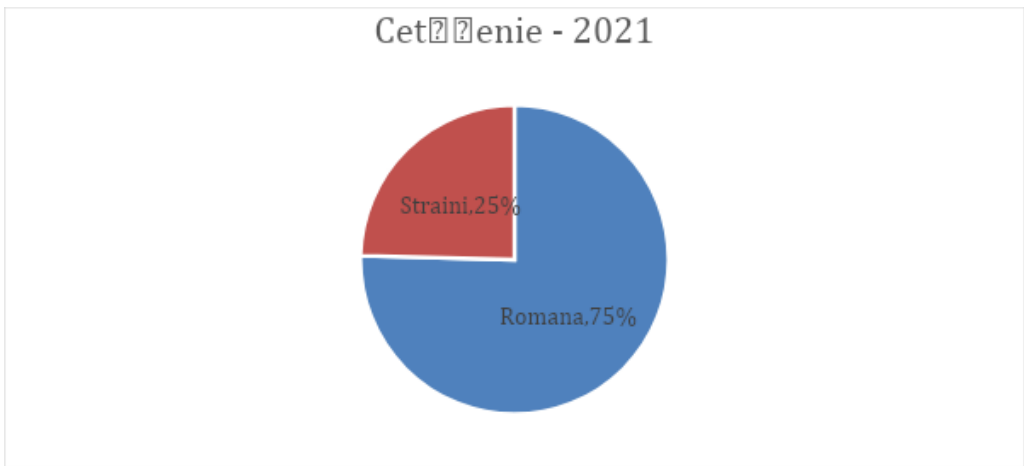
- Establishing and maintaining a local gastronomical point
- Business administration
- Marketing and promoting
- Destination manager

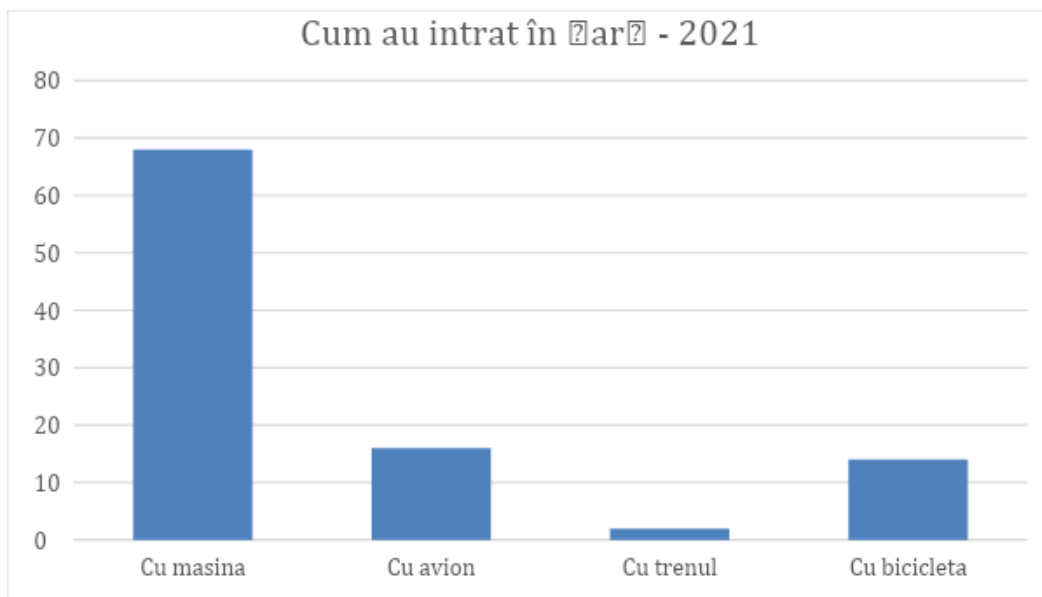
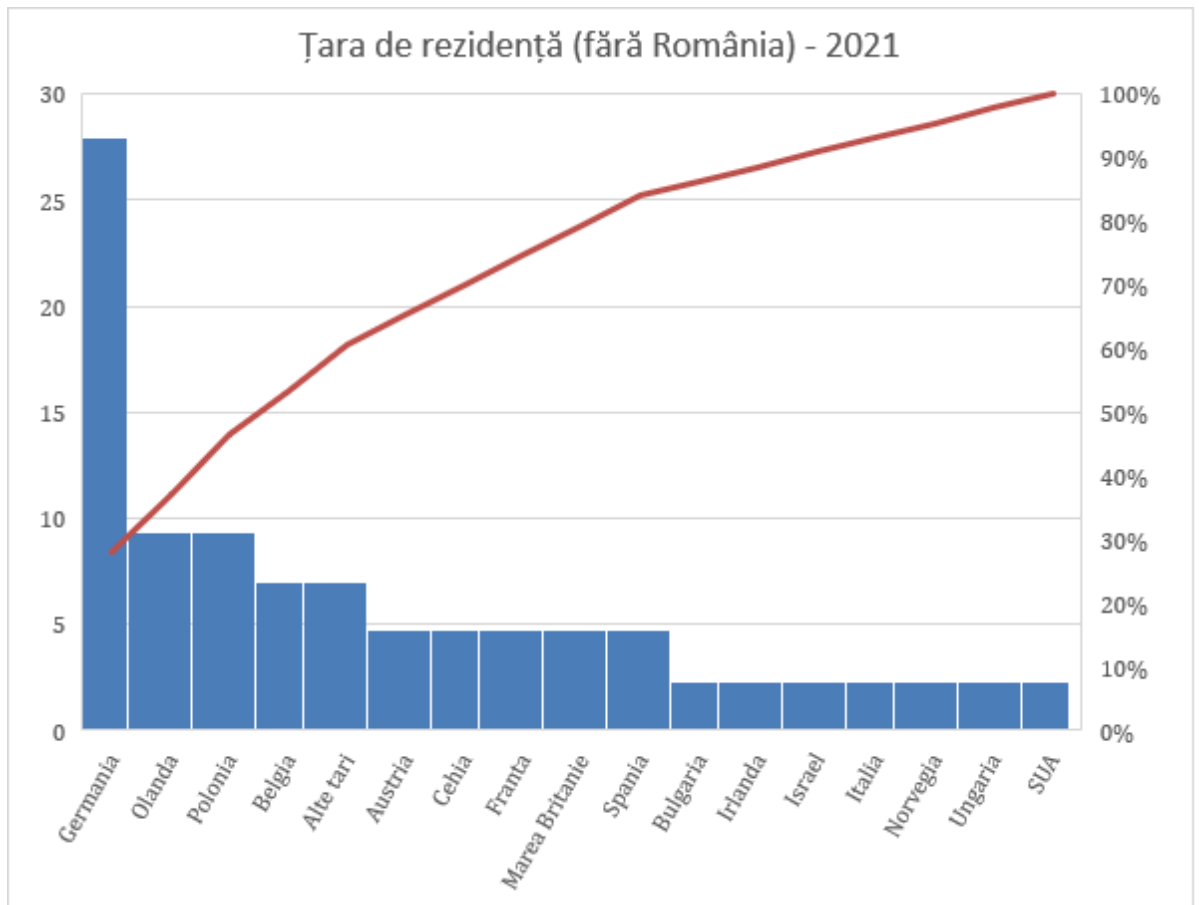
Characterisation of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists

Please describe the characterisation of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analysing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.

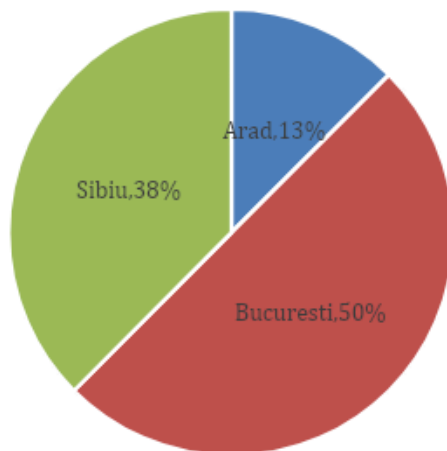




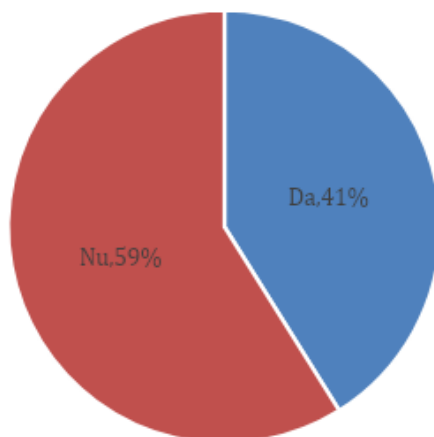




Aeroportul unde au aterizat - 2021



Prima dată în România - 2021



Chapter 2. SWOT analysis of the activity and report on barriers for the development of the activity

CASE STUDY: TRANSILVANIAN
HIGHLANDS IN ROMANIA

Nestled in the heart of Transylvania, Richiș beckons travelers seeking the serene charms of rural life. This picturesque village, graced with rolling hills, vineyard-draped slopes, and timeless farmhouses, offers a welcome respite from the bustle of modernity.

Richiș enchants with its traditional architecture, from ornate wooden gates to colorful facades, a living testament to Romania's rich heritage. It's a living museum where cobblestone streets and quaint cottages narrate stories of generations past.

What sets Richiș apart is its dedication to preserving culture and heritage. Visitors engage in local festivals, crafts workshops, and stay in welcoming guesthouses, forging meaningful connections with the community.

Richiș tantalizes the palate with authentic Romanian cuisine, crafted from locally sourced ingredients, complemented by exquisite regional wines from its vineyards.

Outdoor enthusiasts find solace in Richiș, with hiking, cycling, and birdwatching amid pristine landscapes.

Time slows in Richiș, offering a tranquil escape from the frantic pace of life.

Sustainability is at the core of Richiș' tourism, promoting eco-conscious travel to safeguard nature and traditions.

Explore Richiș and uncover its hidden treasures, cultural delights, and natural wonders—a journey where tradition and countryside beauty unite to create unforgettable memories.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTH

- many stakeholders
- education/language skills
- highly motivated people
- rich cultural and natural resources
- biodiversity hotspot
- digital competences
- quality in business development
- strong international support

S

WEAKNESS

- public transport
- low signal + WiFi
- street dogs and bears
- lack of tourist information and infrastructure
- marketing

W

OPPORTUNITIES

- conservation of old ways
- richness of traditional issues
- sustainable tourism
- willingness to use digital instruments

O

THREATS

- depopulation
- brain drain - youth
- geographical proximity to the war zone
- small FMS are disappearing
- conflict between old ways and development
- mass tourism

T

Chapter 3. Report on the analysis of the potential profile of tourists linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Spain

Type of typical persons or groups:

Spain has the largest and richest biodiversity in Europe, which constitutes a great natural heritage, developing a sustainable tourism model. In addition, the rural environment in Spain represents 85% of the national territory, where 18% of the population lives.

Analyzing the potential profile of tourists in Spain, especially within the context of rural and nature tourism, nature tourists travel motivated by relaxation and fun, and short stays are combined with destinations close to their place of residence. They value positively, the good conservation of the environment and its protection figures. As for foreign tourists, the most attractive activities are mountain, hiking and the enjoyment of nature in general.

The general profile of tourists in Spain is:

- Age between 25 and 45 years for resident tourists and between 45 and 75 years for non-residents.
- Secondary or higher education.
- Medium or high socioeconomic level.
- Travel in company but in small groups.
- Motivated by relaxation and fun. Importance also of sport and learning.
- They combine nature with other aspects of their trip.
- Short stays on weekends, long weekends or holidays, even in autumn and winter. Slightly longer stays for non-resident tourists.
- Overnight stay in places close to the visited area.
- High degree of loyalty to the destinations and activities.
- They practice hiking and walking.

- The value the quality of the environment and the protection figures.
- They organize their trip on their own and hire directly.

Rural tourism in Spain offers a diverse range of local characteristics depending on the region. Here are some common characteristics and activities found in different types of rural areas, we can find different profiles:

1. **"Adventurer-mountaineers"**: interested in mountain areas that offer certain challenges and where more intense sports activities can be practiced. The Spanish geography has unique places for climbing, caving or rafting, as well as a multitude of routes for hiking or trail. The Picos de Europa and Cantabria for its amazing rivers have become a reference for adventure tourism, especially for canoeing and canyoning. Also in the winter months, resorts such as Baqueira-Beret, Jaca, Candanchu or Sierra Nevada welcome thousands of tourists for skiing and snowboarding.
2. **Eco-tourists**: they seek contact with nature, admire the flora, fauna and landscape and, generally, document themselves about the places they are going to visit. They usually make trips to protected areas and wish to learn about nature while respecting its conditions. They seek contact with nature, admire the flora, fauna and scenery and, in general, they document themselves about the places they are going to visit. They often travel to protected areas and want to learn about nature while respecting its conditions. The vast majority of tourists of this type complement these activities with nature photography, making use of "hides" in some areas

to photograph species that are more difficult to observe in other environments.

- a. **National Park tourist profile.** Visitors and rural tourists in these areas are directly linked to nature tourism; There is a strong concentration of demand in the Picos de Europa National Park, where visitors (national and foreign) account for 47% of the total studied. Both national and foreign visitors concentrate their visits to these areas between the months of July and August, taking advantage of the summer vacations, and in March during Holy week. In the National Park of Aigüestortes (Catalonia) and Sierra Nevada (Andalusia) there are peaks of visitors in the winter months, related to snow sports.

- b. **Large mammals watching tourism.** The enjoyment of nature and the observation of species in their natural habitat motivate more and more tourists, becoming another source of economic income and growth for the local population. The large mammals that inhabit Spain are the wolf, the bear and the Iberian lynx, and more and more tourists are coming to their habitats to enjoy the watching of these species. This observation is preferably carried out by men (59%) compared to women (41%). The age group between 35 and 65 years represents 58.9% of the observation tourists, followed by tourists between 18 and 34 years (27%) and in relation to the origin, national tourists come from nearby autonomous communities (Andalusia, Asturias and Castilla y León) and foreign tourists come from Belgium, United Kingdom, France and Holland.

- c. **Birdwatching.** This type of tourism is key for Spain, the majority of tourists are foreigners (35-45%), and come mostly from the United Kingdom, Holland and Germany. Foreign tourists are over 45 years of age (81%), with an average age of 55 years; only 53% have higher education (university, master's or PhD); and they stay more than 6 nights (44%) and between 3-4 nights (31%). The 78% of them use rural tourism infrastructures (rural hotel or rural house), complementing the observation activity with cultural (79%) and gastronomic (73%) activities; with a budget of between 50-100 €/day (50%) or 101-150 €/day (41%). The national ornithological tourist is younger, with an age range between 30 and 45 years (71%) and an average age of 42 years; employed and beginner in the activity (46%); with a higher level of education (university, master or doctorate) (80%); they tend to be trips without overnight stays (54%) or 3-4 nights (22%). In these trips, the most common types of accommodation used were hostels, camper vans or friends' houses (47%).
- d. **Campers:** encompass a broad spectrum of behaviors, seeking to spend time in nature to experience the tranquility and leisure opportunities it offers.
- e. **"Occasional nature tourists":** these are considered to be visitors who pass through a natural area because of its prestige or because they are in its vicinity. They are looking for spectacular and

well-known sites, but have little information about the place visited.

- f. **"Student and senior groups:** trips organized with different objectives depending on the groups. In the case of students, they seek knowledge and perception of natural areas, while in the case of the elderly, they seek to enjoy the landscape and natural beauty.

3. **Cultural and Heritage tourists:** As a destination for cultural tourism, Andalusia (2.7 million trips), Madrid (1.2 million trips), Castilla y León (1.1) and Catalonia (1) top the ranking. There are different cultural attractions such as: museums (El Prado in Madrid, Guggenheim in Bilbao), numerous castles in Castilla y León and Castilla La Mancha, and provinces with great cultural heritage, such as Seville, Granada, Córdoba, Toledo, León, Burgos, Barcelona, etc.

- a. **Gastronomic and enological tourism:** the tourism associated with the world of gastronomy and wine by non-residents is, in many cases, a complementary attraction to other main travel motivations. Within Europe, Poland, Italy, Belgium and Switzerland stand out proportionally, and outside Europe, especially the Latin American countries, Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. While in Europe 20% of tourists engaged in food and wine activities (ranging from 15% of the British to 30% of the Poles), in the USA it was 40% and in Mexico it reached 60%. The profile of the gastronomic and wine tourists who come to Spain for leisure and vacations is

attracted by culture. They arrive without hiring a tourist package, they stay in hotels or with friends, and their stay is short. They have a high or medium-high purchasing power, travel alone or as a couple, and are under 45 years of age.

4. **Sun and beach tourism:** 8000 kilometers of coastline, and many hours of sunshine, are two aspects that attract tourists visiting Spain, being one of the most important types of tourism in the country.

The areas where travelers are concentrated to enjoy their vacations in summer are mostly sun and beach destinations such as: Andalusia, the Balearic Islands, Valencia, Catalonia, Asturias, Aragon, Galicia, Cantabria, the Canary Islands and the Basque Country.

Please describe based on statistic data the typology of tourists in rural regions:

Mountain areas

The tourists visiting mountain areas are adventurous and sporty, preferring hiking and trail running, as well as mountain biking and rock climbing, and in winter they prefer snowboarding.

The accommodation is in mountain lodges, rural cottages and eco-friendly hotels.

Agricultural plains

The tourists do different activities like farm visits, agricultural experiences (harvesting, cheese-making, wine production), horseback riding, etc.

The accommodation is in farm stays, agritourism establishments, rural bed and breakfasts.

Historical villages

The tourists visit the cultural and historical monuments and archaeological sites, traditional crafts workshops.

The accommodation is in historic guesthouses, restored traditional houses and boutique hotels.

State, which types of destinations are used by following persons (e.g. farm-holidays, small hotels, wellness offers, camping, training or conference centers)

families	couples	Groups	singles
Farm-Holidays	Apartments	Camping	Apartments
Hotels	Wellness offers	Training or conference centers	Wellness offers
Apartments	Camping	Hostel	Friend's house
Camping	Friend's house		Hostel

Observations:

In summary, the preferences for accommodations and activities among various traveler types—families, couples, groups, and singles—in rural settings can be characterized by their unique interests and needs:

- Families tend to look for places to relax and have activities for children, experiences in the mountains, on farms or at the beach, where there are a variety of options. For this reason, farm vacations and camping are

popular options, as are hotels with entertainment and apartments in quiet areas.

- Couples tend to prefer more intimate settings, such as apartments and wellness offers, although adventurous couples also look for accommodations such as camping. Many couples, who travel in rural settings, stay with friends.
- Groups often opt for accommodations that can support their activities, such as camping, training or conference centers for structured meetings, and hostels for shared nature experiences.
- Singles are looking for safe environments, but in search of meeting other travelers, for this, they prefer apartments, hostels or even wellness retreats; also a large part opt to visit friends and stay at their home.

In all the types described above, tourists choose their destination according to the experience they want to live and the environment that best suits their preferences, whether it is adventure tourism, cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism or even simply to relax.

Sources:

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- <https://conocimiento.tourspain.es/es/perfil-viajero/>
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Slovakia

Type of typical person or groups:

Analyzing the potential profile of tourists in Slovakia, especially within the context of rural and nature tourism, involves identifying various segments of travelers who are most likely to be attracted to the unique offerings of the country. Here, we categorize these profiles into types of typical persons or groups, each with distinct interests and motivations for visiting Slovakia's rural areas.

1. Adventure Seekers

- **Description:** These individuals or groups are drawn to Slovakia for its outdoor adventure opportunities. They are typically young to middle-aged, active, and looking for physical challenges and adrenaline-pumping activities.
- **Interests:** Hiking, mountain biking, skiing, rock climbing, white-water rafting.
- **Motivations:** To explore natural landscapes, experience extreme sports, and test their physical limits.

2. Eco-tourists

- **Description:** Environmentally conscious and interested in sustainable travel, eco-tourists seek to minimize their ecological footprint while learning about conservation efforts.
- **Interests:** Wildlife observation, birdwatching, visiting national parks and protected areas, participating in conservation projects.
- **Motivations:** To connect with nature, contribute to environmental conservation, and support sustainable tourism practices.

3. Cultural and Heritage Tourists

- **Description:** This group is attracted by Slovakia's rich cultural heritage and history. They are often older, value educational experiences, and have a keen interest in exploring local traditions, architecture, and historical sites.
- **Interests:** Visiting castles, museums, historic villages, participating in cultural festivals, exploring archaeological sites.
- **Motivations:** To learn about Slovakia's history and cultural heritage, experience local customs and traditions.

4. Wellness and Health Tourists

- **Description:** Individuals seeking relaxation, wellness treatments, and a break from the stress of daily life. This group includes both younger and older tourists, often with a focus on health and wellness.
- **Interests:** Spa and wellness centers, thermal baths, yoga retreats, detox programs.
- **Motivations:** To rejuvenate, seek healing and relaxation, and enjoy Slovakia's natural thermal springs and wellness facilities.

5. Food and Wine Enthusiasts

- **Description:** Tourists with a passion for gastronomy and local cuisines. They are interested in tasting and learning about local food and beverage production, including Slovakia's wines.
- **Interests:** Wine tasting, cooking classes, farm-to-table dining experiences, food festivals.
- **Motivations:** To explore Slovakia's culinary traditions, discover local ingredients, and enjoy unique dining experiences.

6. Families Seeking Educational Vacations

- **Description:** Families with children looking for a mix of fun and educational experiences. They prioritize safe, engaging, and informative vacations.
- **Interests:** Interactive museums, wildlife parks, educational trails, family-friendly hiking, and outdoor activities.
- **Motivations:** To spend quality family time, educate children about nature and culture in an engaging way.

7. Solo Travelers Seeking Authentic Experiences

- **Description:** Independent travelers interested in immersive experiences and deeper connections with local communities and cultures.
- **Interests:** Homestays, language learning, volunteering, participating in local crafts and traditions.
- **Motivations:** To experience personal growth, learn new skills, and have authentic interactions with locals.

8. Retirees and Seniors

- **Description:** Older adults, often retired, looking for relaxed and accessible travel experiences. They tend to prefer comfortable accommodations and are interested in cultural and natural attractions without the physical demands of adventure tourism.
- **Interests:** Leisurely walks, guided tours, cultural performances, scenic drives, spa treatments.
- **Motivations:** To enjoy leisure and relaxation, appreciate natural and cultural sights at a comfortable pace.

Please describe based on statistic data the typology of tourists in rural regions:

High Tatras Region

- **Nature and Adventure Enthusiasts:** The High Tatras attract hikers, mountaineers, and winter sports enthusiasts. This area is known for its dramatic mountain landscapes, hiking trails, and ski resorts.
- **Wellness Visitors:** With towns like Trenčianske Teplice and Piešťany, this region is also popular for its spa and wellness centers, attracting tourists seeking relaxation and therapeutic treatments.

Slovak Paradise (Slovenský Raj)

- **Eco-tourists and Hikers:** Known for its beautiful gorges, waterfalls, and hiking trails, Slovak Paradise draws visitors interested in eco-tourism and outdoor adventures in relatively untouched natural settings.

Low Tatras (Nízke Tatry)

- **Outdoor Sports Enthusiasts:** Offering skiing in the winter and mountain biking and hiking in warmer months, the Low Tatras cater to tourists seeking a variety of outdoor activities.

Slovak Karst Region

- **Cave Explorers and Nature Lovers:** Home to unique karst landscapes and UNESCO-listed caves, this area attracts spelunkers, geologists, and tourists interested in unique geological formations.

Orava Region

- **Cultural and Historical Tourists:** Orava Castle and the open-air Museum of the Orava Village offer deep dives into Slovakia's history and culture, appealing to those interested in heritage and traditional architecture.

Tokaj Wine Region

- **Wine Enthusiasts:** This area is famous for its wine production, particularly the sweet Tokaj wines. Wine tasting tours are popular, attracting visitors interested in viticulture and enogastronomy.

