

**RESEARCH REGARDING TOURISTS INTEREST FOR AGRITOURISM.
CASE STUDY APUSENI MOUNTAINS**

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***Abstract:** The popularity of rural areas, and in particular mountain areas, as a holiday destination has grown in recent years in most countries. Tourist activity specific to the rural environment represents an area with potential for future growth. If we discuss the area of the Apuseni Mountains, then agritourism as a field of activity represents a necessity of future times, imposing itself as an economic and social stimulating activity of the rural environment, due to several aspects:*

- *Supporting new businesses, primarily with social benefits for the local community, especially by providing jobs;*
- *The capitalization of the local crafts, of the traditions, aspect that has as consequences both their preservation and the stimulation of their further practice, or the attraction of the young generations;*
- *The possibility of obtaining additional income by selling own local products;*
- *The possibility of ensuring a high standard of living in rural areas.*

The aim of the paper is to highlight the degree of interest for the area, for the specific resources of the area and for the agritourism activities, coming from the tourists, and then to come up with a proposal for a tourist circuit as a sustainable projection.

Key words: agritourism, tourist interest, Apuseni Mountains

INTRODUCTION

Developed in rural area, agritourism promotes the idea of combining economic interests in the development of communities [10,12,7,4] with those regarding nature conservation. Rural entrepreneurs can have a successful model [8,11,14] to capitalize on the tourism potential of an area, [2,3,6] taking in consideration different kind of influences and supplement farm incomes by adding a modest income from tourism activities and bringing different benefits and transformation in good for rural environment, [5] as it is illustrated in figure 1.

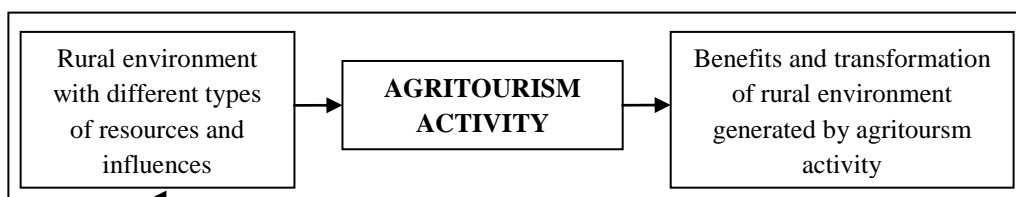


Figure 1. Agritourism-as a system

Rural areas, including the area chosen for the study, the one of Apuseni Mountains, offer great opportunities for the development of rural tourism, its practice being even necessary in the current period. [1,5,9] What is offered through agritourism activity can be broadly characterized as follows:

- originality, specificity and a wide diversity depending on ethnofolkloric area, the geographical area, the customs and tradition of each household that provides this form of tourism but also with the wide range of agri-food products that differ from one locality to another and within the same area;
- the presence in the menus of some local agricultural products, some even with an ecological "shade";

- the wide addressability of the local tourist offer in the rural area, which can satisfy, even in the same space, a wide range of motivations: rest and recreation, education, instruction, knowledge, practicing sports, hiking, etc.

It is no secret that beyond the natural need to relax in the middle of nature, the one who comes to rest here participates with great pleasure at these habits. And, because it adds to its memories beautiful new images, about a different way of life and a different culture, it justifies the efforts of the locals to open the house to receive tourists, efforts that will be rewarded in the future. [15]

Regarding the sustainability of this activity, the practice of agritourism aims to encourage the practice of traditional activities in rural communities, stop land abandonment and the chaotic development of tourism activities, in deep disagreement with the representative features of rural environment. [4,13,14,10]

Regarding the Apuseni Mountains area, it enjoys a great geographical extension(see figure 2), comprising six counties, a low degree of urbanization, 30%, 15 tourist areas, from a geographical point of view and a lot of resources, from the natural ones, many of them unique, to anthropogenic ones promoting the local lifestyle and specific products. All these resources could be sustainable capitalized through agritourism activities.

