

## EQUESTRIAN TOURISM - SUPPORT TOOL FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN PROMOTING TOURISM OBJECTIVES

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**Abstract:** *In the current business environment, tourism has become a powerful economic industry. This is due to several reasons. In the first place tourism accounts for an important percentage of Gross National Product (GNP) and is one of the main sources of employment wherever it is developed. Tourism is a source of wealth in every country. In the tourism context, the European Union plays the principal role. The EU is the prime tourist destination of the world. And Romania can be in the future on of the top if will identify support tool for quality improvement in promoting tourism objectives. In this context is revealed the importance of equestrian tourism.*

**Key words:** *equestrian, horse, quality, sport, tourism, new tourists, quality tools, quality assurance*

### INTRODUCTION

The definition of **Quality** for the tourism sector must refer to the satisfaction of the consumer, in this case the tourist. However, it has to be targeted towards the quality of the tourist offer. Quality is the perception by the tourist of the extent to which his expectations of the product are met by his experience of the tourist product, therefore the satisfaction of all stakeholders is essential: the service personnel, service organizations, shareholders, the staff dealing with environment and social problems.. Besides, quality must not be exclusive, but must be capable of being experienced by all tourists, including those with special needs (elderly, disabled people). We have to take into account that quality cannot be identified with luxury, since it must be present in every kind of tourist product or service. So the equestrian activities in tourism can be a good opportunity for every tourist who agree the companion of horses.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

There are many public organisations or agencies in charge of quality in tourism, both at national and regional levels, working directly with issues related to quality in tourism. There are also many entrepreneurial associations and private companies that assist in the work that has been done.

Quality classifications or standards are being implemented throughout the EU, but there are three that merit special mention:

- STAR Classification, implemented in Romania, is a classifications that is sometimes seen as obsolete and not very reliable. Some EU countries have classifications developed by entrepreneurial associations, but in Romanian cases there are some difficulties in application. However, does not regard these as true quality systems, but as tools to better inform the clients about the range of products, services and facilities available at an hotel or hostel, rather than about the quality of its products, services and facilities. These classifications pre-date true quality systems.

- ISO 9000 series (quality standards), are implemented in tourism organizations from Romania. It is felt to be the most suitable system for tourism. The number of tourist

companies with ISO certifications accounts for a big percentage of the total number of ISO certifications in Romania.

- EFQM Methodology, rarely used, although implementation is increasing, and there is some useful experience of application of this methodology in destinations. The number of EFQM prizes is irrelevant, though there is an increasing tendency to implement it.

The situation is a regional and local level designed to improve the quality of tourist products and promote integration of quality issues in tourism related businesses and tourist destinations.

The equestrian tourism is one of the parts of active tourism, it is mostly leisure time tourism in which nearness of nature, culture and traditional features of countryside, folk culture, handicraft, local gastronomy have already appeared (Gyôrfi-Villám 2001). On the one hand the wranglers are amusing with unique astonishing shows the visitors in equestrian shows; their knowledge and ability are special. On the other hand equestrian sports aren't included only traditional features; next to equestrian competition nowadays therapeutic horse riding has improved giving chance for recruiting health condition or assuring living lifestyle.

The special feature of tourism goods is that has to be cooperated several independent enterprises and actor to be able to create complex tourism offerings. The consumers are incapable of understanding the role and responsibility of different suppliers (Horkai, 2003). The commonest tourism products are in equestrian tourism: trail riding and touring, knightly equestrian tournaments, coach driving, nightly equestrian tours.

The particularity of this activity is that anyone can do it. Whether a champion or a beginner, every horse rider has immediate access; this guarantees a vast source of potential riders. Those wishing to turn this activity into the easiest or the most difficult personal challenge can easily go on trail rides needing them to remain in the saddle for hours, go on long distance trails and participate in or organise very long journeys on horseback. Every rider must know and understand the fact that equestrian tourism offers a world full of knowledge, skill and experience. It is also possible to achieve a high technical level and merit the same dignity as other equestrian disciplines.



**Fig. 1 Promoting the objectives tourism in Romania through equestrian tourism**

The meaning of equestrian tourism, previously only encompassing trail riding or journeys on horseback, has today widened to also include "all equestrian activities undertaken by tourists outside their normal place of residence", i.e. training courses, improvement courses and other aspects or diverse types of vacation principally revolving around the horse.

To live, prosper and satisfy its publics, the equestrian tourism, which means travel with horse, requires a specific organization: reliable and identified routes, with organized stop places, allow the travelers riders to find what they need to feed, water and accommodate their horse and to feed themselves and breathe, in good conditions of comfort. Today, this organization is not homogeneous and cannot always satisfy the request of the riders. Indeed, some differences exist between the countries, in particular the countries which are affiliated to the International Federation of Equestrian Tourism.

**Table 1**

**Summary of surveys on correspondents of routes and equestrian accommodations**

	Germany	Andorra	Austria	Belgium	Canada	Spain	France	G.B	Ireland	Italy	Netherlands	Portugal	Romania	Sweden	Switzerland	U S	Total
Correspondent	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	11
Framework of equestrian routes	No	No	Yes	?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	7
Equestrian routes mark out	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	14
Specific mark	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	8
Specifics trainings	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	7
Maintenance and the management of routes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	no	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	10
Projects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	15
Cross-border connections	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	11
Listed accomodations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	13
Facilities for accomodations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	?	No	No	No	8
Quality approach	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	8

(after International Federation of Equestrian Tourism )

In the table reveals that Romania is, although it provides data only for 50% of projected indicators, are still among the top 11 European countries affiliated to the International Federation for Equestrian Tourism, considered an exciting opportunity for equestrian tourists.

## CONCLUSIONS

Equestrian tourism can be a real support in promoting quality improvement tourist attractions in Romania. This follows primarily from the development of more extensive equestrian tourism in Romania, by increasing the number of tourists that it agrees this type of tourism, but also the geographic and traditional Romanian characteristics lend itself to this form of tourism.

In this context, many tourist attractions can be promoted out using equestrian tourism. Romania has many tourist attractions witch, on the one hand, are difficult to access by car, on the other hand equestrian tourism itself can be a tourist attraction. Equestrian tourism can be a real support in promoting quality improvement tourist attractions in Romania.

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