Čičmany Village

- **Cultural Tourists:** Famous for its traditional wooden houses and folk architecture, Čičmany attracts visitors interested in Slovak rural history and traditional arts and crafts.

Agrotourism Farms Across Rural Slovakia

- **Families and Agritourism Enthusiasts:** Farms offering stays and agricultural experiences cater to families and individuals interested in learning about rural life, farming practices, and local food production.

State, which types of destinations are used by following persons (e.g. farm-holidays, small hotels, wellness offers, camping, training or conference centers).

families	couples	Groups	singles
Farm-Holidays	Small Hotels	Camping	Small Hotels
Small Hotels	Wellnes	Training or conference centers	Wellness offers
Camping	Camping		
Wellnes offers			

Observations:

In summary, the preferences for accommodations and activities among various traveler types—families, couples, groups, and singles—in rural settings can be characterized by their unique interests and needs:

- **Families** often look for interactive and educational experiences that cater to both adults and children, making farm holidays, family-friendly small hotels, and camping popular choices. Wellness resorts that offer family-oriented services are also sought after for relaxation.
- **Couples** may prefer more intimate settings like boutique hotels or romantic lodges, with a strong interest in wellness and spa resorts for a relaxing retreat, as well as camping for adventurous getaways and farm holidays for a unique, peaceful experience.
- **Groups**, including friends, extended families, or special interest groups, tend to opt for accommodations that can support their activities, such as camping, training or conference centers for structured gatherings, small hotels or inns for communal living, and farm holidays for shared immersive experiences.
- **Singles** look for safe and engaging environments where they can either enjoy solitude or meet other travelers, making small hotels, camping sites, solo wellness retreats, and farm holidays appealing for their flexibility and opportunities for personal growth or social interaction.

Across all types, the choice of destination is influenced by the desire for experiences that align with personal interests, whether it's in pursuit of relaxation, adventure, cultural immersion, or education, highlighting the diverse appeal of rural tourism.

Sources:

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327509053_Pertinencia_de_la_infraestructura_de_transporte_para_la_competitividad_del_sector_agricola_de_la_zodes_Montes_de_Maria

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Austria

Type of typical person or groups:

In 2023, tourism in Austria continued to pick up strongly. Despite high prices, overnight stays in Austrian hotels, guesthouses and holiday flats last year were at more than 150 million only 1.0% or 1.56 million below the pre-pandemic peak of 2019. Austria is heavily dependent on international markets. Almost 74.0% of overnight stays are attributable to guests from abroad.

With 151.16 million overnight stays, the past calendar year is only slightly behind 2019 (152.71 million), the year with the most overnight stays since records began. Resident guests spent 2.6% more nights in their own country. The number of arrivals (45.21 million) rose significantly in 2023 compared to the previous year (+13.6%). With 57.43 million overnight stays by guests from Germany, 4.03 million (+7.5%) more were registered compared to 2022. The second most important foreign market of origin, the Netherlands, closed the year with 11.11 million overnight stays (+11.2%).

Type of accommodation	Arrivals	Change in arrivals compared to the same period of the previous year in percent	Overnight stays	Change in overnight stays compared to the same period of the previous year in percent
5-/4-star accommodation establishments	17 916 196	12.7	52 493 096	8.4
3-star accommodation establishments	10 277 214	12.9	27 941 956	10.0
2-/1-star accommodation establishments	3 741 375	20.7	9 880 926	15.5
Holiday dwellings (commercial)	3 946 349	22.8	18 694 386	19.4
Campsites	2 162 267	9.0	8 329 554	6.1
Accommodation for children	1 047 299	16.9	3 340 221	22.0
Recreation facilities	227 596	11.8	4 011 223	10.2
Operated mountain shelters	702 324	16.0	968 049	13.5
Other accommodation establishments	629 436	10.2	2 106 499	9.4
All forms of private accommodations	4 562 511	8.0	23 403 039	7.1
Accommodation total	45 212 567	13.6	151 168 949	10.4

S: STATISTICS AUSTRIA, Accommodation statistics. Compiled on 13 February 2024. – Final results.

Rural tourism in Austria

The typical tourist in rural areas of Austria can vary depending on the specific region and the time of year. However, there are some general characteristics that can be found in both national as well as international tourists:

Outdoor Enthusiasts: Many tourists in rural Austria are outdoor enthusiasts who come to enjoy activities such as hiking, skiing, snowboarding, cycling, and mountaineering.

Cultural Explorers: Austria has a rich cultural heritage, so tourists interested in history, architecture, and traditional Austrian culture may visit rural areas.

Nature Lovers: Austria's rural areas are known for their stunning landscapes, including picturesque villages, alpine meadows, and pristine lakes. Nature lovers often come to

admire the scenery, take photographs, and enjoy activities like birdwatching and nature walks.

Families: Families with children also visit rural Austria, attracted by the family-friendly activities and accommodations available in the countryside.

Food and Wine Enthusiasts: Austria is known for its cuisine and wines. Tourists interested in culinary experiences may visit rural areas to sample local dishes, visit vineyards, and attend food festivals.

Seekers of Authenticity: These tourists are often motivated by a desire for authentic and immersive experiences. They are interested in experiencing traditional Austrian culture, including rural customs, cuisine, crafts, and festivals, and may seek out opportunities to interact with local residents and artisans.

Escape from Urban Life: Many tourists who visit rural areas in Austria are seeking a break from the hustle and bustle of city life. They value the tranquility and slower pace of rural environments, where they can relax, recharge, and disconnect from the stresses of modern living.

Wellness and Health Conscious: Some tourists seek out rural areas in Austria for wellness retreats, spa vacations, or health-focused activities. They may be interested in outdoor yoga classes, holistic therapies, natural hot springs, or farm-to-table dining experiences that promote well-being and relaxation.

Photography Enthusiasts: Rural areas in Austria provide ample opportunities for photography enthusiasts to capture stunning images of landscapes, wildlife, and rural life. Tourists may

visit scenic viewpoints, hiking trails, and quaint villages to document their experiences and create lasting memories.

Ecotourists: Tourists who are passionate about sustainable travel and environmental conservation may be attracted to rural areas in Austria for their pristine natural environments and eco-friendly tourism practices. They may seek out accommodations, tours, and activities that prioritize sustainability and minimize their impact on the environment.

Dog owners: They can be an important tourist group for rural areas for several reasons. The pet-friendly nature of rural destinations can attract dog owners who may specifically seek out places where they can travel with their pets. By catering to this demographic, rural areas can attract a larger pool of tourists, increasing overall visitor numbers and revenue. Providing a positive experience for dog owners can lead to brand loyalty and repeat visitation. If rural areas establish themselves as pet-friendly destinations, dog owners are more likely to return for future visits, contributing to sustained tourism growth.

Please describe based on statistic data the typology of tourists in rural regions:

See above

For most tourists seeking recreation in rural areas, being close to nature and enjoying the natural and cultural landscapes in a biodiverse world is key. In Austria there are many projects aiming to maintain and keep improving sustainable products and services. The goal is to make Austria an all-round sustainable holiday destination for locals, guests and hosts alike.

There are three core visions when it comes to making Austria's tourism industry more sustainable:

The Vision of Technology: The main tools for reducing Austria's carbon footprint as a tourist destination are zero emissions, a focus on public transport and environmentally-friendly forms of energy, achieved by state-of-the-art technologies.

The Vision of Regionality: Material treasures deserve just as much protection as the idealistic heritage. Maintaining traditions contributes significantly to reaching sustainability goals. Regional handicraft businesses play an important role in Austria, and are often happy to open their doors to visitors. Old craft techniques are brought back to life - and inspire guests and locals alike.

Austria's farmers provide a variety of regional products that are particularly appreciated by visitors.

The vision of the Environmentally Conscious Host: Guests value being well taken care of in an authentic environment, by hosts who know, live and appreciate the special traditions and customs of their region.

State, which types of destinations are used by following persons (e.g. farm-holidays, small hotels, wellness offers, camping, training or conference centers)

Wellness offers:

Stressed professionals, health enthusiasts, couples seeking a romantic getaway or quality time together, solo travelers who opt for self-care and introspection, retirees, wellness enthusiasts who are also passionate about fitness and people recovering from illness or injury, as there are specialized programs tailored to promote healing and well-being.

Culture and nature lovers: Some travelers are drawn to Austria's cultural heritage and natural landscapes. They combine their interests in wellness with sightseeing, exploring historical sites, or enjoying outdoor adventures.

Farm holidays:

In general, people who are drawn to farm holidays in Austria are often seeking authentic and immersive experiences that allow them to connect with nature, learn about traditional farming practices, and appreciate the beauty of rural life. Among them we can often find the following individuals / groups: families with children, nature enthusiasts, couples seeking tranquility, eco-tourists, and adventure seekers as farm holidays offer a range of outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, horseback riding, and farm tours.

Camping:

Tourists who choose to go camping in Austria come from diverse backgrounds and have varied interests, e.g. outdoor enthusiasts, budget travelers, families, solo travelers, etc.

People go camping for a combination of reasons, including a love of nature, a sense of adventure, a desire for relaxation, and a connection with others. Whether it's a weekend getaway or an extended wilderness expedition, camping offers something for everyone who seeks to experience the outdoors.

State, which types of destinations are used by following persons (e.g. farm-holidays, small hotels, wellness offers, camping, training or conference centers).

families	couples	groups	singles
Camping	Camping	x	Camping
Wellness / spa	Wellness/ spa	Wellness / spa (groups of friends)	Wellness/ spa (mostly for health reasons...)
Outdoor holidays (winter or summer sports)	Outdoor holidays (winter or summer sports)	Outdoor holidays (winter or summer sports)	Outdoor holidays (winter or summer sports)
Farm holidays	Farm holidays	x	Farm holidays
Adventure holidays / outdoor sports, e.g. hiking, mountain cart, cycling, swimming, horse-back riding, etc.	Adventure holidays / outdoor sports, e.g. hiking, mountain cart, cycling, swimming, horse-back riding, etc.	Adventure holidays / outdoor sports, e.g. hiking, skiing, cycling, swimming, horse-back riding, etc.	Adventure holidays / outdoor sports, e.g. hiking, cycling, swimming, horse-back riding, etc.
Day or weekend trips (e.g.	Day or weekend trips	Day or weekend trips (e.g.	Day or weekend trips

nature parks, museums, exhibitions, outdoor theater, climbing park, boat tour...)	(e.g. nature parks, museums, exhibitions, wine tasting, culinary experiences	wine tasting / culinary experiences; seasonal experiences like Christmas or Easter markets, guided tours through national parks, historic sites etc.	(Escape from urban life - hiking, museums, nature parks, photography...)
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Observations:

One of the most significant trends is a renewed interest in sustainable travel, as people become more aware of the impact of tourism on the environment and local communities. Another trend is the rise of remote work and digital nomadism, as more people opt to work remotely and travel at the same time. Additionally, there is a growing demand for off-the-beaten-path destinations, as travelers seek to avoid overcrowded tourist hotspots and discover unique and authentic experiences. These trends are reshaping the travel industry and providing exciting opportunities for both travelers and the travel industry alike.

In the age of social media, travelers are looking for unique and memorable experiences that they can share with their friends and followers. Experiential travel is all about immersing oneself in the local culture, history, and customs of a destination. This could include taking a cooking class

with a local chef, learning traditional crafts from artisans, or participating in a cultural festival.

To appeal to these travelers, hotels are going beyond the traditional amenities such as spas and fitness centers, and instead, offering unique experiences that connect guests with the local culture and community. Some hotels are partnering with local artisans and chefs to offer immersive cooking classes and food tours that showcase the local cuisine. Others are organizing guided tours and excursions to nearby attractions, or offering cultural activities such as dance or music performances. By offering these experiential elements, hotels can create a memorable and meaningful stay for their guests, while also contributing to the local economy and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

The travel industry is experiencing some exciting new trends. By staying on top of these trends, regions can position themselves to attract and cater to these new and emerging travel segments.

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Romania

Description of the location

Case study: Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism destination, Romania

The Transylvanian Highlands are situated in the central part of Romania, primarily within the historical region of Transylvania. This region is characterized by its mountainous terrain, with the Carpathian Mountains dominating the landscape. The highlands cover a vast area, encompassing numerous valleys, plateaus, and peaks, with elevations ranging from 500 meters to over 2,000 meters above sea level.

Adored by contemporary princes and visited by guests from all over the world, the Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism destination instills in your soul the special charm of the last truly medieval landscape in Europe.

Besides the beautiful villages with fortified churches, here, in the heart of Romania, you will find meadows exploding in colour, with a variety of flowers and butterflies, as you can rarely see. Through the cool forests, with impressive trees, you can discover fresh deer or bear tracks and you can hear the birds chirping their charming trills.

In sync with nature, people work their land and turn its yield into reasons to celebrate, happily inviting you to join them. Along the many valleys, you have all the time in the world to admire the landscape, while making room for a rainbow of local sensations, sprinkled with wild berries, sturdy households, and welcoming people.

Transylvanian Highlands is an open invitation to appreciate nature, local culture, and, above all, people!

Tourists come to the southern region of Transylvania (along the Sibiu - Sighișoara - Brașov axis), drawn by the wild nature, mosaic landscapes, pastures with centuries-old oak trees, picturesque communities, and the serene beauty of life they experience here. Therefore, we wish for the future of tourism in the area to preserve this picture, while also allowing the communities to develop.

For this purpose, in 2015, a Destination Management Unit was created to serve as a bridge between all those involved, directly or indirectly, in tourism in the region.

"The Hills of Transylvania" is an initiative of important actors in the area, partners who add value to this special zone through the projects they implement and by supporting the development of communities. They are: Mioritics Association, Sibiu County Tourism Association, WWF Romania, ADEPT Transylvania Foundation, Mihai Eminescu Trust Foundation, Monumentum Association, Târnava Hills Local Action Group, Hârtibaciu Microregion Local Action Group, Mediaș Plateau Local Action Group, Transylvanian Association Brașov North, and Fortified Churches Foundation.

Since 2022, destination management has been ensured by the "Hills of Transylvania" Association, whose members are: ADEPT Transylvania Foundation, Mioritics Association, Mihai Eminescu Trust Foundation, Fortified Churches Foundation, and Sibiu County Tourism Association.

Communities:

The Transylvanian Highlands are home to numerous rural communities, each with its own distinct cultural identity and traditions. These communities are scattered throughout the region, nestled amidst the mountains and valleys. Many of these villages have preserved their traditional way of life, with agriculture and crafts playing a significant role in the local economy. Some notable communities include Sibiu, Brasov, Sighisoara, and Bran, each offering unique insights into Transylvanian culture and heritage.

Landscape:

The landscape of the Transylvanian Highlands is incredibly diverse, encompassing dense forests, rolling hills, fertile valleys, and alpine meadows. Forests cover a significant portion of the region, consisting mainly of beech, oak, and pine trees, providing habitat for a variety of wildlife species. The highlands are also dotted with sparkling rivers, tranquil lakes, and dramatic rock formations, creating stunning natural **vistas at every turn.**

Cultures:

The Transylvanian Highlands are renowned for their rich cultural heritage, shaped by centuries of history and diverse influences. The region is home to a mix of ethnic communities, including Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons, and Roma, each contributing to the vibrant tapestry of Transylvanian culture. Visitors to the highlands can explore medieval towns and villages, adorned with historic architecture and fortified churches, showcasing the region's storied past. Traditional crafts such as pottery, weaving, and woodcarving are still practiced in many communities, offering opportunities for cultural immersion and hands-on experiences.

Overall, the Transylvanian Highlands offer a captivating blend of natural beauty, cultural richness, and authentic experiences, making it a premier destination for eco-tourism and exploration.



Map of the destination

Profile of actual tourists (seasonality if applicable)

1. Type of typical person or groups:

Tourists who choose the Transylvanian Highlands as their tourism destination represent a diverse range of interests and backgrounds. Here's a description of the typical tourists who are drawn to this picturesque region:

Nature Enthusiasts: Many tourists are attracted to the Transylvanian Highlands for its stunning natural landscapes, including rolling hills, lush forests, and pristine rivers. Nature enthusiasts flock to the region to explore its extensive network of hiking trails, offering breathtaking views of the Carpathian Mountains and opportunities to encounter diverse flora and fauna

Cultural Explorers: The Transylvanian Highlands are steeped in history and folklore, with charming medieval towns, fortified churches, and centuries-old traditions waiting to be discovered. Cultural explorers are drawn to the region's rich heritage, visiting historic sites such as Bran Castle, Sighișoara Citadel, and Biertan Fortified Church to immerse themselves in Transylvanian culture.

Adventure Seekers: For adrenaline junkies and adventure seekers, the Transylvanian Highlands offer a wide range of outdoor activities, including mountain biking, rock climbing, and zip-lining. Thrill-seekers can challenge themselves with white-water rafting on the Buzău River or embark on multi-day trekking expeditions through remote wilderness areas.

Wellness Travelers: The tranquil atmosphere and natural beauty of the Transylvanian Highlands make it an ideal destination for wellness travelers seeking relaxation and rejuvenation. Visitors can indulge in spa treatments at luxury resorts nestled in the mountains, practice yoga amidst scenic landscapes, or simply unwind with peaceful walks in nature.

Food and Wine Enthusiasts: The Transylvanian Highlands boast a rich culinary tradition, with hearty dishes and locally sourced ingredients that reflect the region's agricultural heritage. Food and wine enthusiasts can sample traditional Romanian cuisine at rustic taverns and

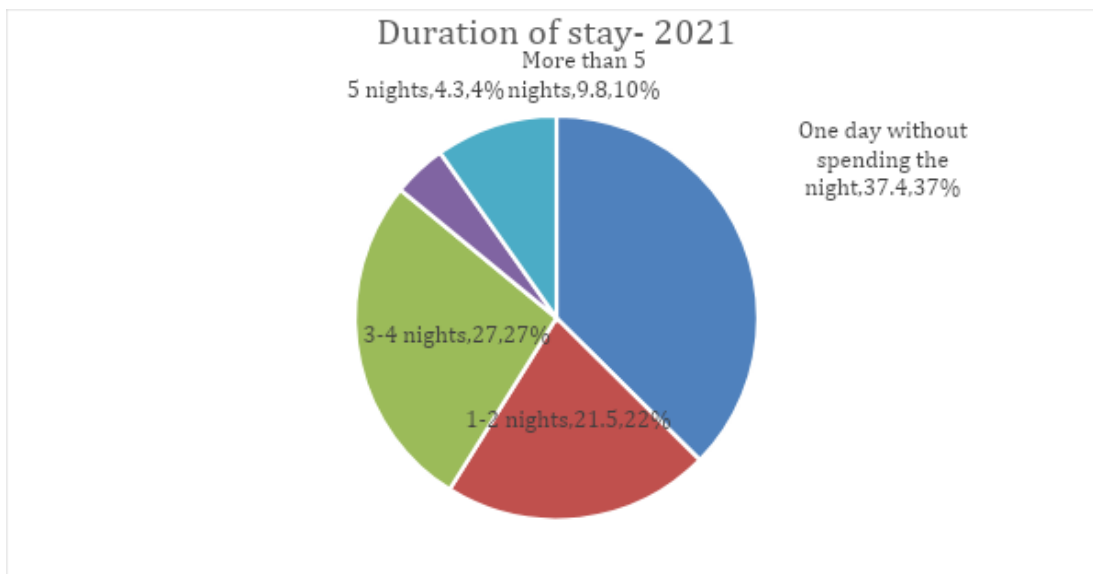
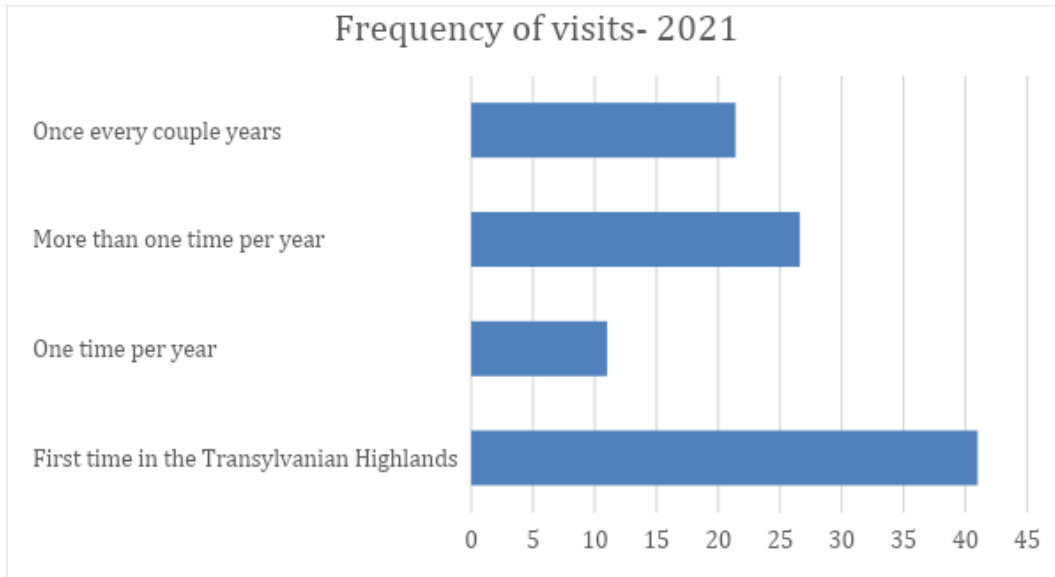
farm-to-table restaurants, accompanied by fine wines from local vineyards.

Off-the-Beaten-Path Explorers: For travelers seeking authentic and off-the-beaten-path experiences, the Transylvanian Highlands offer endless opportunities for exploration. From hidden villages tucked away in the mountains to remote monasteries and abandoned castles, adventurers can uncover the region's hidden gems and forge unforgettable memories.

Overall, tourists who choose the Transylvanian Highlands as their destination are drawn to its unique blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and opportunities for adventure and relaxation. Whether seeking outdoor thrills, cultural immersion, or peaceful retreats, the region offers something for every type of traveler to enjoy.