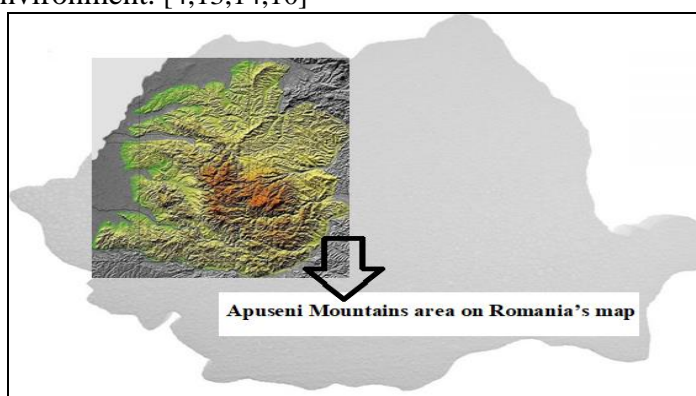


Figure 2. Apuseni Mountains area on Romania's map

Source: processing after <https://www.welcometoromania.ro>[16]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to achieve the proposed goal for this scientific research, we used a questionnaire, focused on identifying the interest of tourists for rural resources from the area under study. A number of 120 questionnaires were applied, the results being presented in the next section. Specifically, the main research-specific activities carried out in this study are:

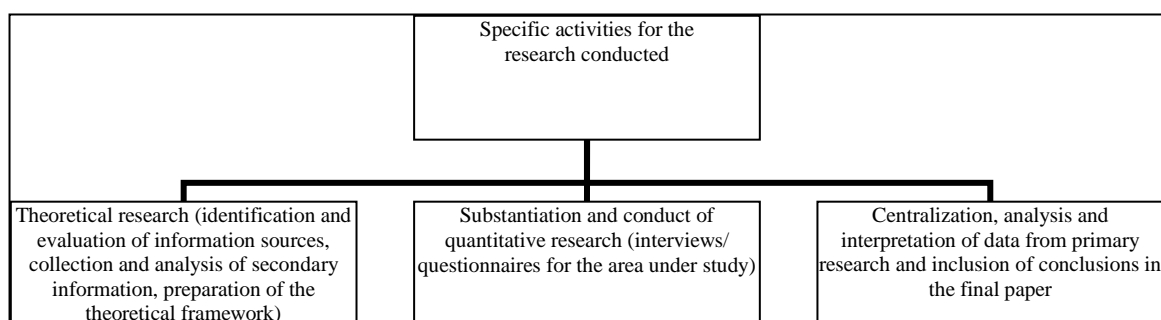


Figure 3. The main activities specific to the research conducted

RESEARCH RESULTS

The purpose of the research is to identify the interest of tourists for rural resources from Apuseni Mountains. Question number one involved the collection of information regarding tourists coming in the area, in order to segment them by gender, age category and type of education.

Table 1.

Identification data about participants at the study			
Sex	Women		Men
		67	
Age category of respondents	20-34 years	35-50 years	over 50 years
	43	59	18
Respondent studies	Primary education	Secondary education	Higher education
	18	23	79

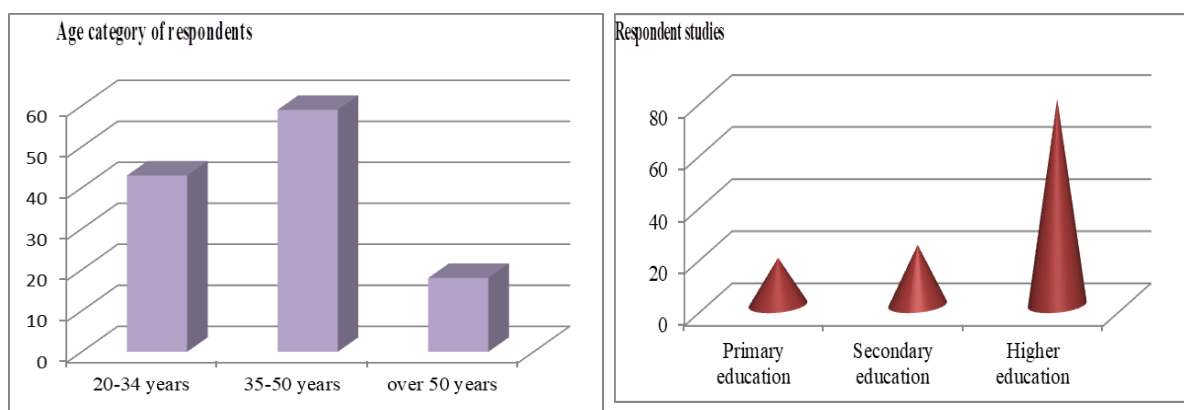


Figure 4. Identification data about participants at the study

The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data obtained at this first question are:

- The female gender predominates as a share among the tourists specific to the analyzed area;

- Regarding the age category of tourists in the analyzed area, we can see that 35.83% of those surveyed fall into the age group of 34 years, 49.16% fall into the age category of 50 years, 15.00% fall into the age category of over 50 years. Therefore, we find that among those who practice agritourism in this area, predominate those who are in the labor force category, in recent years the percentage of young tourists inclined to practice this form of tourism is increasing, a possible explanation being the stressful living conditions from urban environment or certain professions, and another being the desire to return or to know the origins or a sustained promotion of the “green or bio tourism” forms.

Through the question number two, we wanted to know and highlight whether the tourist considers the area analyzed by us one favorable to the agritourism activity and which are the reasons on which the agritourism activity, from Apuseni Mountains area, can be based. The conclusions and findings of this question are outlined below:

- 74.16% of tourists surveyed by us consider the area favorable for tourism and agritourism. However, there is also a percentage of 25.83% who consider that there is still work to be done for the area to be a tourist one; the main impediment mentioned being the deficient infrastructure;

- Among the reasons that in the eyes of tourists put this area on the tourist and agritourism map of our country, are: unique rural resources, in proportion of 34.16%, gastronomy with specific heritage was another motivation appreciated by tourists, in proportion of 28.33%, the traditions and customs of the area were another attractive reason

for tourists, in proportion of 32.5%, and in the percentage of 5.00% other reasons are added such as: various activities practiced or possible to practice, quality of reception, etc.

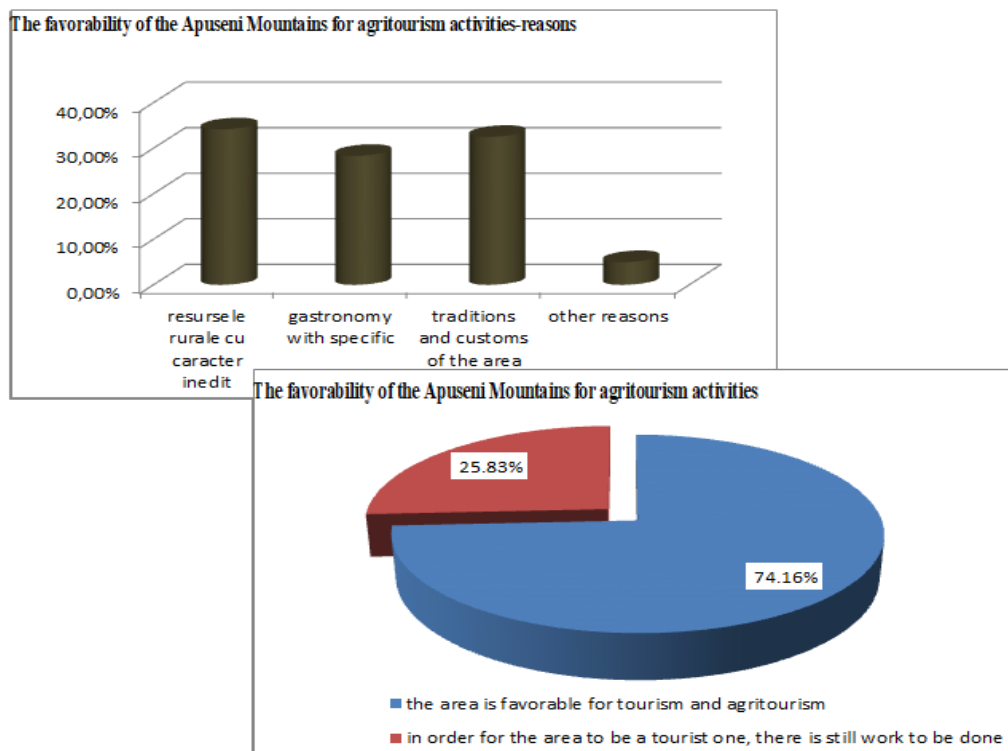


Figure 5. The Apuseni Mountains favorability for agritourism activities-reasons

Through the question number three was intended to identify the satisfaction degree regarding the agritourism product elements within the analyzed area, following the three elements common to any tourism product. The conclusions drawn reveal aspects such as:

- for the first element of the agritourism product from the area, the satisfaction degree of the surveyed tourists is higher than the degree of dissatisfaction;
- the food was positively assessed by 89.33% of those surveyed, to this aspect probably contributing the authenticity and naturalness of the resources used, either specific to the area or from their own production;
- regarding the specific approval of the agritourism activity, it is also found in the case of this area the minus at national level, namely the non-existence of leisure facilities that can ultimately differentiate a sold or unsold agritourism product. From those surveyed, only 68.66% said they were dissatisfied with the specific leisure elements from the area.