Statistical data related to the profile of the tourists:

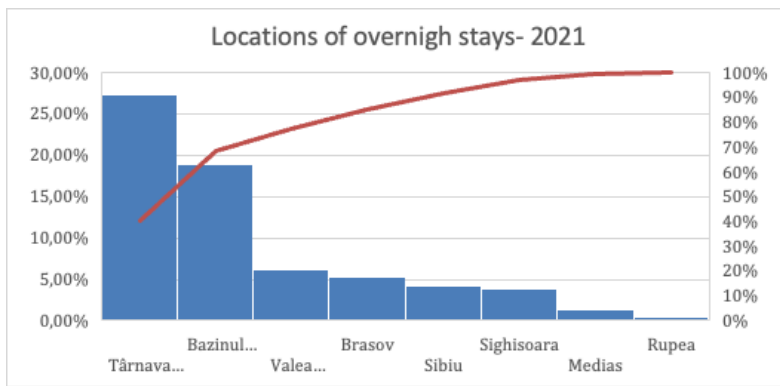
The visitation frequency increased significantly in 2021 compared to 2018, especially in terms of repeat visits within a year, indicating that the destination of the Transylvanian Hills is appreciated by tourists. At the same time, we must consider the current context in which the proportion of foreign visitors has decreased by more than 50%, which is why it is normal for a higher proportion of Romanian visitors to be reflected in the higher frequency of visits



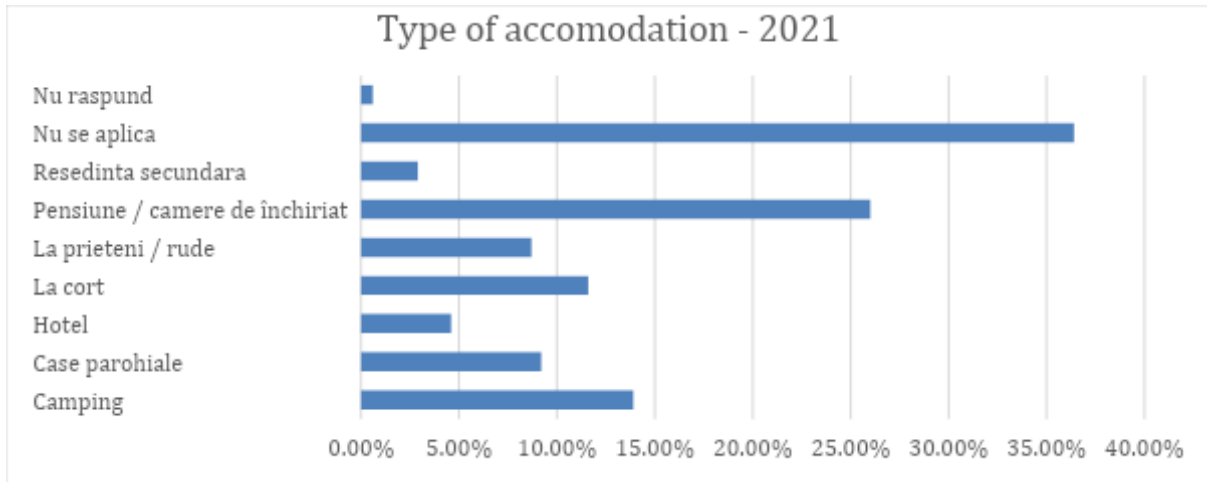
The high percentage of visitors who do not stay overnight at the destination indicates that the destination is predominantly visited by people living in neighboring counties. Some of the visitors are just passing through (18.3%)

Changes in the length of stay can be attributed to the decrease in the proportion of foreign visitors (who usually opted to stay overnight at the destination) and the increased awareness of the destination, which has generated a greater influx of visitors who do not always choose to stay overnight at the destination

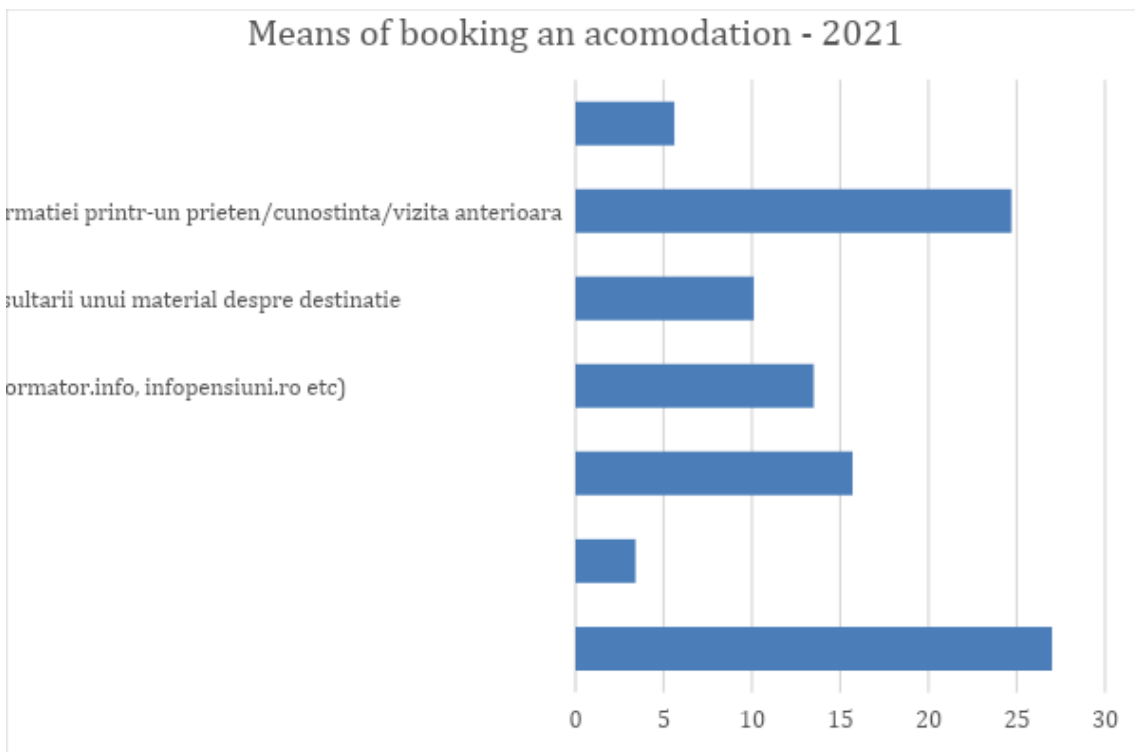
There are extremely few who stay for more than 4 nights at the destination.

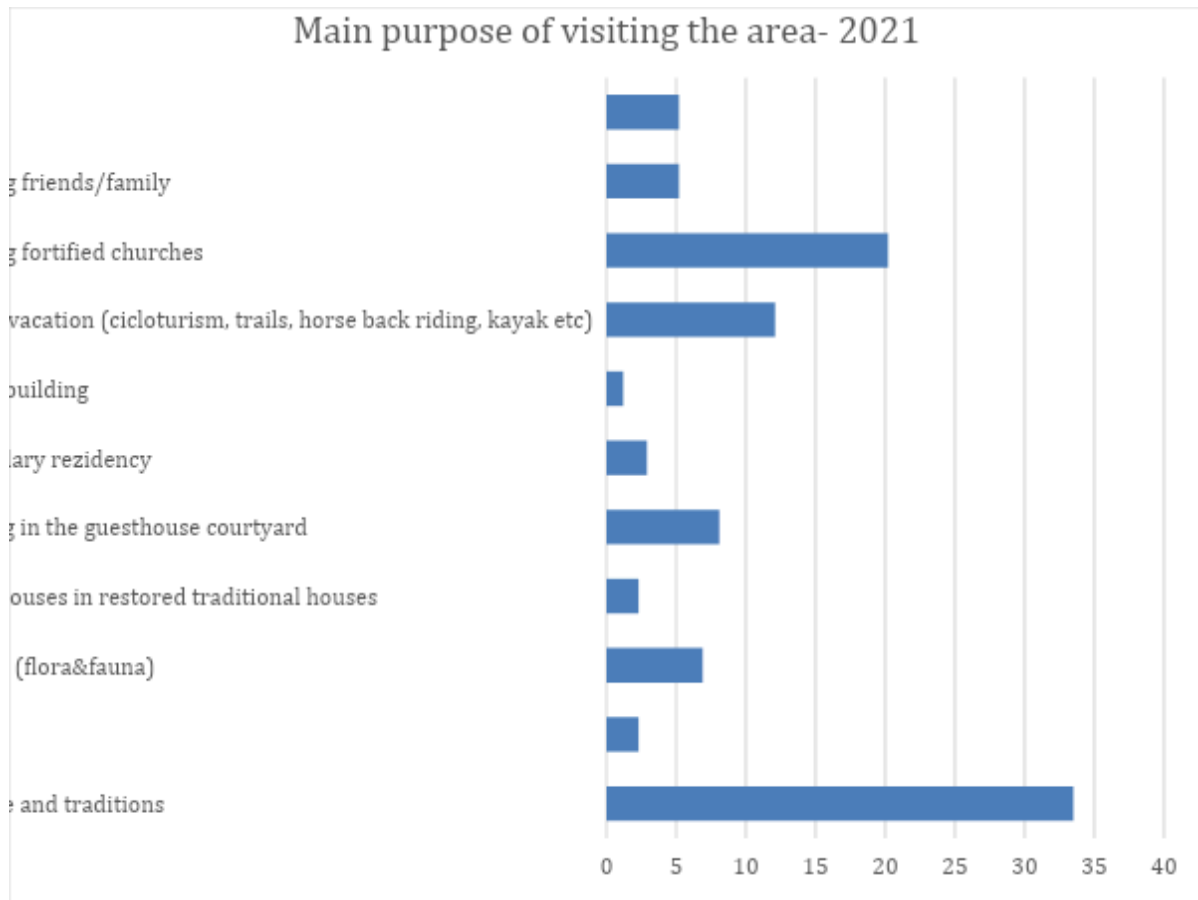


Major cities were surpassed by rural destinations in 2021 compared to 2018, possibly also due to the pandemic, which prompted tourists to choose small accommodations and avoid cities.



The guesthouses are the main accommodation units targeted by tourists. There is a significant decrease in the proportion of parish houses, probably due to the decline in groups and/or foreign visitors.

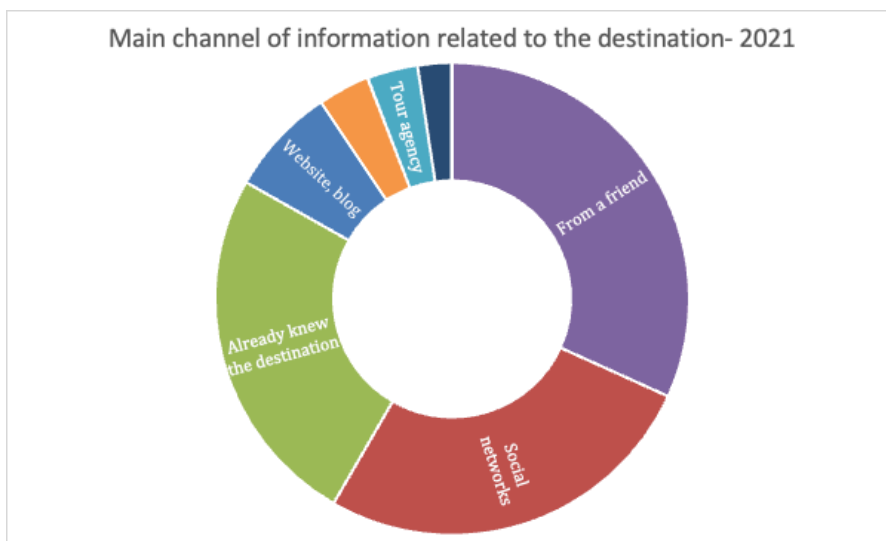




The main purpose of visits remained cultural and traditional components, although the proportion has decreased to less than 35%, compared to 46%. Since 2018, the number of those who come to the destination for nature observation has doubled, as well as those who choose to spend relaxing time at the accommodation.



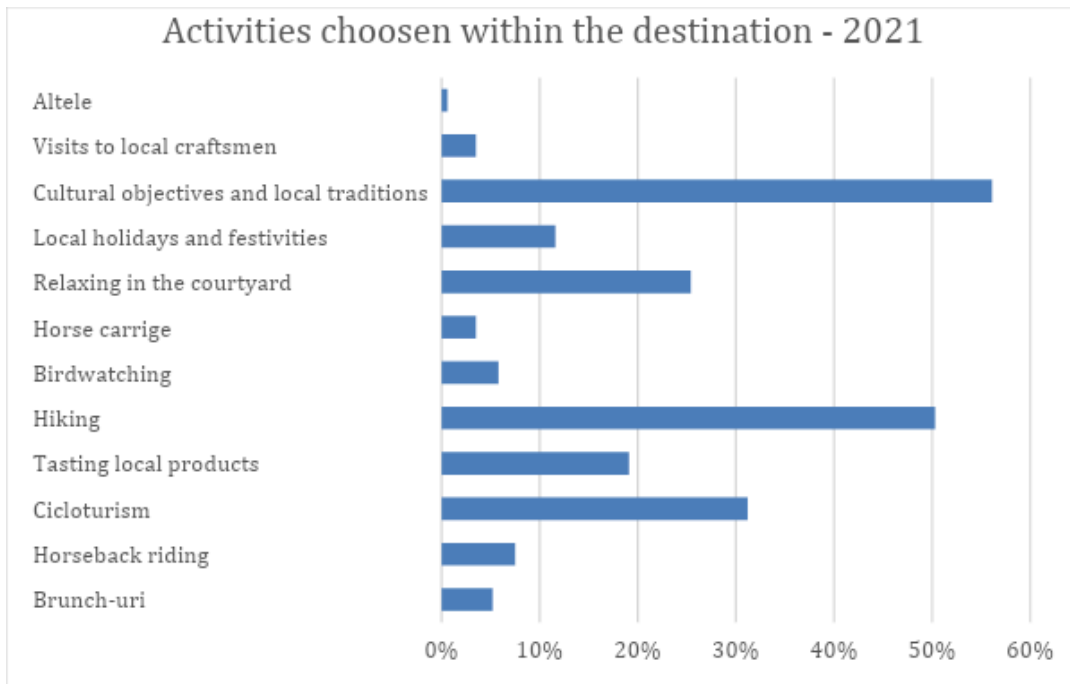
The personal car remains far ahead in transportation preferences, to the detriment of more sustainable means of transport



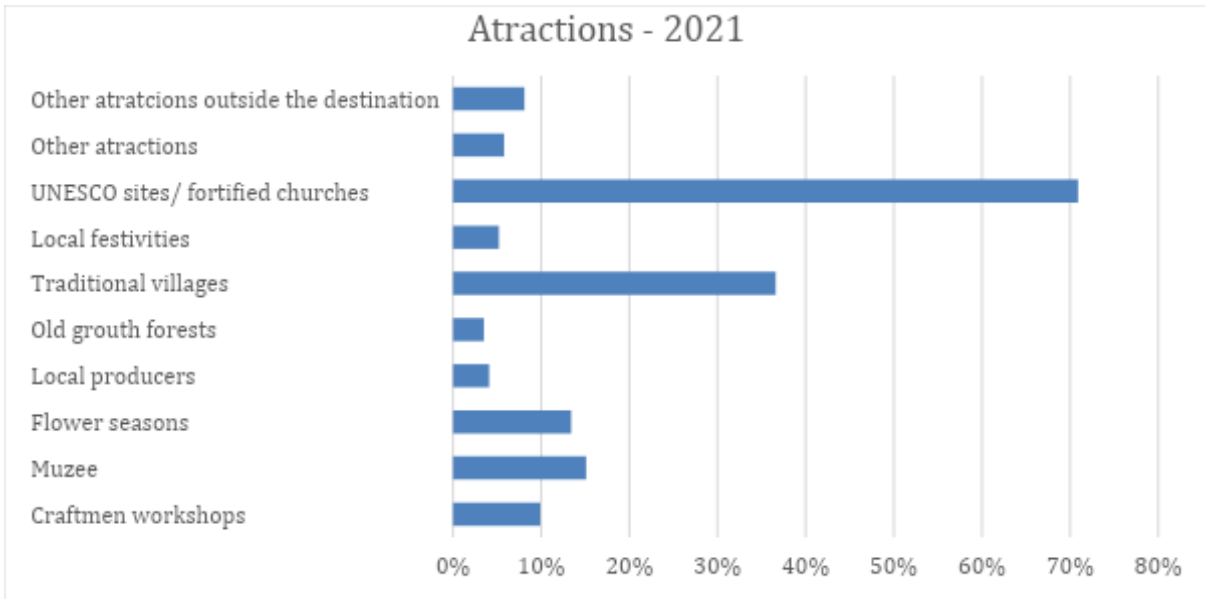
Surprisingly, the proportion of social media networks as a source of information has increased. On the other hand, the proportion of those who already knew about the accommodation or learned about it from acquaintances has increased to over 50%.

The proportion of printed materials has decreased significantly, probably due to the lack of participation in promotional events.

Additionally, the proportion of websites has also decreased, which is concerning and may be correlated with the performance of the destination website

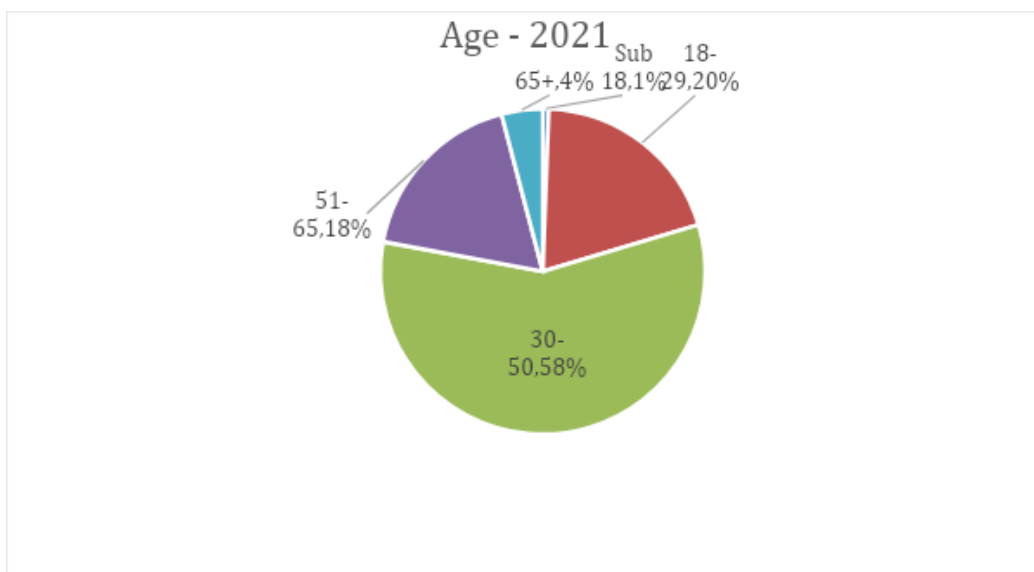


There is a noticeable consistent increase in the proportion of hiking and cycling activities, probably due to the ongoing promotion of the cycling network and the Transylvania Vineyards.

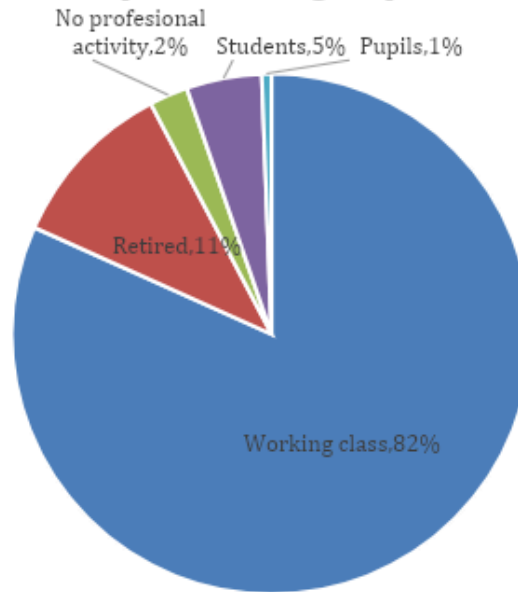


Tourists' preferences regarding the attractions they will visit at the destination remained largely the same in 2021 compared to 2018 (UNESCO sites/fortified churches and traditional villages)

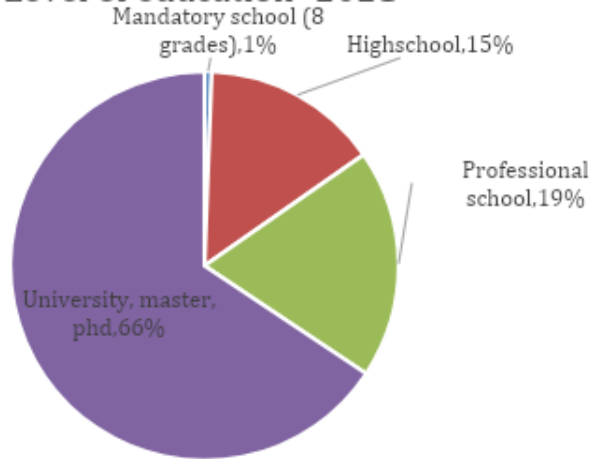
Please describe based on statistic data the typology of tourists in rural regions:

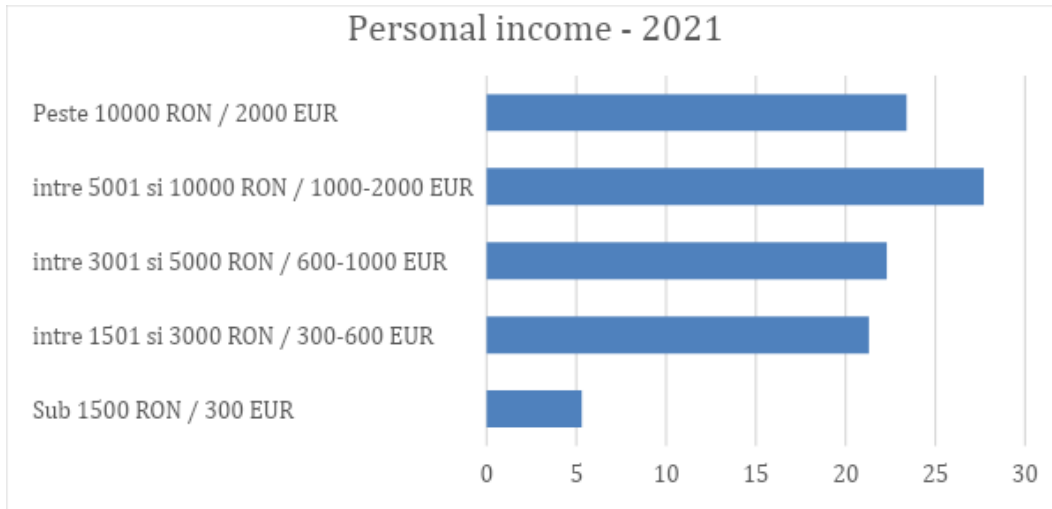


Social professional groups- 2021

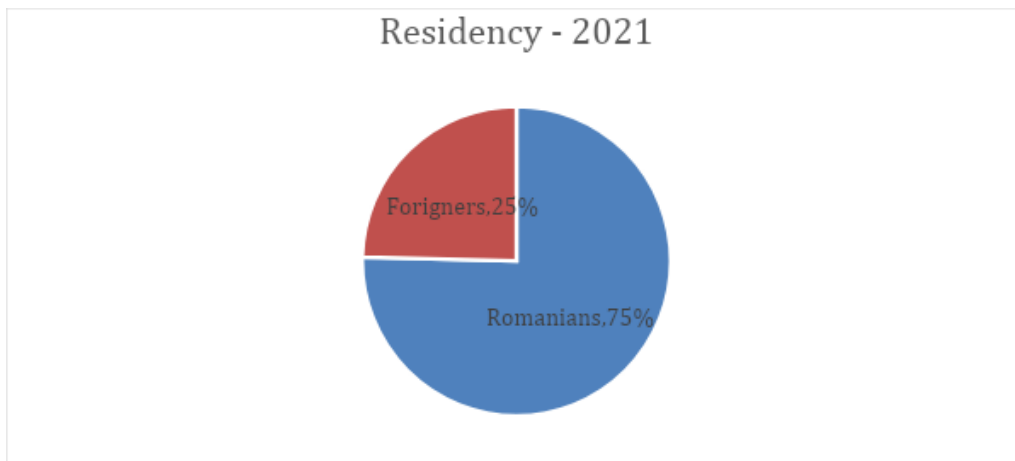


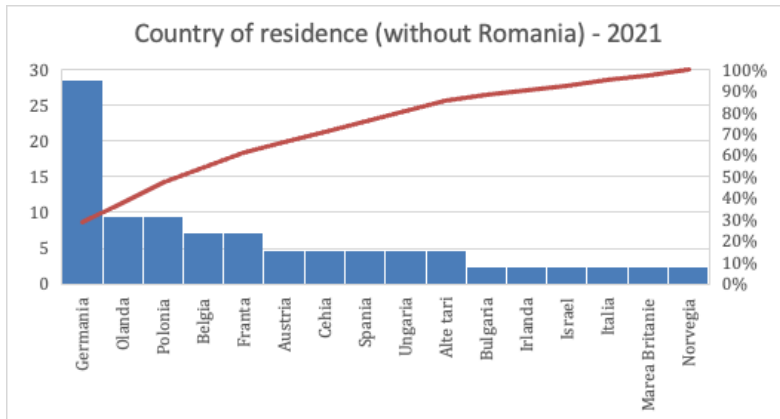
Level of education- 2021



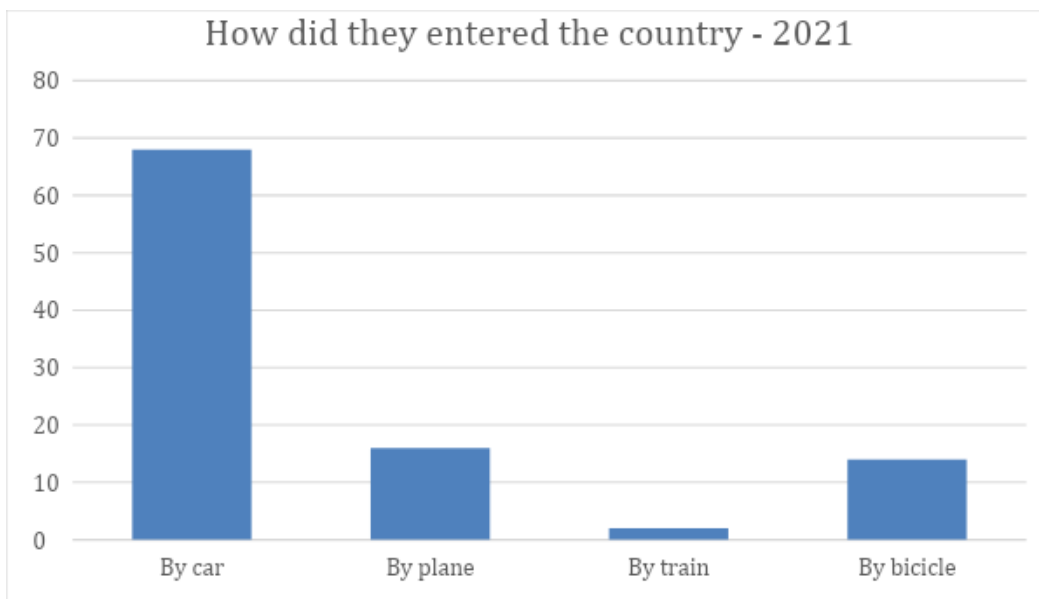


Visitors with high and very high incomes represent over 50% of those who arrive at the destination (over 5000 lei). There is also an increase in the proportion of those earning over 5000 lei, by approximately 20%, while the proportion of low incomes (under 3000 lei) has decreased from 36% to 26%.



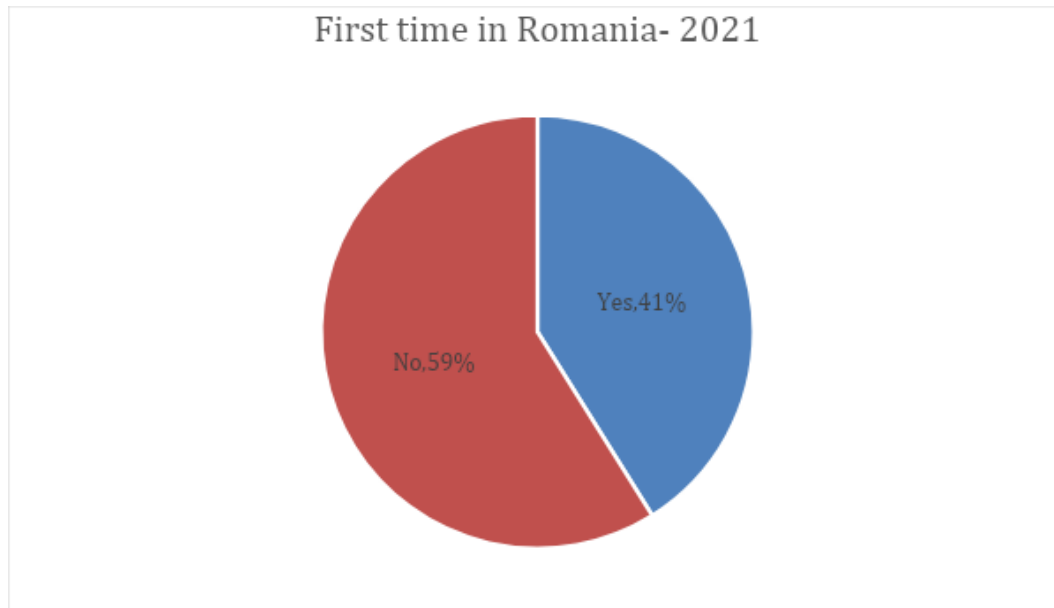


Germany remains the main tourist-emitting country for the destination of the Transylvanian Hills. However, the low number of foreign visitors (42 in total) should lead us to regard the percentages resulting from the share of emitting countries with caution



Against the backdrop of the pandemic, air travel for those coming from abroad was replaced by road transport. This is directly linked to the volatility of travel conditions, as

well as the decrease in long-distance travel. This means that foreign visitors come from relatively nearby countries (Germany, Hungary, Austria, Poland).



State, which types of destinations are used by following persons (e.g. farm-holidays, small hotels, wellness offers, camping, training or conference centers)

Families	Couples	Groups	Singles
Farm stays - Families often choose agrotourism accommodations in rural areas of Romania, where children can interact with farm	Boutique Hotels in Historic Towns: Couples may prefer romantic boutique hotels located in picturesque historic towns	Conference Hotels: Groups traveling for business or events often choose conference hotels in major cities	Hostels in Major Cities: Solo travelers often stay in hostels in cities like Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, or Timișoara,

<p>animals, participate in agricultural activities, and enjoy the tranquility of the countryside</p>	<p>like Sighișoara, Sibiu, or Brasov, offering charming accommodations and intimate settings</p>	<p>like Bucharest or Cluj-Napoca, which offer conference facilities, meeting rooms, and accommodation for large groups</p>	<p>which offer affordable accommodations, social atmospheres, and opportunities to meet other travelers</p>
<p>Family-Friendly Resorts: Several resorts in Romania cater specifically to families, offering amenities such as children's clubs, playgrounds, swimming pools, and organized family-friendly activities</p>	<p>Spa Resorts: Romania has several spa resorts in locations like Baile Herculane, Sovata, or Praid, where couples can indulge in spa treatments, thermal baths, and wellness activities in a serene environment</p>	<p>Villa Rentals: Groups of friends or families may rent villas or holiday homes in destinations like the Black Sea coast or Transylvania, providing spacious accommodations and shared amenities for group gatherings</p>	<p>Adventure Tours: Singles may join adventure tours or guided expeditions to explore Romania's natural wonders, including hiking in the Făgăraș Mountains, cycling in Maramureș, or kayaking in the Danube Delta</p>

<p>Mountain Cabins: Families may opt for cozy mountain cabins or chalets in destinations like the Carpathian Mountains, providing opportunities for outdoor adventures such as hiking, skiing, and wildlife spotting</p>	<p>Wine Country Retreats: Couples seeking a romantic getaway may choose accommodations in Romania's wine regions, such as Dealu Mare or Recaș, where they can enjoy wine tastings, vineyard tours, and gourmet dining experiences</p>	<p>Youth Camps: Youth groups or educational organizations may use youth camps or outdoor education centers in rural areas for team-building activities, workshops, and educational programs</p>	<p>Budget Guesthouses: Budget-conscious solo travelers can find affordable guesthouses or budget accommodations in rural areas, providing simple yet comfortable lodging options for independent exploration</p>
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Sources: Private analysis of the Association of Ecotourism of Romania, based on surveys done on the ground through their members within the Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism destination.

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

1. Outdoor Adventures and Sustainable Recreation

For adventure seekers, the Transylvanian Highlands offer a playground of outdoor activities in harmony with nature. From

trekking and mountain biking to wildlife watching and birding, there are endless opportunities to connect with the natural world and embark on unforgettable adventures. Sustainable recreation options abound, including guided eco-tours, horseback riding excursions, and educational programs focused on conservation and environmental awareness.

2.Cultural Heritage and Authentic Experiences

Beyond its natural beauty, the Transylvanian Highlands are steeped in a rich tapestry of history and culture. Travelers can explore medieval villages adorned with charming Saxon architecture, visit fortified churches dating back centuries, and engage with artisans preserving traditional crafts such as pottery, weaving, and woodcarving. Cultural festivals and folkloric performances offer glimpses into the vibrant traditions of Transylvanian life, providing unforgettable experiences for visitors seeking authentic cultural immersion.

3.Health and Wellness Travelers

The tranquil setting of the highlands makes it an ideal destination for health and wellness retreats. Targeting health and wellness travelers interested in yoga retreats, meditation workshops, and holistic wellness experiences could tap into this growing market segment.

4. Digital Detox Travelers

In today's hyperconnected world, many travelers seek destinations where they can unplug and disconnect from technology. Targeting digital detox travelers with off-the-grid accommodations, nature retreats, and mindfulness activities could cater to this niche market seeking peace and tranquility.

5. Slow Travelers

Slow travel emphasizes immersing oneself in the local culture and savoring the travel experience at a leisurely pace. Targeting slow travelers with immersive cultural experiences, homestay accommodations, and guided cultural tours could appeal to travelers seeking meaningful connections and authentic experiences.

Chapter 4. Practical examples of tourist profiles

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Spain

1.- Promociones Turísticas Salamón

(<http://hospederiadesalamon.es/>)

2.- Fundación Monte Mediterráneo

(www.fundacionmontemediterraneo.com)

1. Description of the location

Location in Cantabrian Mountain Range. The village has only 42 inhabitants. The little hostelry consists of 2 houses: one with 4 doble rooms and one suite, another one with 2 doble rooms and an apartment.



Profile of actual tourists (seasonality if applicable)

December to February/March: 0

April to June: 75% national tourists, 25% foreigners - national tourists 99% couples. Hiking, mountaineering, climbing, biking.

July/August: high season, 98% national tourists, 2 % international tourists; national tourists 99% couples.

June to September/October: 75% national tourism (national tourists 99% couples) 25% international tourism: biking, hiking, mountaineering, climbing.

September-November: hunting tourism, 50 % national tourism and 50% international tourism – mainly USA.

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

Foreigners from European countries for mountaineering, hiking, climbing in May, June, September, October.

Foreigners and national tourists in January and February for ski tourism, mountain trekking, snowshoe-tours, and gastronomic après-ski.

2. Description of the location

Dehesa San Francisco is a 700 hectares big farm in the Nature Park Sierra de Aracena and Picos de Aroche presenting the typical multifunctional agrosilvopastoral system and cultural landscape. The farm is certified as organic and FSC. It includes $\frac{3}{4}$ hectare horticulture orchard.

On the site there are:

Training Center with 13 rooms, chimney heating, common area, solar energy, terraces

Rustic stone house for two persons - electricity and hot water by solar panels

Rustic stone house for 6 persons in two bedrooms, common rooms - electricity and hot water by solar panels

Rustic stone house for 8 persons in two bedrooms, common rooms - electricity and hot water by solar panels.

The stone houses are situated in unique remote areas.

Profile of actual tourists (seasonality if applicable)

95% of tourists are foreigners, mainly during Christmas/New Year, winter, Easter vacation. 20% families, 75% adult couples or groups.

June-September is too hot.

100% educational tourism.

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

Educational tourism for young people

Language courses (e.g.: summer camps)

Sustainable food and cooking

Slovakia

1.- Lišov Múzeum

2.- Stará Hora Sebechleby

Description of the location

The Lišov Múzeum has 3 main part, traditional house from 1916, replic of the celtic roundhouse and mask gallery, is located in Lišov, in the southern part of central Slovakia, at the boundary between the Nitra and Banská Bystrica regions, in the historical Hont region. Known for its rich folklore traditions, rural architecture, and vineyard culture with

unique local grape varieties, Lišov exemplifies the rural character of Slovakia. The area features traditional folk houses and specific rock dwellings carved into tuff volcanic rocks of the Krupina Plain. The territory has been settled since the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, with the first written mention of the medieval village from the second half of the 13th century

Profile of actual tourists (seasonality if applicable)

The tourists visiting the Lišov Múzeum are diverse, including families with children, school groups, and individual visitors interested in local culture, history, and traditional crafts. The museum sees fluctuating visitor numbers throughout the year, with peak seasons likely aligning with school holidays and summer months when tourism in Slovakia increases. Seasonal events and workshops could also attract visitors looking for unique local experiences.

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

The potential new target groups for tourism at the Lišov Múzeum could include international tourists seeking authentic local experiences, researchers and students interested in rural architecture and history, enthusiasts of folk traditions and crafts, as well as eco-tourists attracted to the area's natural landscapes and sustainable tourism practices.

Description of the location

The wine-growing settlement of Stará Hora, on the southern edge of the Štiavnické Vrchy hills, is part of the

Sebechleby village. Declared a cultural heritage site for its traditional architecture on January 21, 1981, its most striking features are the vine cellars dug by hand into the volcanic tuff and the small two-room cottages built above them, now used for recreation or agritourism. Several events and festivals, including the well-known "Oberačka po sebechlebsky," are hosted here, offering visitors a taste of local traditions, wines, and specialties.

Profile of actual tourists (seasonality if applicable)

The actual tourists to Stará Hora Sebechleby are primarily those interested in experiencing the cultural heritage, traditional architecture, and viticulture of the region. The area attracts visitors with its unique combination of natural beauty and cultural events such as traditional festivals, making it a popular destination for those seeking to immerse themselves in local traditions and enjoy the tranquil countryside. Seasonality may vary, with peak times likely aligning with major local events and the grape harvest season, offering a rich experience of local customs and community celebrations.

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

For Stará Hora Sebechleby, potential new target groups could include eco-tourists and nature enthusiasts drawn to its scenic landscapes and vineyards. Additionally, history buffs and architecture aficionados might be attracted to its cultural heritage sites and traditional architecture. Agritourism could appeal to families and individuals interested in vineyard tours and wine tasting, while the area's traditional events and festivals present an opportunity

to attract cultural tourists seeking authentic local experiences.

Austria

1.- Traisental Valley (Lower Austria)

<https://www.traisental.mostviertel.at/english>

2.- Rust am See (Lake Neusiedl, Burgenland)

<https://www.freistadt-rust.at/en/>

Description of the location

The Traisental is one of the youngest wine-growing regions in Austria, having only existed in its present form since 1995. It is also the smallest in Lower Austria. Here, wine is cultivated on 848 hectares, which corresponds to 3% of Lower Austria's winegrowing area. However, when it comes to the region's Grüner Veltliner, the Traisental has a commanding presence. An integral part of the small wine villages here are the traditional Buschenschank taverns. A real step back into the past is provided by the historic towns of Traismauer and Herzogenburg. Typical fruity and spicy Grüner Veltliner and robust, mineral-driven Riesling have been marketed under the Traisental DAC designation since the 2006 vintage.

The landscape of this area is defined by beautiful rolling hills and small vineyards. The banks of the river Traisen are lined with fertile farming land, which gradually leads up to small terraced vineyards. The Traisental is an attractive

destination for wine lovers, hikers, cyclists and those interested in all aspects of culture. The discovery of grape seeds from the early Bronze Age confirm that this region has had a tradition of winegrowing since ancient times, well before the Romans established their methods of viticulture here. The nearby city of St. Pölten, capital of the federal state of Lower Austria, offers a diverse line-up of modern cultural events. From this southernmost point of the wine-growing region, many paths lead to idyllic wine-growing villages with their traditional Heurige taverns, including Statzendorf, Unterwölbling and Oberwölbling, Nußdorf, Reichersdorf, Getzersdorf, Inzersdorf, Stollhofen, Frauendorf and Gemeinlebarn.

Profile of actual tourists(seasonality if applicable)

In the example of Traismauer, a city that lies in the Traisental region, the arrivals per country of origin in the year 2023 are listed:

In 2023, a total of 2,361 tourists came to Traismauer from Austria, and 5,640 tourists from other countries, mostly from Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, but also the UK and the USA.

Link:<https://www.no.e.gv.at/noe/Zahlen-Fakten/Tourismus1.html>

These numbers refer to overnight stays, but not to day tourists who come to the Traisental region from the surrounding areas or nearby cities. Day tourists predominantly come **from April to October** for activities such as cycling, culinary and wine experiences, visits to monasteries or museums, nature experiences, Nordic walking, hiking, swimming, etc.

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

International tourists who are interested in historic villages, Austrian culinary and wine or outdoor sports such as cycling or trekking in the months from April to October.

National tourists from November until March for visits to monasteries and museums, in winter special events like Christmas markets or gourmet dinners, art or music shows and winter sports like ice skating or cross-country skiing may attract more national tourists.

Description of the location

Rust is a picturesque town located in the Burgenland state of Austria, situated on the western shore of Lake Neusiedl. The entire old town of Rust is protected as a historic monument. The Baroque and Renaissance facades are well-maintained and contribute to giving the city a special flair.

Rust is renowned for its wine culture, particularly its sweet wines made from the region's indigenous grape variety. The town's vineyards stretch across the nearby slopes, and wine tourism is a significant part of Rust's economy and identity. Visitors can enjoy wine tastings, tours of local wineries, and explore the scenic vineyard landscapes.

The town is located on the shores of Lake Neusiedl, which is the second-largest steppe lake in Central Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

One of the unique features of Rust is its population of storks. The town is famous for its stork colony, with many storks returning each year to nest on rooftops and chimneys.

The presence of these majestic birds adds to the town's charm and has become a symbol of Rust.

Throughout the year, the city hosts various cultural events such as wine festivals, concerts, and traditional celebrations. One of the most notable events is the "Ruster Kellergassenfest," a wine festival held in the historic wine cellars of the town, where visitors can sample local wines and culinary specialties.

Profile of actual tourists(seasonality if applicable)

The region caters to a diverse array of leisure interests, attracting both national and international tourists. Outdoor lovers, including those keen on Nordic walking, cycling, golfing, and tennis, find many opportunities for recreation. Lake Neusiedl is particularly renowned among international water sports enthusiasts, offering activities such as Stand Up Paddling, windsurfing, sailing, and kiting, with the annual Surf Opening and Surf World Cup drawing significant global participation. The lake and its surrounding wetlands are of great ecological importance. Thus, the area appeals to birdwatchers, with Rust being a popular destination for observing storks.

Families with children can visit the nearby Family Park tailored to younger visitors, providing an array of amusement options.

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

International tourists who enjoy sports and leisure activities such as birdwatching, cycling, Nordic walking, beach volleyball, boat tours or water sports like sailing and surfing.

National / international tourists interested in opera or operettas in June, July and August, as the neighboring towns St. Margarethen and Mörbisch offer opportunities to indulge in these cultural experiences.

Possible offers for other target groups: Yoga / Pilates / Meditation by the lake, horse-back riding, cooking courses, winter sports, e.g. ice-skating, curling. Language courses (e.g. summer camps) or sports camps, team building and outdoor events, etc.

Romania

Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism destination, Romania

www.colinele-transilvaniei.ro

Description of the location

The Transylvanian Highlands are situated in the central part of Romania, primarily within the historical region of Transylvania. This region is characterized by its mountainous terrain, with the Carpathian Mountains dominating the landscape. The highlands cover a vast area, encompassing numerous valleys, plateaus, and peaks, with elevations ranging from 500 meters to over 2,000 meters above sea level.

Adored by contemporary princes and visited by guests from all over the world, the Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism

destination instills in your soul the special charm of the last truly medieval landscape in Europe.

Besides the beautiful villages with fortified churches, here, in the heart of Romania, you will find meadows exploding in colour, with a variety of flowers and butterflies, as you can rarely see. Through the cool forests, with impressive trees, you can discover fresh deer or bear tracks and you can hear the birds chirping their charming trills.

In sync with nature, people work their land and turn its yield into reasons to celebrate, happily inviting you to join them. Along the many valleys, you have all the time in the world to admire the landscape, while making room for a rainbow of local sensations, sprinkled with wild berries, sturdy households, and welcoming people.

Transylvanian Highlands is an open invitation to appreciate nature, local culture, and, above all, people!

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Profile of actual tourists(seasonality if applicable)

1. Type of typical person or groups:

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Nature Enthusiasts: Many tourists are attracted to the Transylvanian Highlands for its stunning natural landscapes, including rolling hills, lush forests, and pristine rivers. Nature enthusiasts flock to the region to explore its extensive network of hiking trails, offering breathtaking views of the Carpathian Mountains and opportunities to encounter diverse flora and fauna

Cultural Explorers: The Transylvanian Highlands are steeped in history and folklore, with charming medieval towns,

fortified churches, and centuries-old traditions waiting to be discovered. Cultural explorers are drawn to the region's rich heritage, visiting historic sites such as Bran Castle, Sighișoara Citadel, and Biertan Fortified Church to immerse themselves in Transylvanian culture.

Adventure Seekers: For adrenaline junkies and adventure seekers, the Transylvanian Highlands offer a wide range of outdoor activities, including mountain biking, rock climbing, and zip-lining. Thrill-seekers can challenge themselves with white-water rafting on the Buzău River or embark on multi-day trekking expeditions through remote wilderness areas.

Wellness Travelers: The tranquil atmosphere and natural beauty of the Transylvanian Highlands make it an ideal destination for wellness travelers seeking relaxation and rejuvenation. Visitors can indulge in spa treatments at luxury resorts nestled in the mountains, practice yoga amidst scenic landscapes, or simply unwind with peaceful walks in nature.

Food and Wine Enthusiasts: The Transylvanian Highlands boast a rich culinary tradition, with hearty dishes and locally sourced ingredients that reflect the region's agricultural heritage. Food and wine enthusiasts can sample traditional Romanian cuisine at rustic taverns and farm-to-table restaurants, accompanied by fine wines from local vineyards.

Off-the-Beaten-Path Explorers: For travelers seeking authentic and off-the-beaten-path experiences, the Transylvanian Highlands offer endless opportunities for exploration. From hidden villages tucked away in the mountains to remote monasteries and abandoned castles, adventurers can uncover the region's hidden gems and forge unforgettable memories.

Overall, tourists who choose the Transylvanian Highlands as their destination are drawn to its unique blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and opportunities for adventure and relaxation. Whether seeking outdoor thrills, cultural immersion, or peaceful retreats, the region offers something for every type of traveler to enjoy.

Statistical data related to the profile of the tourists:

The visitation frequency increased significantly in 2021 compared to 2018, especially in terms of repeat visits within a year, indicating that the destination of the Transylvanian Hills is appreciated by tourists. At the same time, we must consider the current context in which the proportion of foreign visitors has decreased by more than 50%, which is why it is normal for a higher proportion of Romanian visitors to be reflected in the higher frequency of visits.

State, which types of destinations are used by following persons (e.g. farm-holidays, small hotels, wellness offers, camping, training or conference centers)

Families	Couples	Groups	Singles
Farm stays - Families often choose agrotourism accommodations in rural areas of Romania, where children can interact	Boutique Hotels in Historic Towns: Couples may prefer romantic boutique hotels located in picturesque historic towns	Conference Hotels: Groups traveling for business or events often choose conference hotels in major cities	Hostels in Major Cities: Solo travelers often stay in hostels in cities like Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, or Timișoara,

<p>with farm animals, participate in agricultural activities, and enjoy the tranquility of the countryside</p>	<p>like Sighișoara, Sibiu, or Brasov, offering charming accommodations and intimate settings</p>	<p>like Bucharest or Cluj-Napoca, which offer conference facilities, meeting rooms, and accommodation for large groups</p>	<p>which offer affordable accommodations, social atmospheres, and opportunities to meet other travelers</p>
<p>Family-Friendly Resorts: Several resorts in Romania cater specifically to families, offering amenities such as children's clubs, playgrounds, swimming pools, and organized family-friendly activities</p>	<p>Spa Resorts: Romania has several spa resorts in locations like Baile Herculane, Sovata, or Praid, where couples can indulge in spa treatments, thermal baths, and wellness activities in a serene environment</p>	<p>Villa Rentals: Groups of friends or families may rent villas or holiday homes in destinations like the Black Sea coast or Transylvania, providing spacious accommodations and shared amenities for group gatherings</p>	<p>Adventure Tours: Singles may join adventure tours or guided expeditions to explore Romania's natural wonders, including hiking in the Făgăraș Mountains, cycling in Maramureș, or kayaking in the Danube Delta</p>

Mountain	Wine	Youth	Budget
<p>Cabins: Families may opt for cozy mountain cabins or chalets in destinations like the Carpathian Mountains, providing opportunities for outdoor adventures such as hiking, skiing, and wildlife spotting</p>	<p>Country Retreats: Couples seeking a romantic getaway may choose accommodations in Romania's wine regions, such as Dealu Mare or Recaș, where they can enjoy wine tastings, vineyard tours, and gourmet dining experiences</p>	<p>Camps: Youth groups or educational organizations may use youth camps or outdoor education centers in rural areas for team-building activities, workshops, and educational programs</p>	<p>Guesthouses: Budget-conscious solo travelers can find affordable guesthouses or budget accommodation s in rural areas, providing simple yet comfortable lodging options for independent exploration</p>

Potential profile of new target groups for tourism in the location

1. Outdoor Adventures and Sustainable Recreation

For adventure seekers, the Transylvanian Highlands offer a playground of outdoor activities in harmony with nature. From trekking and mountain biking to wildlife watching and birding, there are endless opportunities to connect with the natural world and embark on unforgettable adventures. Sustainable recreation options abound, including guided eco-tours,

horseback riding excursions, and educational programs focused on conservation and environmental awareness.