Table 2.
Satisfaction degree by components of agritourism product from Apuseni Mountains area

	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
1. Quality of accommodation services	36.33%	63.66%
2. Food in agritourism guesthouses	41.66%	58.33%
3. The specifics of leisure elements	68.66%	31.33%

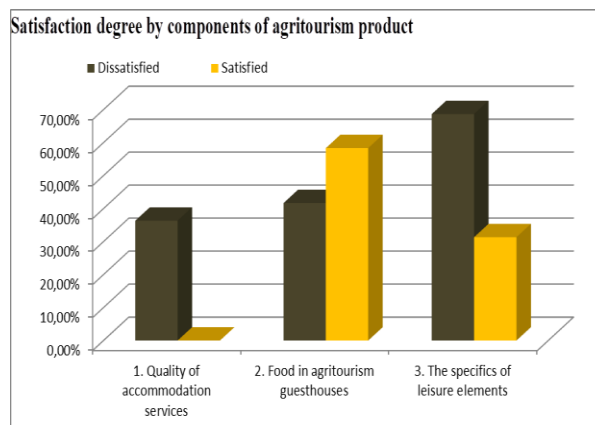


Figure 6. Satisfaction degree by components of agritourism product from Apuseni Mountains area

Because through previous question was intended to highlight the way in which the agritourism product of the area subject to research by tourists is seen, the question number four sought to clearly identify the elements that the agritourism product from this area does not have, so as to stand out on the tourist market. The conclusions drawn reveal aspects such as:

- the leisure/tourist programs are deficient, according to 51.33% of the surveyed tourists;
- also at the promotion chapter is still to be worked on, at present the promotion is not attractive/specialized, considers a percentage of 29.66% of those surveyed;
- it still have to work on the training/attitude of the owners of tourist structures, according to 19.00% of the surveyed tourists.

But also the tourists are the ones who mention that there are a series of elements/strengths that “put in light” the Apuseni Mountains area: the unique character of the resources owned by the area, exceptional natural resources, authentic gastronomic products, a favorable quality/price ratio, etc.

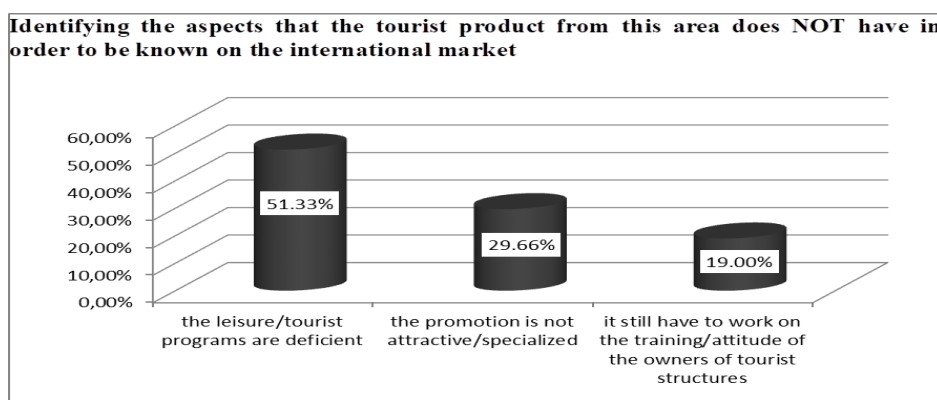


Figure 7. Identifying the aspects that the tourist product from this area does NOT have in order to be known on the international market

Through question number five was followed how agritourism guesthouse is perceived by tourists, and if the tourist sees in the agritourism guesthouse a profitable establishment to capitalize on the resources specific of the area. The research undertaken reveals that 67.33% of those surveyed consider the idea of designing agritourism guesthouses appropriate, but do not consider relevant only this action, but march on the

emphasis that should be placed on the tourist product, on leisure opportunities, promoting sales at existing structures. Tourists consider that there are a relative number of tourist structures, but there is still work to be done to make them profitable, in terms of capitalizing on local resources through their prism.