2.Cultural Heritage and Authentic Experiences

Beyond its natural beauty, the Transylvanian Highlands are steeped in a rich tapestry of history and culture. Travelers can explore medieval villages adorned with charming Saxon architecture, visit fortified churches dating back centuries, and engage with artisans preserving traditional crafts such as pottery, weaving, and woodcarving. Cultural festivals and folkloric performances offer glimpses into the vibrant traditions of Transylvanian life, providing unforgettable experiences for visitors seeking authentic cultural immersion.

3.Health and Wellness Travelers

The tranquil setting of the highlands makes it an ideal destination for health and wellness retreats. Targeting health and wellness travelers interested in yoga retreats, meditation workshops, and holistic wellness experiences could tap into this growing market segment.

4. Digital Detox Travelers

In today's hyperconnected world, many travelers seek destinations where they can unplug and disconnect from technology. Targeting digital detox travelers with off-the-grid accommodations, nature retreats, and mindfulness activities could cater to this niche market seeking peace and tranquility.

5. Slow Travelers

Slow travel emphasizes immersing oneself in the local culture and savoring the travel experience at a leisurely pace.

Targeting slow travelers with immersive cultural experiences, homestay accommodations, and guided cultural tours could appeal to travelers seeking meaningful connections and authentic experiences.

Chapter 5.

Report-summary compilation of training courses related to rural tourism

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Spain

Personal and Professional Skills for Sustainable Tourism:

- **Professional Skills:**

- Proficiency in English for international tourist engagement
- Basic knowledge of nature conservation, environmental issues, and ecology
- Profound knowledge of socio-economic conditions in the working area

Personal Skills:

- Personal commitment and engagement for the area and future generations
- Caring for nature and the environment

Mindset:

- Sense of responsibility for the world

Training and Further Education in Digitalization for Sustainable Tourism:

- **Existing Programs:**

- University careers integrating digitalization in tourism
- Inconsistent vocational educational training (VET) across regions
- Implementation of digital tools for accessibility, such as information in multiple languages and for those with limited mobility

Gaps and Future Needs:

- Lack of homogenized vocational training at the national level
- Limited digitalization in rural tourism, with a significant gap between different tourism actors
- Need for more efforts by local and regional development agencies on digitalization

Promoting Further Training in Digitalization/Sustainable Tourism:

- **Recommendations for Action:**
 - Use of best practice examples to motivate improvements
 - Simple, economical digital solutions like QR-codes with translations for wider accessibility
 - Special tools for persons with limited mobility and mental disabilities to trigger discussions on digitalization extent and implementation.

Slovakia

Personal and Professional Skills for Sustainable Tourism:

Personal Skills:

- Cultural sensitivity and environmental awareness
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Strong communication skills, including multilingual abilities
- Problem-solving skills and empathy

Professional Skills:

- Deep understanding of sustainable tourism practices

- Project management skills for coordinating with various stakeholders
- Marketing expertise for promoting sustainable tourism experiences
- Knowledge of tourism's economic impact on local communities
- Educational skills for teaching tourists about local culture and conservation
- Research and data analysis for informed sustainable tourism strategies

Training and Further Education in Digitalization for Sustainable Tourism:

- **Existing Programs:**
 - University courses at Slovak University of Technology and Comenius University in Bratislava
 - Vocational training by the Tourism Development Academy on digital marketing
 - Training by the Slovak Chamber of Commerce on using digital tools like booking systems and virtual tours

Gaps and Future Needs:

- Lack of comprehensive, advanced courses combining digitalization and sustainability
- Limited coverage of emerging technologies such as AI, big data analytics, and blockchain
- Need for practical, hands-on training for real-world application of digital tools
- Specialized training for SMEs to adopt digital solutions promoting sustainability
- Continuous education programs to keep professionals updated with the latest trends and technologies

Promoting Further Training in Digitalization/Sustainable Tourism:

- **Recommendations for Action:**

- Launch awareness campaigns on the importance of digital skills and sustainable practices
- Develop and fund specialized training programs through partnerships
- Provide incentives like subsidies or tax breaks for businesses investing in employee training
- Create accessible, flexible learning opportunities such as online courses and modular training programs
- Establish certification programs in digital and sustainable tourism to enhance credibility and motivate participation

Austria

Personal and Professional Skills for Sustainable Tourism:

- **Personal Skills:**

- Cultural sensitivity and environmental awareness
- Adaptability and strong communication skills
- Customer-oriented mindset and problem-solving abilities

Professional Skills:

- Deep understanding of sustainable tourism practices
- Project management skills for effective planning and execution
- Marketing expertise for promoting sustainable tourism
- Knowledge of local culture and natural resources

- Educational skills to inform tourists about conservation efforts

Training and Further Education in Digitalization for Sustainable Tourism:

- **Existing Programs:**
 - o University programs incorporating sustainability and digitalization, such as those offered by the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna
 - o Vocational training programs focusing on digital marketing and sustainable tourism practices
 - o Workshops and courses provided by tourism associations and local chambers of commerce

Gaps and Future Needs:

- Need for more specialized courses combining digitalization and sustainability at advanced levels
- Limited focus on emerging technologies like AI and big data in current training programs
- Practical training opportunities for real-world application of digital tools are lacking
- Greater emphasis on continuous education to keep professionals updated with the latest digital trends

Promoting Further Training in Digitalization/Sustainable Tourism:

- **Recommendations for Action:**
 - o Raise awareness through campaigns highlighting the importance of digital skills in sustainable tourism

- o Strengthen partnerships between educational institutions, government, and industry stakeholders to develop specialized training programs
- o Provide financial incentives for businesses to invest in employee training
- o Offer flexible, accessible learning opportunities, including online and modular courses
- o Establish certification programs to enhance the credibility of training in digital and sustainable tourism

Romania

Personal and Professional Skills for Sustainable Tourism:

- **Personal Skills:**

- o Cultural sensitivity and respect for local traditions
- o Flexibility, adaptability, and strong interpersonal skills
- o Problem-solving abilities and customer service orientation

Professional Skills:

- Thorough understanding of sustainable tourism practices
- Project management skills for coordinating with diverse stakeholders
- Marketing skills for promoting local tourism sustainably
- Knowledge of local ecological and cultural contexts
- Educational skills to teach tourists about local heritage and conservation

Training and Further Education in Digitalization for Sustainable Tourism:

- **Existing Programs:**

- University courses integrating digital technology and sustainability, such as those offered by Babeş-Bolyai University
- Vocational training focusing on digital tools for tourism marketing and management
- Workshops and training sessions organized by tourism boards and industry associations

Gaps and Future Needs:

- Insufficient advanced training programs that blend digitalization with sustainability
- Lack of focus on cutting-edge technologies like AI, big data, and blockchain in existing courses
- Need for hands-on, practical training experiences for tourism professionals
- Increased support for continuous education to keep pace with technological advancements

Promoting Further Training in Digitalization/Sustainable Tourism:

- **Recommendations for Action:**

- Implement awareness campaigns to underscore the importance of digital skills in tourism
- Foster collaborations between educational institutions, government bodies, and the private sector to create and fund training programs
- Introduce financial incentives such as grants or tax breaks to encourage training investments
- Develop flexible learning options, including online and modular training formats

- o Create certification programs in digital and sustainable tourism to validate and motivate professional development

Conclusions Based on the Analysis of Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Common Skill Requirements:

- All four countries emphasize the need for both personal and professional skills in sustainable tourism. Personal skills such as cultural sensitivity, adaptability, strong communication, and problem-solving abilities are universally recognized as essential. Professionally, a deep understanding of sustainable tourism practices, project management, and marketing expertise is critical.

Educational Infrastructure:

- **Austria and Slovakia** have relatively robust educational offerings at the university level that integrate digitalization with sustainable tourism. Both countries provide vocational training and workshops, though they recognize the need for more advanced and practical courses.
- **Spain and Romania** face challenges with inconsistent vocational training, particularly in rural tourism. Spain, in particular, struggles with a lack of homogenized vocational training at a national level, and Romania needs more advanced and practical training programs.

Gaps in Training and Education:

- There is a general lack of advanced courses that combine digitalization with sustainability, especially at the postgraduate level. Emerging technologies such as AI, big data, and blockchain are not sufficiently covered in the current training programs across all four countries.
- Practical, hands-on training for real-world application of digital tools is limited. There is a need for more continuous education programs to keep tourism professionals updated with the latest digital and sustainable practices.

Promotional Strategies for Further Training:

- All four countries can benefit from awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of digital skills and sustainable practices. These campaigns should leverage social media, local media, and industry events to reach a broad audience.
- Partnerships between educational institutions, government agencies, and industry stakeholders are crucial for developing and funding specialized training programs.
- Financial incentives, such as subsidies, grants, or tax breaks, can encourage businesses to invest in employee training. Flexible learning opportunities, including online and modular courses, can help professionals upskill at their own pace.

Best Practices and Accessibility:

- The use of best practice examples can motivate improvements and inspire the adoption of digital and sustainable practices. Spain's example of using QR-codes

for multilingual access and tools for people with limited mobility can serve as a model for other countries.

- Establishing certification programs in digital and sustainable tourism can enhance the credibility of training programs and motivate participation among professionals.

Specific Conclusions for Each Country

Austria:

- Strengths: Strong university programs and vocational training; existing workshops by tourism associations.
- Needs: More specialized courses on emerging technologies and practical training opportunities.

Slovakia:

- Strengths: University courses and vocational training integrating digital tools and sustainable practices.
- Needs: Advanced training on emerging technologies and continuous education programs.

Spain:

- Strengths: University programs with a focus on digitalization; practical examples like QR-codes for accessibility.
- Needs: Homogenized vocational training, advanced digitalization courses, and practical training for rural tourism.

Romania:

- Strengths: University courses integrating digital technology and sustainability; industry-organized workshops.
- Needs: More advanced and practical training programs, focus on emerging technologies, and continuous education support.

By addressing these gaps and implementing the recommended strategies, Austria, Slovakia, Spain, and Romania can develop a more skilled workforce capable of leveraging digital technologies to foster sustainable tourism practices.

Chapter 6. New organisations with the capacity to organise events

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

The development of a database on organisations with the capacity to organise events can be a useful tool in the rural tourism sector, allowing users to easily access such services. The inclusion of organisations in the database should be done in a methodological way, following a set of common criteria.

The criteria considered to be fundamental are the following:

1. To belong to the rural tourism sector
2. To be sustainable with some kind of certification (also identify the certifications in each country)
3. To have digital innovation

Name of the organisation	Country	Since	objective of the organisation	activities and projects	It belongs to the rural tourism sector (Yes or No)	sustainable with some kind of certification (Yes or No)	certifications of each country (Wich one)	digital innovation (Yes or No)	website	Social media
Ranch 13	Slovakia	2013	Tourism, accommodation, gastronomic, events	Events, gastronomic education	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	https://www.ranch13.sk/	https://www.facebook.com/ranch13.sk/?locale=sk_SK
Farma Lavela	Slovakia	2007	tourism, gastronomic hosting	hosting, food production	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	https://www.lavella.sk/	https://www.facebook.com/farma.lavella/
Agroturist	Slovakia	1999	tourism and gastronomic	support of tourism in rural areas	Yes	No	No	Yes	agroturist.sk	
Farma Roziak	Slovakia	2001	nature, food, excursion	hosting, gastronomic, events	Yes	Yes	No	No		https://www.facebook.com/farma.roziak/
Global Tribe biodynamic Ecovillage	Spain	2017	host tourists and produce organic food	ecovillage, camping, resta	Yes	Yes	CAAE	yes	https://www.global-tribe.org/	

				urant						
Bioeaters	Spain	2020	organic catering	events with organic catering	Yes	Yes	CAAE	no		https://www.facebook.com/bioeaters
Wild Watching Spain	Spain		nature tourism, excursion, trekking	trekking, excursions, nature observation	Yes	No		Yes	https://es-es.facebook.com/WildWatchingSpain , https://wildwatchingspain.com/	https://www.instagram.com/wildwatchingspain/?hl=es
Fundación Naturaleza y Hombre	Spain	1994	tourism rural, nature and gastronomic	conservation projects, custody agreements between rural populations, projects to improve habitats and threats	Yes	Yes	FSC	Yes	https://www.lodgecampariosdeazaba.com/la-reserva/	https://www.instagram.com/campariosdeazaba/

				tened species						
St. Martins Lodge	Austria	2009	tourism rural, nature and gastronomic	hosting, nature education, observing	YES	YES	NO	yes	https://www.facebook.com/ThermBurgenland/?locale=de_DE, https://www.instagram.com/stmartinsthermeundlodge/?hl=de	https://www.facebook.com/ThermBurgenland/?locale=de_DE, https://www.instagram.com/stmartinsthermeundlodge/?hl=de
Steinschaler - wilde Einfachheit	Austria	1996	tourism rural, exkursions, gastronomic	hosting, nature education, catering	YES	YES	Umweltzeichen	Yes	https://steinschaler.at/	https://www.facebook.com/Steinschalerhof/
Biohotel Gralhof	Austria		tourism rural, gastronomic	hosting, Certified organic	Yes	Yes	BIO	Yes	https://gralhof.at/#bio	https://www.facebook.com/people/Gralhof-Das-Biohotel-am-Weissensee/100063587769956/
Tourismus region Alpbachtal	Austria	2023	tourism rural, Visitor guidance, gamification	Visit or guidance, Digital information about	Yes	No	NO	Yes	https://www.simagazin.com/si-magazin/themen/digital	

				the region, flora and fauna via QR code					lisierung-innovation/virtuelle-s-abenteuer-fuer-gaeste-des-alpbachtals/	
My Transilvania	Romania	2010	Rural tourism, gastronomy, excursions, events, brunch, bike excursions, etc	Events, gastronomy, sports	yes	no	no	yes	https://experiences.mytransilvania.ro https://booking.mytransilvania.ro	https://www.facebook.com/mytransilvania.ro
The Haferland Week	Romania	2012	Rural tourism, cultural activities, gastronomy, excursions, events, brunch,	events, local rural culture, gastronomy, etc	yes	no	no	yes	https://haferland.ro/en/about-us/	https://www.facebook.com/haferland

			bike excursions, etc							
Go visit Transilvania	Romania	2019	Rural tourism, cultural activities, gastronomy, excursions, events, brunch, bike excursions, etc	events, culture, gastronomy, agriculture	yes	no	no	yes	https://www.govisittransylvania.ro/listings/transylvania-brunch/	https://www.facebook.com/GoVisitTransylvania
Carpathia Foundation - Cobor Biodiversity Farm	Romania	2007	Rural tourism, ecological products, biodiversity farmland, wildlife watching, bike competitions, etc	Ecotourism, events, biodiversity projects	yes	no	no	yes	https://cobor-farm.ro https://cobor-farm.ro/ro/cobor-intrastejaricel-mai-nou-festival-care-pune-in-v	https://www.facebook.com/FermaCobor

									aloar e-ste jarii -se-v a-des fasur a-pe- 3-4-i unie- in-sa tul-c obor- din-j udetu l-bra sov/	
ADEPT Foundation	Romania	2015	Rural tourism develop ment	Bike compe titio ns in rural area	yes	no	no	yes	https://fundatia-adept.org/ro/home/ https://trace.ro/en/	https://www.facebook.com/TransilvaniaBikeTrailsRace

Chapter 7. Report of successful initiatives and good practices of tourism associated with agricultural and livestock activities, a file will be made for each activity presented

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Spain

What specific agricultural or livestock activity is being highlighted, and how has it been integrated with tourism in your Country?

In Spain, horseback riding is a big issue – the passion goes back to the times of Morish occupation who brought Arabian horse to Spain. Especially in the South of Spain, horses are an essential part of all pilgrimages, popular festivals, etc.



Also, horsedrawn carriages have a long tradition and play an important role in traditional festivals, marriages, etc.

There are a lot of farms who offer all kinds of activities related to horses and donkeys all over Spain. In Jerez de la Frontera you have the famous ***Real Escuela Andaluza Arte Ecuestre***.

Another unique offer for tourism related to livestock is visiting breeders of “toro bravo”, bulls for the bullfights. There are even special agencies (e.g.: torostours) for this specific aspect.

Small rustic houses on farmlands are very popular, so people can be integrated in farming and livestock: agrotourism.

Tourism with an educational focus can be found for falconry and other livestock related activities.

Hunting – if we consider it to be related to livestock – is a very important business in rural tourism: for national and international tourists.

Concerning to *artemisa* *fundación* (<https://fundacionartemisan.com/informe-socioeconomico-impacto-caza-en-espana/>) hunting in Spain creates an income of 6,475 million euros and creates 187.000 jobs.

What are the notable successful initiatives associated with this activity, and what factors contributed to their success?

The key factor for success is definitely the language knowledge so that tourist without knowledge of the Spanish language can participate. Livestock related tourism in rural areas is majorly booked by tourists from countries outside of Spain.

It is usually a middle-to-high-standard tourism in special surroundings and high-quality facilities. High personal engagement, commitment and implication of the staff members are another key quality.

What challenges were encountered during the implementation of these initiatives, and what solutions were employed to address them? Identify key obstacles and the measures taken to overcome them. What impact have these initiatives had on the local community, economy, and environment?

The main challenge is the economic aspect: any type of agrotourism requires a huge capital (farmland, livestock, staff) and can usually only be complementary to a running farm- and/or livestock-business. That's why this kind of

tourism is usually offered by economically well equipped, big farms or breeders. Key obstacle therefore is economic strength. Small farms or businesses have a hard time preparing the complete display (animals, infrastructure, qualified staff) for just seasonal tourism. Tourism related to livestock usually only offers seasonal jobs for the local community. Economic impact is usually for the owners of the farms/businesses. Ecologically speaking, agrotourism is usually quite sensitized and conscientious.

Slovakia

What specific agricultural or livestock activity is being highlighted, and how has it been integrated with tourism in your Country?

In Slovakia, organic beekeeping in the countryside is a prominent agricultural activity that has been successfully integrated with tourism. This integration is achieved through various initiatives that invite tourists to participate in and learn about beekeeping. Visitors can engage in interactive farm visits where they observe the daily operations of beekeeping, participate in honey tasting tours, and attend educational workshops. These experiences are designed to highlight the importance of bees in agriculture and provide insights into the production process of organic honey. Furthermore, these tours are often packaged with local accommodation and traditional Slovak meals, enhancing the cultural and culinary appeal of the tourist experience.

What are the notable successful initiatives associated with this activity, and what factors contributed to their success?

Several notable initiatives have been successful in promoting organic beekeeping tourism in Slovakia. Beekeeping tours are one of the primary attractions, where local beekeepers open their farms to tourists, providing guided tours that explain the intricacies of beekeeping and honey production. Annual honey festivals also play a significant role, celebrating the heritage of beekeeping and showcasing a variety of local honey products. Additionally, educational workshops offer tourists hands-on experiences and knowledge about the vital role of bees in the ecosystem. The success of these initiatives can be attributed to the strong local tradition of beekeeping, the high quality of Slovak organic honey which attracts a wide range of tourists, and substantial support from government and local authorities, including funding and marketing efforts to promote rural tourism.

What challenges were encountered during the implementation of these initiatives, and what solutions were employed to address them? Identify key obstacles and the measures taken to overcome them. What impact have these initiatives had on the local community, economy, and environment?

The implementation of beekeeping tourism in Slovakia faced several challenges. One of the main issues was the seasonality of the activity, as beekeeping is largely dependent on the active seasons of bees. Additionally, logistical challenges arose in managing large groups of tourists on working farms without disrupting the beekeeping process. There were also environmental concerns about ensuring that tourism activities did not negatively impact bee populations and their natural habitats. To address these challenges, extended season activities were developed, such as honey product workshops and indoor educational sessions, to attract visitors throughout the year. Infrastructure improvements were made to accommodate tourists, including the construction of visitor centers and

safe observation areas. Furthermore, environmental education programs were implemented to raise awareness among tourists about the importance of protecting bee habitats and promoting sustainable tourism practices. The integration of organic beekeeping with tourism has had a significant positive impact on local communities, the economy, and the environment in Slovakia. Economically, these initiatives have provided additional income streams for local beekeepers and boosted rural tourism, attracting visitors from both domestic and international markets. Socially, they have fostered a greater sense of community pride and cultural heritage, as residents share their traditional practices with visitors. Environmentally, the focus on organic beekeeping and the education of tourists about the importance of bees have promoted better environmental stewardship and awareness. These initiatives have also encouraged the preservation of natural habitats and supported biodiversity, contributing to the overall health of the local ecosystem. The measurable outcomes include increased tourist numbers, higher sales of local honey products, and enhanced conservation efforts for bee populations.

Austria

What specific agricultural or livestock activity is being highlighted, and how has it been integrated with tourism in your Country?

There are around 8.000 to 9.000 Alpine pastures in Austria, although the exact number can vary slightly depending on the source and definition. These mountain pastures are spread across the various federal states, particularly in the Alpine

regions. Cattle and sheep are primarily kept on the mountain pastures. There are also horses and goats.

Overall, Alpine pasture farming contributes significantly to Austria's attractiveness as a tourist destination. It offers authentic and traditional experiences, promotes the regional economy through culinary offerings and leisure opportunities, supports nature conservation and sustainable tourism and maintains the cultural landscape. Alpine pastures are therefore an indispensable part of the tourism offer in Austria and an important economic factor for the Alpine regions

Here are the most important aspects that emphasise the significance of Alpine pasture farming for Austrian tourism:

- **preservation of the cultural landscape**

Austria's mountain pastures characterise the typical Alpine cultural landscape. Grazing prevents scrub encroachment and preserves the open, well-tended alpine pastures. This landscape is a magnet for tourists who want to enjoy the beauty of the Alps.

- **authentic and traditional experience**

Tourists appreciate authentic experiences and the opportunity to experience traditional life in the Alps up close. Alpine pastures offer insights into traditional farming and craftsmanship, such as the production of cheese and other dairy products. Visitors can take part in guided tours, tastings and workshops.

- **culinary highlights**

Regional products such as alpine cheese, butter and bacon are very popular with tourists. Many alpine huts run restaurants

that offer these specialities. These culinary experiences are a major attraction for visitors and enrich the region's gastronomic offerings.

- **leisure and sports activities**

The Alpine pastures and the surrounding mountain landscapes offer numerous leisure and sports activities. Hiking, mountain biking, climbing and skiing are popular activities that attract many tourists. The well-maintained hiking trails and mountain routes make the Alpine regions particularly attractive for outdoor enthusiasts.

- **Nature conservation and sustainability**

Alpine farming contributes to the preservation of biodiversity and sustainable land use. Tourists who are interested in ecological and sustainable travel options particularly appreciate this aspect. Alpine pastures are often managed in harmony with nature conservation, which protects the environment and preserves the natural beauty of the region.

What are the notable successful initiatives associated with this activity, and what factors contributed to their success?

Alpine pasture farming has a very long tradition in Austria and the synergies between agricultural production and tourism have been utilised very well for decades.

Many farmers offer guest accommodation and catering and thus have an additional income. This is particularly positive as production in these disadvantaged areas is very challenging and labour-intensive and the income directly from agriculture is low.

In addition to the beautiful landscape, tourists also enjoy taking part in traditional festivals such as church days, folk

concerts and dances. The traditional cattle drives also attract many visitors.

What challenges were encountered during the implementation of these initiatives, and what solutions were employed to address them? Identify key obstacles and the measures taken to overcome them. What impact have these initiatives had on the local community, economy, and environment?

The link between mountain pasture farming and tourism in Austria is fundamentally positive and promotes regional development, but there are also challenges that need to be overcome. Here are some of the main challenges that arise in connection with tourists

- **environmental pollution and nature conservation**

Many visitors to these conservation-relevant regions can have a negative impact on nature. This can lead to the disturbance of wildlife or have an impact on biodiversity, for example when tourists pick protected plants.

In addition, the high number of visitors can lead to erosion and damage to hiking trails and mountain pastures, and the problem of waste and rubbish on the mountains is also not irrelevant.

conflicts between tourists and mountain pasture hosts

The behaviour of tourists can lead to conflicts due to a lack of understanding of agricultural activities and rules (e.g. closed gates, grazing animals not disturbed).

Carelessness and ignorance can lead to damage to fences, pastures and other facilities, which means additional work and costs for the mountain pasture hosts.

- **Seasonal variations and profitability**

Tourism is highly seasonal, which brings with it economic fluctuations and uncertainties for the mountain pasture economy. Investments in infrastructure (e.g. hiking trails, huts) and services for tourists are necessary but costly.

- **Traffic problems and accessibility**

Especially in the high season, the access roads to the mountain pastures can be overloaded, which leads to traffic problems and increased environmental pollution.

- **Safety risks**

Some tourists are not sufficiently prepared for alpine conditions, which leads to accidents and increased rescue efforts. Rapidly changing weather conditions in the Alps can surprise tourists and put them in danger.

In recent years in particular, tourists' behaviour towards grazing livestock has been a problem and there are repeated cases of people being injured by grazing animals, especially when mother animals are defending their young.

Overcoming these challenges requires close co-operation between all stakeholders and balanced management in order to protect the interests of both the mountain pasture economy and tourism. For this reason, special initiatives are being taken here and there are special subsidies within the framework of the common agricultural policy.

Strategies for overcoming the challenges

- Sustainable tourism management: development and implementation of strategies to manage visitor flows and protect the environment.
- Education and awareness-raising: Educational campaigns and information materials to raise awareness among tourists for the interests of the mountain pasture economy.
- Cooperation and dialogue: Collaboration between alpine farmers, tourism organisations and local authorities to develop joint solutions.
- Infrastructure investments: Development and maintenance of hiking trails, refuges and other facilities to meet the needs of tourists while protecting the environment.

Romania

What specific agricultural or livestock activity is being highlighted, and how has it been integrated with tourism in your Country?

In Romania, one specific agricultural activity that has been integrated with tourism is traditional farming practices, particularly those involving heritage breeds of livestock and organic farming methods. This integration serves to promote sustainable rural tourism and cultural experiences.

Heritage Breeds and Organic Farming:

Heritage Breeds: Many traditional farms in Romania raise heritage breeds of livestock, such as Hutsul sheep, Carpathian goats, and Mangalitsa pigs. These breeds are valued for their adaptability to local environments and their role in preserving genetic diversity.

Organic Farming: There is a growing emphasis on organic farming practices in Romania, where farms cultivate crops and raise livestock without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. This approach not only supports sustainable agriculture but also appeals to tourists interested in organic produce and ethical farming practices.

In Romania, one specific agricultural activity that has been integrated with tourism is traditional farming practices, particularly those involving heritage breeds of livestock and organic farming methods. This integration serves to promote sustainable rural tourism and cultural experiences.

Integration with Tourism:

Farm Stays: Some traditional farms in Romania offer farm stays or agrotourism experiences, where visitors can participate in daily farm activities such as milking, cheese making, or harvesting crops. This hands-on experience allows tourists to learn about traditional farming techniques firsthand.

Example: The Apafi Manor in Transylvania offers farm stays where guests can participate in daily farm activities such as milking cows, collecting eggs, and harvesting vegetables. Visitors can experience traditional Romanian farm life and interact with heritage breeds like Hutsul sheep and Carpathian goats.

Educational Tours: Farms often organize educational tours that showcase sustainable agricultural practices, such as composting, crop rotation, and water conservation. These tours educate visitors about the importance of sustainable farming and its impact on local ecosystems.

Example: The Saxon Farm in Mălâncrav organizes educational tours that highlight sustainable agricultural

practices. Tourists can learn about organic farming techniques such as composting and crop rotation, as well as traditional methods of preserving crops and making cheese.

Culinary Experiences: Tourists can also enjoy farm-to-table culinary experiences, where they sample organic produce and traditional dishes prepared with locally sourced ingredients. This culinary aspect highlights the connection between sustainable farming practices and traditional Romanian cuisine.

Example: Casa cu Pridvor in Maramureş offers farm-to-table culinary experiences where visitors can enjoy meals prepared with organic produce from the farm. Traditional dishes like sarmale (stuffed cabbage rolls) made with locally sourced ingredients showcase the connection between sustainable farming and authentic Romanian cuisine.

Cultural Heritage: The integration of agricultural activities with tourism also highlights Romania's rich cultural heritage. Visitors learn about the historical significance of traditional farming methods and the role of agriculture in shaping local traditions and identities.

Example: The Fundatia ADEPT Transylvania project in Saschiz promotes sustainable agriculture and traditional crafts. Tourists can visit local farms to see heritage breeds of livestock and participate in workshops on traditional weaving, pottery, and woodcarving, preserving cultural heritage while supporting sustainable tourism.

The "Ziua Mării - The Day of the Mare" festival in Mărginimea Sibiului celebrates traditional horse breeding practices and rural culture. Visitors can attend demonstrations of horse grooming and harnessing, enjoy local

food specialties, and learn about the importance of Mărginimea Sibiului's cultural landscape.

Overall, integrating traditional agricultural practices, heritage livestock breeds, and organic farming with tourism in Romania not only promotes sustainable rural development but also offers authentic cultural experiences that attract tourists interested in sustainable living, local cuisine, and immersive cultural experiences.

These examples demonstrate how traditional agricultural practices, heritage breeds, and organic farming methods are integrated with tourism in Romania to offer unique and authentic experiences that attract visitors interested in sustainable living, cultural heritage, and rural traditions.

What are the notable successful initiatives associated with this activity, and what factors contributed to their success?

There are several notable successful initiatives in Romania that integrate traditional agricultural practices, heritage breeds, and organic farming with tourism. Here are a few examples and the factors contributing to their success:

Transylvanian Heritage Network (THN):

- **Initiative:** The THN promotes sustainable tourism and cultural heritage preservation in rural Transylvania. It focuses on integrating traditional farming practices, including heritage breeds and organic farming, with tourism activities such as farm stays, educational tours, and culinary experiences.

Success Factors:

- **Community Involvement:** Local communities are actively involved in tourism management and benefit directly from tourist expenditures, fostering economic development.
- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** Emphasis on preserving traditional farming methods and heritage breeds helps maintain cultural authenticity, appealing to tourists seeking authentic experiences.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Collaborations between local farmers, NGOs, and tourism operators strengthen marketing efforts and enhance the quality of tourist experiences.
- **Educational Programs:** Offering educational tours and workshops on sustainable agriculture and traditional crafts enriches visitor experiences and promotes understanding of local traditions.

Fundatia ADEPT Transylvania:

- **Initiative:** ADEPT promotes sustainable rural development and biodiversity conservation in the Târnava Mare area of Transylvania. It supports traditional farming practices, organic farming, and biodiversity-friendly agriculture while integrating these practices with tourism through farm visits, festivals, and educational programs.
- **Success Factors:**
 - **Environmental Sustainability:** Focus on biodiversity conservation and organic farming practices attracts environmentally conscious tourists.
 - **Cultural Preservation:** Promotion of traditional crafts, such as weaving and pottery, alongside agriculture, preserves cultural heritage and provides authentic experiences.

- o **Policy Advocacy:** ADEPT engages in policy advocacy to support sustainable rural development and secure funding for conservation and tourism projects.
- o **Tourism Infrastructure:** Development of visitor centers, interpretation trails, and signage enhances tourist accessibility and educates visitors about the area's cultural and natural heritage.

Rural Tourism Development Programs (e.g., LEADER Approach):

Initiative: Supported by EU funding and local partnerships, LEADER approaches in various regions of Romania promote rural tourism development through initiatives that highlight traditional agriculture and local heritage.

Success Factors:

- **Financial Support:** EU funding and grants support infrastructure development, marketing efforts, and capacity building for local communities.
- **Diversification of Offerings:** Integration of agriculture with cultural activities, gastronomy, and eco-tourism diversifies tourist offerings and attracts a broader range of visitors.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Training programs for local communities enhance skills in hospitality, tourism management, and sustainable agriculture, improving service quality and visitor satisfaction.
- **Networking and Collaboration:** Networking platforms facilitate collaboration among stakeholders, promoting knowledge exchange and joint marketing efforts.

These initiatives' success is underpinned by a holistic approach that combines environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, community involvement, and strategic

partnerships. By leveraging these factors, Romania's rural tourism initiatives effectively showcase its traditional agricultural practices, heritage breeds, and organic farming to attract tourists seeking authentic and sustainable travel experiences.

What challenges were encountered during the implementation of these initiatives, and what solutions were employed to address them? Identify key obstacles and the measures taken to overcome them. What impact have these initiatives had on the local community, economy, and environment?

Implementing initiatives that integrate traditional agricultural practices, heritage breeds, and organic farming with tourism in Romania has faced several challenges. Here are key obstacles encountered and measures taken to address them, along with the impact these initiatives have had:

Challenges Encountered:

1. Lack of Infrastructure:

- **Obstacle:** Rural areas often lack adequate tourism infrastructure such as accommodation, transportation, and visitor facilities.
- **Solution:** Investment in infrastructure development supported by EU funding and public-private partnerships. This includes building guesthouses, improving road access, and creating visitor centers.

2. Limited Awareness and Marketing:

- **Obstacle:** Limited visibility and awareness of rural tourism offerings among potential tourists, both domestic and international.
- **Solution:** Intensive marketing campaigns using digital platforms, participation in tourism fairs, and collaboration with travel agencies and tour operators. Promotional materials highlight authentic experiences, cultural heritage, and sustainable practices.

3. Seasonality and Economic Viability:

- **Obstacle:** Seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals impact the economic sustainability of rural tourism initiatives.
- **Solution:** Diversification of tourism offerings throughout the year, including festivals, agricultural workshops, and winter activities. Partnerships with local businesses for year-round events and packages help sustain local economies beyond peak seasons.

4. Community Engagement and Capacity Building:

- **Obstacle:** Limited engagement and capacity among local communities in managing tourism activities and preserving cultural heritage.
- **Solution:** Training programs in hospitality, sustainable agriculture, and cultural heritage management. Community involvement in decision-making processes and revenue-sharing mechanisms from tourism activities incentivize local support and ownership.

5. Environmental Conservation:

- **Obstacle:** Balancing tourism development with environmental conservation, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas.
- **Solution:** Adoption of sustainable tourism practices, including waste management, water conservation, and eco-friendly construction. Monitoring and compliance with environmental regulations to minimize ecological footprint.

Impact on Local Community, Economy, and Environment:

1. Local Community:

- **Impact:** Increased income opportunities for local residents through employment in tourism-related activities, homestays, and sales of local products.
- **Outcome:** Enhanced pride in cultural heritage and traditional practices. Improved infrastructure benefits daily life, such as better roads and utilities.

2. Economy:

- **Impact:** Economic diversification and reduced dependence on agriculture alone. Tourism revenue supports local businesses, including restaurants, craft shops, and transportation services.
- **Outcome:** Boost to the rural economy, with direct and indirect employment generated by tourism initiatives. Increased income levels and improved standards of living in rural communities.

3. Environment:

- **Impact:** Adoption of sustainable farming and tourism practices helps preserve natural landscapes, biodiversity, and traditional agricultural knowledge.
- **Outcome:** Conservation of natural resources and promotion of eco-tourism. Reduced environmental impact through initiatives like organic farming, renewable energy use, and waste reduction

Overall, these initiatives have had a positive impact on Romania's rural communities by fostering sustainable development, preserving cultural heritage, and diversifying economic opportunities. By addressing challenges such as infrastructure gaps, marketing limitations, seasonal fluctuations, community engagement, and environmental conservation, these initiatives contribute to a balanced and resilient rural tourism sector in Romania.

Chapter 8. Network of developers of digital tools for rural tourism

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

The Summary and Analysis of Network Initiatives from Austria, Slovakia, Romania, and Spain, can be viewed interactively on the project website:

<https://cesefor.com/es/digi-econafacugas-es>

Spain: Diverse Digital and Ecotourism Initiatives

Spain has undertaken a variety of initiatives that blend technology with tourism and environmental conservation:

1. **Micocyl** aims to optimize the management and valorization of mycological resources in Castilla y León.
2. **Observatorio del Turismo Rural** focuses on gathering data through online surveys to analyze and predict trends in rural tourism.
3. **eBird Spain** is a citizen science project documenting bird distribution and abundance.
4. **Santillana a tu servicio** provides a mobile application for tourists and residents to stay informed and report issues.
5. **Official Tourism Portal of Castilla y León** offers virtual tours of natural areas.
6. **Siega Verde** provides a virtual tour of an archaeological site.
7. **Augmented Reality Hiking** uses AR technology for hiking guidance in Málaga.
8. **Senda Libre** offers cycling tours and support in Castilla y León.
9. **Wild Watching Spain** organizes global wildlife tourism and photography trips.
10. **George Scott Rides** provides horse riding experiences in the Sierra Morena.
11. **Portal de Pesca** offers comprehensive fishing information and interactive maps for anglers.

These initiatives show a strong focus on combining technological advancements with tourism, environmental education, and resource management, aiming to enhance both tourist experiences and local community engagement.

Slovakia: Focus on Digital Tools and Sustainable Tourism

Slovakia's initiatives primarily aim to promote ecotourism and cultural heritage through digital platforms:

1. **Via Carolina** offers interactive maps and hiking trails to promote eco-tourism.
2. **Ruritage** develops digital tools for cultural heritage and sustainable tourism.
3. **Slovak Paradise** provides a digital guide for exploring natural and cultural sites.
4. **Tatry360** offers virtual tours and interactive maps for responsible tourism in the High Tatras.

These projects emphasize the use of digital platforms to enhance eco-tourism and cultural heritage preservation, aiming to attract tourists while maintaining sustainable practices.

Austria: Innovative Use of Data and Technology in Tourism

Austria's initiatives leverage data and technology to enhance tourism management and sustainability:

1. **Online Travel Training** promotes Austria as a holiday destination.
2. **Sustainability Through Data Intelligence** revolutionizes tourism data sharing.
3. **Visitor Management Salzburg** develops systems for managing visitor flows in Salzburg's old town.
4. **Expedition Weather Forecast** provides customized weather forecasts for better planning of adventures.

5. **E-mobility for Sustainable Tourism** offers sustainable holiday packages and tips, focusing on e-mobility.
6. **Burgi - Digital Travel Guide** informs tourists about the Burgenland region through a mobile app.

These projects emphasize data-driven decision-making and the use of digital tools to promote sustainable tourism and enhance visitor experiences.

Romania: Integrating Ecotourism with Local Communities

Romania's initiatives integrate ecotourism services with community development and conservation:

1. **Transylvanian Highlands** centralizes ecotourism services, covering accommodation, gastronomy, events, and local guides.
2. **Tara Dornelor** provides similar services, focusing on comprehensive ecotourism experiences.
3. **Eco Romania** partners public and private sectors for nature conservation and sustainable tourism.
4. **Via Transilvanica** focuses on revitalizing communities through a long-distance trail, emphasizing minimalistic tourism that supports local economies.

These initiatives highlight the integration of ecotourism with community development, aiming to revive rural areas and promote sustainable tourism.

Conclusion

The network initiatives from Spain, Slovakia, Romania, and Austria showcase a diverse and innovative approach to enhancing tourism through technology, sustainability, and community engagement. Spain focuses on blending technology with nature and tourism, Slovakia leverages digital platforms

for eco-tourism and cultural heritage, Romania integrates ecotourism with community revitalization, and Austria uses data and technology to manage and promote sustainable tourism. These initiatives reflect a comprehensive effort to optimize tourism experiences while promoting environmental conservation and sustainable development.

Chapter 9. Network of initiatives and good practices

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Introduction

Sustainable tourism is a critical component for ensuring the long-term viability of tourism destinations while preserving their cultural, natural, and socio-economic integrity. This analysis focuses on the network of initiatives and good practices in sustainable tourism across four European countries: Romania, Austria, Slovakia, and Spain. Each country demonstrates unique approaches and successful practices that contribute to the overarching goals of sustainable tourism.

Spain

Key Initiatives

1. Sustainable Tourism in the Balearic Islands

- o **Description:** Focus on reducing environmental impact while maintaining tourist appeal.
- o **Good Practices:** Regulations on tourist numbers, promotion of off-season travel, and sustainable waste and water management systems.

2. Green Certification for Accommodations

- o **Description:** Implementation of green certification programs for hotels and resorts.
- o **Good Practices:** Energy-efficient buildings, waste reduction programs, and sourcing food locally to support nearby farmers.

Slovakia

Key Initiatives

1. National Parks and Protected Areas

- o **Description:** Conservation and sustainable tourism in parks like Tatra National Park.
- o **Good Practices:** Regulated visitor numbers, eco-friendly infrastructure, and educational programs about local biodiversity.

2. Cultural Routes and Heritage Trails

- o **Description:** Development of heritage trails that promote historical sites and local traditions.

- o **Good Practices:** Collaboration with local communities, promotion of local artisans, and preservation of historical sites.

Austria

Key Initiatives

1. Green Tourism in the Alps

- o **Description:** Promoting eco-friendly skiing and hiking with strict environmental standards.
- o **Good Practices:** Use of renewable energy in ski resorts, maintaining trails and landscapes, and implementing strict policies to reduce carbon footprints.

2. Vienna's Urban Sustainability Programs

- o **Description:** Enhancing urban tourism with a focus on sustainability.
- o **Good Practices:** Comprehensive public transport system, green spaces within the city, and sustainable culinary tourism that highlights local and organic foods.

Romania

Key Initiatives

1. Eco-Tourism Development in the 7 ecotourism destinations

- o **Description:** Emphasis on conservation and community involvement, promoting eco-friendly activities like bird watching and boat tours.
- o **Good Practices:** Environmental education for tourists, waste management systems, and the promotion of locally owned and operated lodges and services.

2. Transylvania's Cultural Heritage Conservation

- o **Description:** Preservation of medieval architecture and traditions in saxon villages from the Transilvanian Highlands
- o **Good Practices:** Integration of local culture into the tourism experience, support for traditional

crafts, and festivals that encourage cultural exchange.

Comparative Analysis

1. Community Involvement and Cultural Preservation

- o **Romania and Slovakia** emphasize cultural heritage and community involvement, which are key to sustaining tourism that benefits local populations.
- o **Austria and Spain** balance urban and natural sustainable tourism, showcasing how diverse approaches can coexist within a country.

2. Environmental Conservation

- o **Austria** leads with initiatives in the Alps that combine tourism with stringent environmental policies.
- o **Spain** focuses on island ecosystems, highlighting the need for special considerations in fragile environments.

3. Sustainable Infrastructure

- o Both **Austria** and **Spain** have implemented significant infrastructure improvements to support sustainable tourism, including public transportation and eco-friendly accommodations.
- o **Romania** and **Slovakia** are progressively integrating sustainable practices, often focused more on conservation and community-based tourism.

Conclusion

The network of initiatives and good practices in sustainable tourism across Romania, Austria, Slovakia, and Spain showcases diverse and effective strategies tailored to each country's unique context. By promoting environmental conservation, cultural heritage, and sustainable infrastructure, these countries contribute to the global movement towards sustainable tourism. Future efforts should continue to foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and innovation to enhance

these practices and ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations.

Chapter 10.

Report on training needs and the need for KA2 with Intellectual outputs

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Spain

Describe which personal and professional skills are required to be successful in sustainable tourism today. What mindset is required?

As a professional requirement I understand that a person working in or for sustainable tourism needs to dominate the English language, since – as we have seen in our analysis, the profile of tourist who practice sustainable tourism is to a large extent, international. On the other hand, basic knowledge of nature conservation, environmental issues and ecology should be present as well as profound knowledge about the socio-economic conditions in the area they work for or in.

As personal requirements we found out in our interviews and research that a personal commitment is required. We could state that persons who take the job as a mere way to earn money and/or satisfy other personal interests are not achieving results nor give impulses or spur any development.

A personal engagement for the area, for future generations, caring for the nature and the environment have shown to be factors for success.

In terms of mindset it is kind of a sense of responsibility for the world that leads to successful actions.

Give an overview of the main areas of existing training and further education offers in the field of "digitalization in sustainable tourism" in your country. Identify gaps and future needs.

The big challenge in Spain is that the vocational educational training is not homogenized on a national level. Careers and trainings concerning tourism are usually university careers and have a good part of digitalization. But in rural tourism, where sustainability is a broad issue since it includes nature conservation, sports, active tourism besides the protection of

the environment (buildings, heating, water supply, etc.) we mostly find persons with a simple VET education which differs depending on the place very much and the institution where the person has undergone the training. In small family businesses, we even identify a complete lack of any training or education and digitalization is implemented on a very low level. Unfortunately, the lack of training and education also leads to an indiscriminated implementation of digitalization which detracts from the true values in sustainable tourism.

There is a huge gap between the different actors and agents in tourism concerning digitalization.

Efforts of local and regional development agencies should focus much more on this aspect.

A big plus in Spanish tourism is the implementation of digital tools to give access to information to persons who speak other languages and to those persons with limited mobility.

Explain how further training in the field of digitalization/sustainable tourism can be promoted more strongly within the target groups. Can you derive any recommendations for action from this?

Best Practice examples are the best motivation to improve or change. The present project showed that inspiration and impulses of good practice examples are the most effective.

In the case of Spain, e.g., the use of QR-codes with translation into different languages is a economic and simple way to give access to information for anybody.

Special tools for persons with limited mobility (e.g.: position of the QR-codes for people in wheel chairs) as well as information material for persons with mental disabilities can trigger the discussion about the implementation of digitalization (to what extent, in which places, moments, etc.) in professionals' organizations, local and regional development agencies, etc.

Slovakia

Describe which personal and professional skills are required to be successful in sustainable tourism today. What mindset is required?

To be successful in sustainable tourism in Slovakia, individuals need a blend of personal and professional skills, supported by a sustainability-first mindset. Personal skills such as cultural sensitivity and environmental awareness are crucial for respecting local traditions and promoting eco-friendly practices. Adaptability, flexibility, and strong communication skills, including multilingual abilities, enhance engagement with diverse tourists. Problem-solving skills and empathy ensure issues are addressed promptly and customer needs are met.

Professionally, a deep understanding of sustainable tourism practices is essential for implementing and promoting eco-friendly initiatives. Project management skills enable effective planning and execution of sustainable tourism projects, requiring coordination with stakeholders like government bodies, NGOs, and local communities. Marketing expertise helps in promoting sustainable tourism experiences to a global audience. An understanding of tourism's economic impact on local communities is vital for developing products that benefit both the environment and the local economy. Educational skills are important for teaching tourists about

local culture and conservation, enhancing their experience. Finally, research and data analysis inform effective sustainable tourism strategies.

Give an overview of the main areas of existing training and further education offered in the field of "digitalization in sustainable tourism" in your country. Identify gaps and future needs.

In Slovakia, existing training and further education programs in digitalization for sustainable tourism encompass university courses, vocational training, and specialized workshops. Universities like the Slovak University of Technology and Comenius University in Bratislava offer programs that integrate digital technology and sustainability in tourism management, focusing on areas such as digital marketing and eco-friendly practices. Vocational training provided by institutions like the Tourism Development Academy includes workshops on digital marketing for sustainable tourism, covering social media, SEO, and online reputation management. The Slovak Chamber of Commerce also offers vocational training on using digital tools, such as booking systems and virtual tours, to enhance the tourism experience while promoting sustainability.

Gaps and Future Needs

Despite these offerings, several gaps and future needs are apparent. There is a lack of comprehensive, advanced courses that combine digitalization with sustainability, particularly at the postgraduate level. Current programs often do not cover emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and blockchain, which can significantly enhance sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, there is a need for more practical, hands-on training that enables tourism professionals to apply digital tools effectively in real-world scenarios. Future needs also include specialized training for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector to adopt digital solutions that promote sustainability. Lastly, there is a growing demand for continuous education programs to keep professionals updated with the latest trends and technologies in digitalization and sustainable tourism. Addressing these gaps can help Slovakia develop a more skilled workforce capable of leveraging digital technologies to foster sustainable tourism.

Explain how further training in the field of digitalization/sustainable tourism can be promoted more strongly within the target groups. Can you derive any recommendations for action from this?

To promote further training in digitalization and sustainable tourism among target groups in Slovakia, a multifaceted approach is necessary. Awareness campaigns should be launched to highlight the importance of digital skills and sustainable practices in the tourism industry, leveraging social media, local media, and industry events to reach a broader audience. Partnerships between educational institutions, government agencies, and industry stakeholders can help develop and fund specialized training programs. Incentives, such as subsidies or tax breaks, can encourage businesses to invest in employee training. Additionally, creating accessible, flexible learning opportunities, such as online courses and modular training programs, can help professionals upskill at their own pace. Establishing certification programs in digital and sustainable tourism can also enhance credibility and motivate participation. These strategies combined can foster a more skilled workforce equipped to leverage digital technologies for sustainable tourism.

Austria

Describe which personal and professional skills are required to be successful in sustainable tourism today. What mindset is required?

To be successful in sustainable tourism today, you need a combination of personal and professional skills, along with a mindset focused on sustainability, responsibility, and collaboration.

Personal Skills

Adaptability is crucial in the dynamic field of sustainable tourism, requiring the ability to adjust to new challenges, environments, and changing circumstances. Understanding and respecting diverse cultures and communities help create meaningful and respectful tourism experiences. A genuine interest in and commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable practices is also essential. Effective communication and relationship-building skills are vital for working with diverse stakeholders, including local communities, tourists, and industry partners. Creative and analytical thinking aids in developing innovative solutions for sustainability challenges, while strong moral principles ensure that tourism activities are conducted responsibly and ethically.

Professional Skills

Professionally, understanding the principles of sustainable tourism, including eco-friendly practices, conservation, and community engagement, is essential. The ability to plan, execute, and manage sustainable tourism projects effectively is required, along with skills in promoting sustainable tourism initiatives and educating the public about sustainable travel practices. The ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data is crucial to measure the impact of tourism activities and make informed decisions. Knowledge of local, national, and international tourism policies and regulations related to sustainability, as well as an understanding of financial management and funding mechanisms for sustainable tourism projects, is also necessary.

Mindset

A successful professional in sustainable tourism prioritizes long-term environmental health, economic viability, and social equity over short-term gains. Recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and social systems and considering the broader impact of tourism activities is crucial. Embracing new technologies, ideas, and practices that enhance sustainability in tourism is necessary, along with a cooperative attitude that values partnerships and teamwork with various stakeholders, including local communities, governments, NGOs, and tourists. Resilience and perseverance are essential for maintaining a positive and proactive approach to overcoming obstacles. Additionally, understanding global sustainability issues and their local implications and committing to contributing positively to global sustainable development goals is important.

Give an overview of the main areas of existing training and further education offers in the field of "digitalization in sustainable tourism" in your country. Identify gaps and future needs.

In the field of digitalization in sustainable tourism, existing training and further education programs cover several key areas. One prominent focus is on digital marketing for sustainable tourism. These programs aim to equip tourism professionals with skills in social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), content creation, and data analytics, all tailored to promote sustainable tourism practices and destinations effectively.

Another significant area is technology and innovation in tourism. Courses in this domain explore the latest technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence

(AI), big data, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT). These technologies are applied to enhance visitor experiences, optimize resource use, and minimize environmental impacts, thus driving sustainability in the tourism sector.

Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism management systems. Training in this area involves learning to implement and manage digital systems that support sustainability goals. This includes understanding software and platforms designed to track and report sustainability metrics, manage reservations in an eco-friendly manner, and ensure compliance with sustainability standards.

Online customer relationship management (CRM) is another crucial component of these educational offers. These programs help tourism professionals use digital tools to manage customer relationships, enhance customer engagement, personalize experiences, and promote sustainable tourism products and services.

Furthermore, there are programs centered on e-learning and virtual tourism. These initiatives focus on developing and delivering digital educational content for sustainable tourism and creating virtual tourism experiences. Participants learn to design engaging and informative digital content that highlights sustainable practices and destinations.

Despite these comprehensive training offerings, there are notable gaps and future needs in the education landscape. One major gap is the lack of integrated programs that simultaneously address both digital skills and sustainability principles. Many existing courses treat these topics separately, resulting in a fragmented understanding and application.

There is also a need for more practical implementation training. Many current programs are heavily theoretical and lack hands-on training opportunities. Future education efforts should focus on providing real-world scenarios and projects where students can apply their digital and sustainability knowledge.

Moreover, the diverse nature of the tourism industry calls for specialized training tailored to different sectors, such as hospitality, travel agencies, tour operators, and destination management organizations. Customized training for these distinct areas is essential.

Continuous professional development is another critical need. With rapid advancements in both digital technologies and sustainability practices, ongoing education is vital to keep professionals updated with the latest trends and innovations.

Training programs should also better balance local context with global sustainability trends. There is a noticeable gap in education that addresses specific local challenges and opportunities while also incorporating global best practices and standards.

Lastly, future training programs should emphasize collaboration and networking. Providing platforms for professionals to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices in digitalization and sustainability will foster a more connected and informed industry.

Explain how further training in the field of digitalization/sustainable tourism can be promoted more strongly within the target groups. Can you derive any recommendations for action from this?

Promoting further training in digitalization and sustainable tourism within Austria's target groups requires a strategic and well-coordinated approach that leverages existing strengths and addresses current gaps. Raising awareness about the importance and benefits of integrating digitalization with sustainable tourism practices is the first step. Government agencies, industry associations, and educational institutions should collaborate to highlight success stories and case studies that demonstrate how digital tools can enhance sustainability efforts and drive business growth in tourism.

Establishing partnerships between the government, private sector, and educational institutions can significantly enhance the reach and impact of training programs. The Austrian government can provide incentives for businesses that invest in digital and sustainable tourism training for their employees. These partnerships can also facilitate the development of tailored training programs that meet the specific needs of the tourism sector.

Increasing funding and subsidies for training programs can lower financial barriers for individuals and businesses. Government grants and scholarships can be offered to encourage more professionals to enroll in digitalization and sustainable tourism courses. Additionally, tax incentives for companies that invest in employee training can further motivate the private sector.

Incorporating digitalization and sustainable tourism into the curricula of tourism and hospitality management programs at universities and vocational schools can ensure that the next generation of professionals enters the workforce with the necessary skills. Developing specialized modules or degrees focused on these areas will also help build a more robust talent pipeline.

Developing and promoting industry-specific training programs can address the diverse needs of different sectors within tourism, such as hospitality, travel agencies, and tour operators. Customized training that considers the unique challenges and opportunities of each sector will make the programs more relevant and effective.

Leveraging digital platforms to deliver training can increase accessibility and convenience for learners. Online courses, webinars, and virtual workshops can make it easier for professionals across Austria, including those in remote areas, to access high-quality training. These platforms can also facilitate continuous professional development through on-demand learning.

Launching comprehensive awareness campaigns can educate tourism professionals about the benefits of digitalization and sustainable practices. These campaigns can use various media channels, including social media, industry publications, and events, to reach a broad audience. Highlighting the competitive advantage and potential cost savings of adopting these practices can be particularly persuasive.

Creating opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing among tourism professionals can foster a community of practice around digitalization and sustainability. Conferences, workshops, and online forums can provide platforms for professionals to exchange ideas, share best practices, and collaborate on innovative solutions.

Establishing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of training programs can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the programs are meeting the needs of the industry. Regular feedback from participants and

industry stakeholders can guide the continuous refinement of training offerings.

Romania

Describe which personal and professional skills are required to be successful in sustainable tourism today. What mindset is required?

To be successful in sustainable tourism in Romania, individuals must possess a combination of personal and professional skills tailored to the country's unique cultural, environmental, and economic context. Additionally, a specific mindset is required to address the opportunities and challenges present in Romania.

Personal Skills

1. **Passion for Romania's Natural and Cultural Heritage:** A deep commitment to preserving Romania's diverse ecosystems, from the Carpathian Mountains to the Danube Delta, and its rich cultural heritage, including historical sites and traditional villages.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Understanding and respecting Romania's diverse cultural landscape is crucial. This includes engaging with and valuing the traditions of various ethnic groups such as the Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons, and Roma communities.
3. **Adaptability:** The tourism sector in Romania is evolving, and professionals need to be adaptable to changes in policies, tourist preferences, and economic conditions. Flexibility is key to navigating these shifts effectively.

4. **Communication Skills:** Proficiency in Romanian and, ideally, other languages such as English, French, or German, to engage effectively with both local communities and international tourists.
5. **Problem-Solving Abilities:** Addressing issues like infrastructure development, environmental conservation, and community engagement in the Romanian context requires innovative problem-solving skills.

Professional Skills

1. **Knowledge of Sustainable Practices in Romania:** Familiarity with sustainable tourism practices specific to Romania, such as eco-friendly lodging options, sustainable agriculture, and conservation projects in national parks and protected areas.
2. **Project Management:** Expertise in managing tourism projects that focus on sustainability, including planning, budgeting, and resource management, with an emphasis on involving local communities and stakeholders.
3. **Marketing and Promotion:** Skills in promoting Romania's unique sustainable tourism offerings, using digital marketing, social media, and partnerships with travel agencies to attract eco-conscious tourists.
4. **Collaboration and Networking:** Building strong relationships with Romanian government bodies, NGOs, local businesses, and international organizations to promote and implement sustainable tourism initiatives.

Mindset Required in Romania

1. **Community-Centric Approach:** Emphasizing the involvement and empowerment of local communities in tourism development. This mindset values local knowledge and practices, ensuring that tourism benefits the people who live in tourist areas.
2. **Long-Term Vision:** Focusing on the long-term sustainability of tourism rather than short-term gains. This includes investing in infrastructure that supports sustainable practices and conserving natural and cultural resources for future generations.
3. **Innovation and Creativity:** Being open to new ideas and approaches to overcome challenges unique to Romania, such as developing off-the-beaten-path destinations and creating niche tourism experiences (e.g., rural tourism, adventure tourism).
4. **Environmental Stewardship:** A strong commitment to protecting Romania's natural environment, including efforts to reduce pollution, manage waste, and promote biodiversity conservation.
5. **Economic Inclusivity:** Ensuring that tourism development is inclusive and provides economic benefits to a wide range of people, particularly in rural and underdeveloped regions.

By cultivating these personal and professional skills and adopting a mindset tailored to Romania's unique context, individuals can contribute significantly to the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector in the country.

Give an overview of the main areas of existing training and further education offers in the field of "digitalization in sustainable tourism" in your country. Identify gaps and future needs.

Current Training Programs and Educational Offers:

1. University Programs:

- Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies: Offers courses in tourism management with modules on digital marketing and sustainable tourism practices.
- Transilvania University of Braşov: Provides a master's program in Sustainable Development, which includes components on digital tools used in sustainable tourism.
- University of Bucharest: Features programs in Environmental Studies and Geography that include courses on GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and other digital tools relevant to sustainable tourism.

2. Vocational and Professional Training:

- **Romanian Tourism Training Center:** Provides vocational training in tourism with modules on digital marketing and sustainable tourism.
- **Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania:** Offers various professional development courses, including those focused on e-commerce, digital strategy, and sustainable tourism practices.

3. Online Courses and Workshops:

- **Coursera and edX:** These platforms offer a variety of online courses in digital marketing, sustainable tourism, and related fields that are accessible to Romanian students and professionals.

- **Sustainable Travel International and Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC):** Offer webinars and online courses relevant to Romanian professionals, focusing on integrating digital tools in sustainable tourism.

4. NGO and Government Initiatives:

- **Propark Foundation for Protected Areas** – community outreach, environmental education, community facilitators, sustainable development
- **Romanian Association of Ecotourism** – ecotourism, destination management, visitor management, sustainable development, etc.
- **Romanian Ministry of Tourism:** Conducts workshops and training sessions on sustainable tourism and digitalization.
- **WWF Romania:** Engages in community education projects that sometimes include digital tools for sustainable tourism and conservation.

Identified Gaps and Future Needs

1. Integration of Advanced Digital Tools:

- **Gap:** Current programs often lack a focus on advanced digital tools such as AI, big data analytics, and blockchain technology for sustainable tourism management.
- **Need:** Development of specialized courses and workshops focusing on the application of these advanced technologies in the tourism sector.

2. Holistic Sustainable Digital Marketing:

- **Gap:** Limited training on how to create comprehensive digital marketing strategies that integrate sustainability.
- **Need:** Programs offering in-depth training on creating and managing digital campaigns that promote sustainable tourism practices and destinations.

3. **Practical Applications and Case Studies:**

- **Gap:** A shortage of hands-on training and practical case studies specific to Romania's tourism sector.
- **Need:** Incorporation of more practical projects, internships, and real-world case studies in educational programs to provide students with direct experience.

4. **Community Engagement through Digital Platforms:**

- **Gap:** Insufficient focus on using digital platforms to engage local communities and promote participatory tourism planning.
- **Need:** Training programs teaching how to use digital tools to foster community involvement and support local tourism initiatives.

5. **Language and Accessibility:**

- **Gap:** Many digital training resources are available only in English, which can be a barrier for some Romanian professionals.
- **Need:** More training materials and courses offered in Romanian, and efforts to make digital tools more accessible to a broader audience.

6. **Continuous Professional Development:**

- **Gap:** Limited opportunities for continuous professional development in digitalization and sustainable tourism.
- **Need:** Establishment of ongoing professional development programs and certification courses that allow professionals to stay updated with the latest trends and technologies.

7. **Collaboration between Stakeholders:**

- **Gap:** Insufficient collaboration between universities, industry stakeholders, and government bodies to create comprehensive training programs.
- **Need:** Enhanced collaboration to develop and offer interdisciplinary programs that combine academic knowledge with practical industry insights.

By addressing these gaps and future needs, Romania can better prepare its tourism professionals to leverage digital tools effectively in promoting and managing sustainable tourism, thereby enhancing the overall sustainability and competitiveness of its tourism sector.

Explain how further training in the field of digitalization/sustainable tourism can be promoted more strongly within the target groups. Can you derive any recommendations for action from this?

Promoting Further Training in Digitalization and Sustainable Tourism

To effectively promote further training in digitalization and sustainable tourism among target groups in Romania, a strategic approach involving awareness campaigns, incentives,

partnerships, and tailored programs is essential. Below are recommendations for action that can be derived for the Romanian context:

Recommendations for Action

1. **Awareness Campaigns and Information Dissemination**
 - **Action:** Launch nationwide awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of digitalization and sustainable tourism training.
 - **Implementation:** Utilize various media channels, including social media, local television, radio, and print media, to reach a wide audience. Collaborate with influencers and industry experts to endorse the programs.
2. **Incentives for Participation**
 - **Action:** Provide financial incentives such as scholarships, grants, and subsidies to encourage participation in training programs.
 - **Implementation:** Government and private sector collaboration to create funding opportunities for students and professionals pursuing these courses.
3. **Partnerships with Educational Institutions**
 - **Action:** Establish partnerships between universities, vocational schools, and industry stakeholders to develop and promote specialized training programs.
 - **Implementation:** Co-create curriculum and training modules that incorporate real-world case studies and practical applications relevant to Romania's tourism sector.
4. **Tailored Training Programs**

- **Action:** Develop tailored training programs that address the specific needs of different target groups, such as small business owners, local government officials, and tourism professionals.
- **Implementation:** Conduct needs assessments to identify skill gaps and design courses that are accessible both online and offline to cater to varying levels of digital literacy.

5. Community Engagement and Local Involvement

- **Action:** Engage local communities in the training process to ensure that sustainable tourism initiatives are inclusive and culturally appropriate.
- **Implementation:** Organize workshops and seminars in local communities, involving local leaders and stakeholders to foster a sense of ownership and relevance.

6. Professional Development and Certification

- **Action:** Create pathways for continuous professional development and certification in digitalization and sustainable tourism.
- **Implementation:** Introduce certification programs that are recognized by industry bodies and offer clear career advancement opportunities.

7. Integration of Technology in Training

- **Action:** Incorporate advanced technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and interactive online platforms in training modules to enhance learning experiences.

- **Implementation:** Partner with tech companies and educational institutions to develop and provide access to these technologies.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Action:** Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of training programs and make necessary adjustments.
- **Implementation:** Regularly collect feedback from participants, track their career progression, and measure the impact on sustainable tourism practices.

9. Public-Private Partnerships

- **Action:** Foster public-private partnerships to leverage resources and expertise in promoting sustainable tourism training.
- **Implementation:** Encourage collaboration between government agencies, private sector companies, NGOs, and international organizations to support training initiatives.

10. Showcasing Success Stories

- **Action:** Highlight success stories and best practices from individuals and organizations that have benefited from digitalization and sustainable tourism training.
- **Implementation:** Create a platform for sharing these stories through websites, newsletters, conferences, and social media to inspire and motivate others.

Contextual Recommendations for Romania

1. Leverage Romania's Unique Cultural and Natural Assets

- Emphasize the importance of preserving Romania's rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes through sustainable tourism practices. Tailor training programs to highlight successful sustainable tourism models within Romania, such as eco-tourism in the Carpathian Mountains and community-based tourism in traditional villages.

2. Focus on Language Accessibility

- Develop and provide training materials in Romanian to ensure accessibility for all professionals, especially those in rural areas who may not be fluent in English.

3. Utilize Existing Tourism Infrastructure

- Work with existing tourism infrastructure, such as tourism associations, travel agencies, and hospitality businesses, to promote training programs. These entities can act as multipliers by encouraging their employees and members to participate.

4. Government Support and Policy Integration

- Advocate for government policies that support digitalization and sustainable tourism training, including integrating these themes into national tourism strategies and providing funding for training programs.

By implementing these recommendations, Romania can enhance the promotion of further training in digitalization and sustainable tourism, ultimately leading to a more

knowledgeable and skilled workforce capable of driving sustainable growth in the tourism sector.

Chapter 11. Identification of needs in digitisation of activity groups, initiatives, and good practices

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

Spain

What examples for digitalization in the tourist sector did you know before the project? Did they seem successful, appropriate and/or sensible to you?

In the autonomous community of Castilla y León, in Spain, there is Micocyl; is a program promoted by the Junta de Castilla y León, the Diputations, and more than 320 municipalities of the region based on a progressive improvement of the governance of the whole sector to optimize the management and valorization of the mycological resource. This program is based on a system of regulation through harvesting permits, compatible with the myco-tourism and myco-agri-food development of the participating rural forest territories and allows taking advantage of multiple opportunities for financing and European cooperation.

In museums and other tourist attractions (e.g.: stalactite caves) QR-Codes are used to give access to information in different languages. It is an economic way to provide individualized information. Usually there are certain points along the visit with numbers and you press the corresponding number on your QR code in the cell phone.

How much digitalization and in which sectors within tourism do you think is adequate or necessary?

Digitalization should always be an instrument or tool focused on the target group:

Young people are - generally speaking - attracted by digital tools and so it can be a kind of "teaser" to make them

interested in topics and/or modalities of tourism that they probably are not interested in by themselves.

For people with limited mobility, digitalization is a way to make them participate and provide them experiences that they cannot access by, e.g.: web cam, video in real time/live, etc.

For touristic activities in protected areas or adventure tourism digitalization (e.g.: vía apps) can be an instrument to provide security (e.g.: real time location) or supervision that certain rules or limits in protected areas are being respected (see: Micocyl).

Apps can be extremely useful in educational tourism or training activities in tourism.

Did the project give you any inspiration for how much and what kind of digitalization is needed?

The project sensitized for the careful use of digitalization: should be a teaser, a tool or an instrument and not replace an actual experience – except for the case of digital tools for people with reduced mobility.

We learned the importance and attractiveness of digital tools for young people and the enormous potential for people with limited mobility.

Slovakia

What examples for digitalization in the tourist sector did you know before the project? Did they seem successful, appropriate and/or sensible to you?

The digital tourist guide app in Banská Štiavnica, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Slovakia, exemplifies successful digitalization in tourism. The app features interactive maps, augmented reality (AR) for historical reconstructions, multilingual support, and real-time event information, which enhance the visitor experience and educational value. This approach not only aids tourists in navigating the town and accessing culturally rich content but also helps manage tourist flows to preserve historic sites. Additionally, it boosts the local economy by promoting businesses. Given its alignment with the town's need for sustainable tourism and heritage conservation, this digital initiative is both sensible and appropriate.

How much digitalization and in which sectors within tourism do you think is adequate or necessary?

In Slovakia, digitalization across various tourism sectors is both necessary and beneficial for enhancing visitor experiences and operational efficiency. Essential areas include integrating advanced online booking and management systems for accommodations and attractions, implementing digital tools at cultural and heritage sites such as virtual tours and augmented reality for enriched visitor engagement, and improving transportation with real-time updates and mobile ticketing. Additionally, digital marketing strategies can effectively promote tourism services, while sustainability initiatives leveraging digital data can help manage the environmental impacts of tourism. Moreover, supporting local businesses in adopting digital tools for e-commerce can enhance their visibility and revenue, contributing positively to the local economy. These digital adaptations not only facilitate smoother tourist experiences but also bolster the overall sustainability and accessibility of Slovakia's tourism sector.

Did the project give you any inspiration for how much and what kind of digitalization is needed?

The project highlighted the importance of using digitalization thoughtfully in Slovakia's tourism sector: it should enhance, not replace, real experiences. Digital tools like augmented reality can enrich historical and cultural understanding, making attractions more appealing, especially to younger audiences. Additionally, it underscored the value of digitalization for improving accessibility for people with limited mobility, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to explore and enjoy Slovakia's rich heritage.

Austria

What examples for digitalization in the tourist sector did you know before the project? Did they seem successful, appropriate and/or sensible to you?

Digitalisation in the regional tourism sector is taking place at various levels. Three different sectors are explained here as examples.

1. Booking platforms:

Urlaub am Bauernhof (farm holiday in Austria) is the largest accommodation provider in rural areas in Austria. The various offers are presented via a clearly organised booking website. The filter function can be used, for example, to find holiday offers that can be easily reached by public transport to enable a sustainable journey. <https://www.farmholidays.com/en>

2. Apps with regional offers:

Many regions in Austria offer apps to demonstrate what the region has to offer. These can include sights, shopping opportunities from regional producers, mobility options, etc.

- The Lower Austria Card, for example, contains around 350 excursion destinations. This card can be purchased for €75 and card holders can visit all excursion destinations free of charge for 1 year.

The app includes a clear digital overview, recommendations for the region, seasonal tips for the respective area, etc.

<https://www.niederoesterreich-card.at>

- Austria-wide platform for nature experiences:

A wide variety of offers for nature experiences are collected in this platform. Guided tours, excursions and workshops from national parks, nature parks, nature museums and private providers are included. Interested parties can use filter functions to find relevant offers (topic, format, duration, target group, region, etc.).

By May 2024, over 3350 offers had been entered. The number varies depending on the density of offers and is always up to date <https://www.bluehendesoesterreich.at/naturerlebnisse>

3. Digital support in museums or special theme trails:

QR codes are used to draw visitors' attention to special features of the respective location.

- Information boards with a QR code are informative boards or signs that contain a QR code in addition to the static content. The QR code enables viewers to access digital

content using their smartphones.

- The QR code leads users to digital content that is linked to the topic of the board. This can be:
 - Websites: The QR codes could lead to specific websites where further information, videos, images or interactive elements are available.
 - Audio or video content: The QR code could link to audio files, podcasts or videos that provide additional information.
 - Image galleries: Users could access a collection of images to see the object or location from different perspectives. (e.g. different seasons)
 - Documents or PDFs: Documents, brochures or PDF files could be provided that contain additional details.
 - Interactive elements: The QR code could also link to interactive applications or games that promote understanding or interaction with the topic.
- Action Bound - virtual treasure hunt is a mobile app and platform that is used to create interactive scavenger hunts, rallies and other fun activities. The idea behind Action Bound is to create a digital environment in which individuals or groups can solve tasks, solve puzzles and explore places together. <https://en.actionbound.com/?setlang>

How much digitalization and in which sectors within tourism do you think is adequate or necessary?

Adequate digitalization in the Austrian tourism sector should strike a balance between enhancing customer experiences, improving operational efficiency, and maintaining a human touch. The extent and areas of digitalization depend on the specific needs and goals of different sectors within tourism.

In general, however, it can be said that digital tools can promote sustainable tourism. They often provide eco-friendly options, help to monitor resource usage, and facilitate carbon offset programs. Websites and apps that highlight hotels and types of accommodation with eco-certifications can guide travelers to make more sustainable choices. Various online platforms like Expedia, Booking.com or Airbnb, for example, have revolutionized how travelers book flights, accommodation and various activities.

In terms of reducing waste and saving resources, digital tickets, contactless payment or online booking systems are very helpful. For this, mobile apps are essential. They provide convenient access to online payment, itineraries, travel updates, and location-based services. Most features can be personalized, and users can choose which recommendations and notifications they would like to receive.

When it comes to operational efficiency, virtual assistants and chatbots – AI-driven tools in general – may be helpful, as they can provide 24/7 customer support, answer FAQs and assist with booking modification. This improves customer service on the one hand and reduces operational costs on the other.

Naturally, digitalisation also plays an essential role in marketing, e.g. via social media, email marketing, and targeted advertising to reach (potential) target groups. Blogs, videos and virtual tours can attract and engage travelers by showcasing destinations and experiences.

Another trend in the tourism industry is providing digital solutions for managing public transport, car rentals, and ride-sharing services. Real-time updates and mobile ticketing improve the travel experience. While still emerging, the

integration of autonomous shuttles or cars in tourist-heavy areas can offer unique experiences and ease congestion.

Did the project give you any inspiration for how much and what kind of digitalization is needed?

One of the most important insights gained from the project is the significance of (linguistic) accessibility, especially in international tourism. Austria also lags behind in this regard, as many websites and apps are often only available in German. However, with AI and translation technology, this should no longer be an issue in the future, and providers will hopefully be able to make their offerings available in multiple languages.

Another insight is that digitalization can never replace real-life experiences. It can, however, complement and support them. Digital tools are particularly helpful in the planning and execution stages, as they are time- and resource-efficient. Many aspects of tourism can be made more user-friendly, allowing for the fulfillment of individual preferences. Specifically, digital tools can offer substantial support regarding various aspects of a trip or activity: travel arrangements, transportation, accommodation, informational material, maps, food services, opening hours, health, and safety, etc.

However, all these platforms and apps are not effective if they require extensive self-research and are difficult to navigate. Greater cooperation between partners and providers is needed— there are too many apps and too many platforms.

Improving usability through collaboration, expanding networks, better linking, and promoting these resources is

crucial. It would be desirable for online platforms to offer a wide range of options to cater to individual preferences—and for these searches to be truly functional. Implementing an efficient booking management system is essential.

Romania

What examples for digitalization in the tourist sector did you know before the project? Did they seem successful, appropriate and/or sensible to you?

Before the project, I was familiar with several examples of digitalization in the tourism sector, including:

1. **Transylvanian Highlands** - A digital platform that centralizes ecotourism services, offering information on accommodation, local gastronomy, events, and guides.
2. **Tara Dornelor** - Similar to Transylvanian Highlands, it provides a comprehensive digital ecotourism experience.
3. **Eco Romania** - A platform that fosters collaboration between the public and private sectors for nature conservation and sustainable tourism.
4. **Via Transilvanica** - A project focused on revitalizing rural communities through a long-distance trail, promoting minimalistic tourism and local economic support.

These initiatives appeared successful and appropriate as they effectively integrate digital tools to enhance ecotourism and community development. They seemed sensible because they not only promote tourism but also focus on sustainability and the well-being of local communities, ensuring long-term benefits for both tourists and residents.

How much digitalization and in which sectors within tourism do you think is adequate or necessary?

In Romania, digitalization in tourism can play a crucial role in enhancing efficiency, customer experience, and competitiveness. Here are some sectors where digitalization could be particularly beneficial:

1. **Digital Education and Interpretation:** Developing digital tools such as mobile apps or web-based guides that provide information about historical sites, traditional crafts, local cuisine, and ecological landmarks can enhance visitor understanding and appreciation of rural and cultural values.
2. **Smart Infrastructure and Sustainability:** Investing in smart technologies that support sustainable tourism practices, such as renewable energy solutions, waste management systems, and smart transportation options, can enhance the appeal of rural areas while preserving their natural beauty and cultural integrity.
3. **Digital Skills Development:** Providing training and support for local communities and businesses to develop digital skills, such as online marketing, e-commerce, and digital storytelling, can empower them to effectively promote their offerings and engage with digital tourists.
4. **Community Engagement and Participation:** Using digital platforms to facilitate community involvement in tourism promotion and management can empower local stakeholders. This might include platforms for sharing local stories, hosting virtual events, or crowdfunding initiatives for community-led tourism projects.
5. **Online Booking Systems:** Implementing robust online booking platforms can simplify the process for tourists and improve operational efficiency for businesses.

6. **Digital Marketing:** Utilizing digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, SEO, and targeted advertising can help reach a broader audience and attract more tourists.
7. **Tourist Information and Apps:** Developing mobile apps or digital platforms that provide tourists with comprehensive information about attractions, events, accommodations, and transportation options can enhance their experience.
8. **Payment Systems:** Implementing secure and efficient digital payment systems can streamline transactions and improve convenience for tourists and businesses alike.
9. **Data Analytics:** Leveraging data analytics to understand tourist preferences, behavior patterns, and trends can help businesses make informed decisions and tailor their offerings more effectively.
10. **Smart Infrastructure:** Integrating smart technologies in infrastructure, such as smart transportation systems or smart hotels, can improve efficiency, sustainability, and overall visitor experience.
11. **Cultural Heritage Preservation:** Digital tools can aid in preserving and promoting Romania's rich cultural heritage through virtual tours, digitized archives, and interactive exhibits.

Achieving adequate digitalization in these sectors can help Romania capitalize on its tourism potential, attract more visitors, and ensure sustainable growth in the industry. By focusing on these sectors and leveraging digital instruments, Romania can effectively promote its rural and cultural values, attract sustainable tourism, and contribute to the economic development of rural communities while preserving their unique identity.

Did the project give you any inspiration for how much and what kind of digitalization is needed?

Understanding the pivotal role of digitalization in Romania's tourism sector has deeply inspired me. Digitalization can significantly enhance efficiency, customer experience, and competitiveness across various domains.

For instance, developing mobile apps and web-based guides to showcase historical sites, local cuisine, and ecological landmarks can enrich visitor understanding of rural and cultural values.

Moreover, investing in smart technologies like renewable energy solutions and smart transportation systems not only preserves natural beauty but also promotes sustainable tourism practices. Equally important is the digital skills development for local communities, empowering them in online marketing and e-commerce to engage with digital tourists effectively.

Through community engagement platforms and robust online booking systems, Romania can foster local participation in tourism management while simplifying visitor experiences. Leveraging digital marketing strategies and data analytics further amplifies Romania's appeal to a global audience, ensuring informed decision-making and tailored offerings.

Ultimately, by prioritizing cultural heritage preservation through digital tools and smart infrastructure integration, Romania can harness its tourism potential, attract more visitors sustainably, and foster economic growth in rural communities, all while preserving their unique identity.

Chapter 12. Situation of sustainable tourism

Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania

What was your concept, main ideas, experiences concerning sustainability in tourism before DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS

Before the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project, the concept in Cesefor and the idea of sustainable tourism was based on the use of natural areas and cultural heritage, preserving the conservation of the environment and cultural value, and promoting economic benefit. Our experience in this aspect, has always been committed to value the environmental value above all, giving importance to the rural world and the enclaves that surround it, always putting the focus on its conservation and maintenance over time, also promoting sustainable practices among visitors and residents. Spain is very attractive for tourists looking for different experiences, so we always want to guarantee its viability and respect for natural resources and the environment in general.

FMM's approach comes from the almost 30-years' experience on an organic farm of 700 hectares and is focused on the synergies between agro-silvo-pastorile production and preserving and/or augmenting biodiversity. So tourists have to "fit in" the production system of the farm. On the other hand, the organic management of the farm and the measures in favor of biodiversity offer unique experiences to tourists. Sustainable tourism - in our view - always is linked to educational issues to respect and preserve nature maintaining it as the basic resource for human life.

What insights did you get from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS concerning sustainability?

Through our participation in DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS, Cesefor has acquired great knowledge on the involvement of digital tools in sustainable tourism, promoting the use of digitization in rural areas, including digital platforms and social networks that make local businesses known to tourists, promoting

sustainable tourism and approach, and fighting against rural depopulation, very strong in some areas. This project has been fundamental to continue growing in the incorporation of technology and facilitating a complete stay for visitors, with a focus on sustainable tourism. FMM's insights are mainly based on the use of digital tools since our approach is more from the eco-side than from the dig-side. It was eye-opening to learn about new tools.

Could you state any parallelisms between the partner country's situation and the one in your country/area in terms of sustainability?

Through our participation in the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project together with partners from Austria, Slovakia and Romania, at Cesefor, we have observed the same use of the rich natural and cultural heritage as a link in sustainable tourism, and also the promotion of ecotourism and other nature activities.

For FMM it was a very instructive experience especially because the situation in Austria is very advanced and Slovakia and Romania have similar panoramas concerning depopulation in rural areas, for example.

What conclusions in terms of sustainability could you draw from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

From our participation in the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project, Cesefor drew the main conclusion about sustainability in tourism, which was the great potential of digitization to promote sustainability between tourism and the local agent, promoting a more complete tourist experience, being more accessible and proximity. Other very important conclusions were also obtained, such as the need to preserve the environment so that local communities can benefit from the environment and it is also an appeal for tourists. It is of

vital importance the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and economic and social development in rural areas through tourism activities.

FMM has confirmed the big challenge that that exists if you need to combine economic and ecological as well as social issues. A follow-up project has been designed to pursue the challenges we detected.

What did you most profit from during DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

During the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project, Cesefor has had the opportunity to share with other European partners the reality of sustainable tourism in Spain. To make known the key values in its development, to interact and learn about examples of this tourism in other countries, which have served to enhance the value also in Spain relevant enclaves. In addition, it has been able to integrate digital tools and platforms within sustainable tourism, to conserve the environment, but showing the heritage to visitors. In summary, this project has provided us with tools and ideas to continue promoting sustainable development in rural areas, pursuing sustainability and also promoting digital tools to help tourism and local development.

FMM has, once again, learned how rich and amazing the natural and cultural heritage is and how necessary it is to arrange a sustainable way of tourism based on it.

Slovakia

What was your concept, main ideas, experiences concerning sustainability in tourism before DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS

Before DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS, our concept in Lišov Múzeum and main ideas concerning sustainability in tourism were centered

on leveraging our rich cultural and environmental heritage to promote sustainable rural tourism. Rooted in the principles of sustainable development, we focused on the preservation of cultural heritage, environmental conservation, and fostering socio-economic benefits for our local community. Our experiences in organizing various educational and community-based activities showcased our commitment to these principles. We aimed to provide immersive experiences that highlighted traditional skills and crafts, supported local artisans and farmers, and encouraged sustainable living practices among the community and visitors. This approach not only aimed to enhance the attractiveness of our region to tourists seeking authentic and eco-friendly experiences but also sought to ensure the long-term viability and resilience of our local economy and natural resources.

What insights did you get from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS concerning sustainability?

Through our involvement in DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS, at Lišov Múzeum, we gained significant insights into the integration of digital tools and practices within the realm of sustainable tourism. The project illuminated the potential of digitalization to enhance the visitor experience, improve accessibility to remote rural areas, and provide educational content that deepens the understanding of sustainability. We learned about innovative ways to market and manage sustainable tourism offerings, from virtual tours to digital platforms that connect tourists with local artisans and farmers, thereby promoting local products and sustainable practices. Additionally, DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS underscored the importance of digital skills in rural communities, highlighting the need for digital literacy as a means to empower residents, enhance local economies, and ensure the sustainability of tourism practices. This project has been instrumental in shaping our

approach towards incorporating technology in promoting and practicing sustainability in tourism, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of offering authentic, eco-friendly, and enriching experiences to our visitors.

Could you state any parallelisms between the partner country's situation and the one in your country/area in terms of sustainability?

Through our involvement in the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project alongside esteemed partners from Spain, Romania, and Austria, we at Lišov Múzeum have observed a shared dedication to using our cultural and natural heritage as a cornerstone for sustainable tourism. The collaborative effort has particularly spotlighted the role of digital innovation in broadening the appeal and accessibility of sustainable tourism offerings. This partnership has not only deepened our understanding but also provided us with valuable insights into combating rural depopulation and leveraging technology to enhance our sustainable tourism practices.

What conclusions in terms of sustainability could you draw from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

From our participation in the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project, we at Lišov Múzeum could draw several pivotal conclusions about sustainability in tourism. The project underscored the essential role of integrating digital tools and practices as a means to enhance sustainable tourism models. It highlighted the importance of preserving cultural and natural heritage while fostering economic and social development in rural areas. Furthermore, the collaboration emphasized the need for sustainable practices that not only attract visitors but also benefit local communities and preserve the environment for future generations. A key takeaway was the potential of

digitalization to create more accessible and engaging tourism experiences, promoting a deeper understanding of sustainability among visitors and residents alike. This experience has reinforced our commitment to advancing sustainability through innovative practices and collaborative efforts.

What did you most profit from during DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

During the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project, what we at Lišov Múzeum profited from the most was the invaluable opportunity to integrate and innovate our sustainable tourism practices with digital tools and platforms. This experience not only broadened our approach to promoting and preserving cultural and natural heritage but also significantly enhanced our ability to engage with a wider audience. Learning from our partners, we gained insights into the diverse applications of digital technology in sustainable tourism, from virtual tours that showcase our region's beauty and heritage without impacting the environment, to digital marketing strategies that effectively communicate our commitment to sustainability. This project has enriched our understanding and implementation of sustainability in tourism, providing us with practical tools and strategies to further our mission in a digitally connected world.

Austria

What was your concept, main ideas, experiences concerning sustainability in tourism before DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

Even prior to the project DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS, we at the University College for Agricultural and Environmental Pedagogy (UCAEP) had a foundational understanding of sustainability in tourism based on academic knowledge, our personal experiences and societal perspectives.

However, sustainability in the context of tourism was viewed primarily as environmental conservation, economic viability, cultural preservation, or maybe a combination of these elements. We considered environmental protection and economic viability to be the most important aspects, as both ensure that tourism initiatives can thrive economically while minimizing negative impacts on the environment, society, and culture.

Considering sustainability in tourism for the long-term health of a destination was a fundamental part of our concept even before the project, but we used to prioritize certain aspects of sustainability over others, such as environmental protection over community engagement. Our main idea was that sustainable tourism meant preserving the environment and wildlife while providing authentic and enriching experiences for visitors. However, we may not have fully understood the interconnectedness of sustainability pillars and their impact on local communities.

What insights did you get from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS concerning sustainability?

Could you state any parallelisms between the partner country's situation and the one in your country/area in terms of sustainability?

Throughout this project, we have been able to identify certain areas where we felt we lacked understanding or knowledge regarding sustainability in tourism. These include gaps in our awareness of best practices, emerging trends or the interconnectedness of sustainability issues within the tourism sector.

Regarding digitalization and digital tools, we have come to realize just how important online platforms are nowadays to

facilitate communication and collaboration between tourism stakeholders, local communities, and visitors. Digital marketing techniques such as social media, search engine optimization, and targeted advertising can effectively promote rural destinations to a wider audience and specifically attract responsible tourists who value authenticity and environmental conservation.

On the other hand, social media, online forums, blogs or community websites can also provide opportunities for locals and residents to share their knowledge, traditions, and stories with tourists, fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange.

Our perspective has shifted towards a more holistic view that recognizes the interconnectedness of sustainability pillars and their impact on local communities. This realisation will lead to more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to sustainable tourism.

What conclusions in terms of sustainability could you draw from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

What did you most profit from during DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

Digitalization holds significant potential for advancing sustainable tourism in rural areas by facilitating various facets of planning, management, promotion, and visitor experience. It empowers rural communities to leverage their natural and cultural assets for sustainable tourism development while preserving their distinct identity and enhancing the quality of life for residents. However, it is imperative to ensure that digital initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and respectful of local traditions and values.

During the DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS project, UCAEP had the opportunity to engage with European partners, sharing insights into sustainable tourism practices. This collaboration involved highlighting key principles underlying its development, exchanging experiences with partners from other countries, and incorporating digital tools and platforms to promote environmental conservation while showcasing heritage to visitors. Fundamentally, the project has provided us with resources and ideas to advance the promotion of sustainable development in rural regions, emphasizing both environmental sustainability and the utilization of digital tools to enhance tourism and local development endeavors.

Romania

What was your concept, main ideas, experiences concerning sustainability in tourism before DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS

Sustainability in rural areas of Romania, particularly in the context of rural tourism and ecotourism, revolves around conserving natural resources while promoting socio-economic development. Conservation efforts prioritize preserving biodiversity and implementing sustainable land use practices. Socio-economic development involves empowering local communities and enhancing livelihoods through tourism activities. Experiences in sustainable rural tourism include community-based initiatives and eco-friendly accommodations, aiming to engage locals and preserve cultural heritage. Ecotourism practices focus on protected areas, promoting responsible visitor behavior, and educating about environmental conservation. Challenges include balancing conservation with development, addressing infrastructure constraints, and leveraging technology for sustainable tourism promotion. Collaboration among stakeholders is key to

navigating these challenges and ensuring the continued pursuit of sustainable development in rural Romania.

Romania has [8 ecotourism destinations](#) that strive to balance sustainable development with the conservation of natural resources and protection of cultural values through several key approaches:

Engagement of Local Communities: Ecotourism initiatives actively involve local communities in decision-making processes and benefit-sharing mechanisms. This engagement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among locals for both the natural environment and cultural heritage.

Responsible Tourism Practices: Ecotourism operators in Romania prioritize responsible tourism practices, such as low-impact tourism activities, waste reduction, and energy efficiency. By minimizing their ecological footprint, they aim to preserve natural resources while providing authentic and immersive experiences for visitors.

Conservation of Biodiversity: Ecotourism projects often focus on protected areas and wildlife habitats, aiming to conserve biodiversity while offering opportunities for wildlife observation and nature-based activities. Sustainable management practices, such as habitat restoration and wildlife monitoring, contribute to the long-term preservation of ecosystems.

Cultural Preservation and Interpretation: Ecotourism in Romania places a strong emphasis on preserving cultural values and heritage sites. Local traditions, folklore, and customs are integrated into tourism experiences, providing visitors with insights into the rich cultural diversity of the region. Interpretation programs led by knowledgeable guides further

enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of local cultures

Education and Awareness: Ecotourism initiatives in Romania prioritize education and awareness-raising about environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation. Through interpretive signage, guided tours, and educational programs, visitors are informed about the importance of protecting natural and cultural assets, encouraging responsible behavior and fostering a deeper connection with the destination.

Regulatory Framework and Certification: Romania has implemented regulations and certification programs to ensure that ecotourism activities adhere to sustainable practices and standards. Certification schemes, such as eco-labels and sustainable tourism certifications, help guide tourists toward responsible operators and encourage continuous improvement in sustainability performance.

By integrating these approaches, ecotourism in Romania seeks to achieve a harmonious balance between sustainable development, natural resource conservation, and cultural preservation, ultimately contributing to the long-term well-being of both local communities and the environment.

What insights did you get from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS concerning sustainability?

Digital instruments offer promising solutions to enhance sustainability in tourism across Romania. By enabling efficient resource management, data-driven decision-making, and enhancing visitor experiences, digital technologies can contribute to minimizing negative environmental impacts and maximizing positive socio-economic benefits. Sustainable mobility solutions, community engagement platforms, and targeted marketing efforts facilitated by digital tools foster

collaboration among stakeholders and promote responsible travel practices. Embracing digital innovation in tourism presents opportunities to create more resilient, inclusive, and environmentally conscious tourism destinations in Romania, ultimately ensuring the long-term sustainability of the industry.

Could you state any parallelisms between the partner country's situation and the one in your country/area in terms of sustainability?

Parralelism between Spain, Austria, Slovakia and Romania in therms of sustainability:

Diverse Approaches to Sustainability: Each country employs diverse approaches to incorporate sustainability principles into rural tourism, reflecting their unique geographical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. From community-based initiatives to nature conservation efforts, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to sustainable rural tourism.

Common Goals and Priorities: Despite differences in approaches, all four countries share common goals and priorities in promoting sustainability in rural tourism. These include preserving natural and cultural heritage, empowering local communities, promoting responsible tourism practices, and fostering economic development while minimizing negative environmental impacts.

Community Engagement as a Key Driver: Community engagement emerges as a key driver of sustainable rural tourism across all four countries. By involving local residents in tourism planning, decision-making, and benefit-sharing, stakeholders can ensure that tourism development is culturally authentic, socially inclusive, and economically equitable.

Integration of Nature and Culture: Sustainable rural tourism initiatives in Slovakia, Austria, Spain, and Romania recognize

the interdependence of nature and culture, integrating both aspects into tourism experiences. By highlighting traditional craftsmanship, culinary traditions, and cultural festivals alongside nature-based activities, destinations offer holistic and authentic experiences for visitors

Need for Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: Collaboration among stakeholders and knowledge sharing are essential for advancing sustainable rural tourism development. By sharing best practices, lessons learned, and success stories, countries can learn from each other, build capacity, and address common challenges more effectively

Overall, while there are differences in how Slovakia, Austria, Spain, and Romania approach sustainability in rural tourism, there are also many shared principles and values. By continuing to prioritize sustainability, these countries can ensure that rural tourism contributes to the well-being of local communities, protects natural and cultural heritage, and fosters responsible tourism practices for future generations.

What conclusions in terms of sustainability could you draw from DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

Digital tools in rural tourism can have the potential to significantly enhance sustainability in rural tourism by improving resource efficiency, enhancing visitor experiences, supporting local economies, enabling data-driven decision making, promoting responsible tourism practices, and fostering capacity building and innovation.

- Digital tools enable more efficient resource management in rural tourism operations, leading to reduced energy consumption, waste generation, and environmental impact
- By providing access to digital platforms and mobile applications, tourists can enhance their travel

experiences through personalized recommendations, interactive maps, and real-time information, ultimately contributing to increased visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

- Digital tools empower rural tourism businesses, including small-scale accommodations, local guides, and artisanal producers, by increasing their visibility, market access, and revenue opportunities. This support strengthens local economies and contributes to sustainable livelihoods for rural communities.
- The collection and analysis of data through digital tools enable tourism stakeholders to make informed decisions about marketing strategies, product development, and infrastructure investments, leading to more targeted and effective sustainability interventions.
- Digital tools facilitate the dissemination of information and education about responsible tourism practices, including environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community engagement. By raising awareness and promoting sustainable behaviors among tourists, digital tools contribute to the long-term sustainability of rural tourism destinations.
- Through training programs, workshops, and knowledge exchange activities, rural tourism stakeholders can build capacity in digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and innovation. This capacity building fosters a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, driving innovation and resilience in rural tourism enterprises

What did you most profit from during DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS?

- Cross cultural learning opportunities – by exposure to diverse perspectives between 4 countries

- Interdisciplinary approach – collaborating across different disciplines
- Hands-on experience – practical learning opportunities achieved through the exchange visits and the online meetings
- Networking – building professional connections
- Cultural Immersion – immersing in local culture through the exchange visits
- Promotion of sustainability: showcasing best practices in Romania