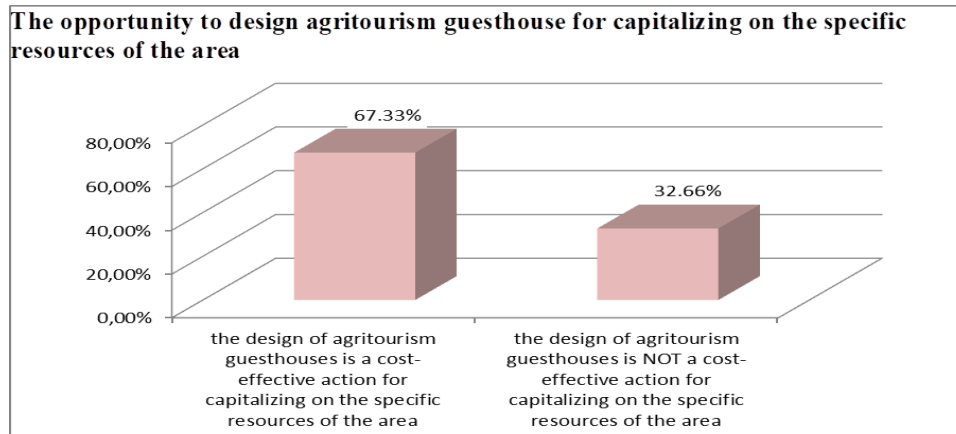


Figure 8. The opportunity to design agritourism guesthouse for capitalizing on the specific resources of the area

Through question sixth we try to identifying possible measures to be taken by the owners of agritourism guesthouse to increase sales, possibly to be taken as proposals for future development.

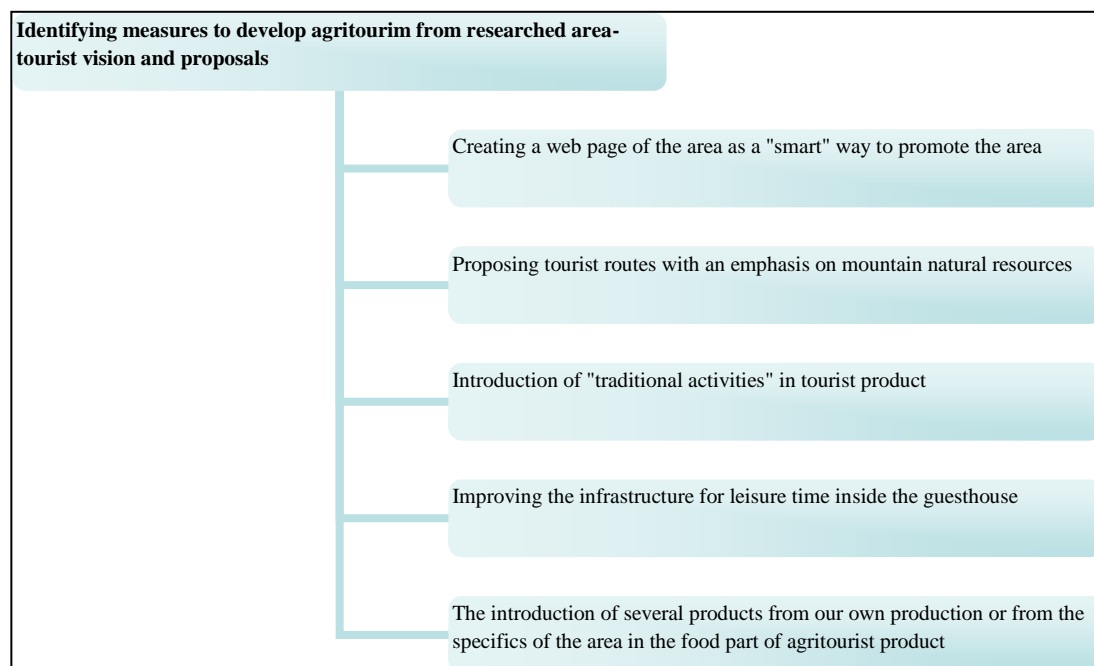


Figure 9. Identifying measures to develop agritourim from researched area-tourist vision and proposals

It is clear from the centralization of the information gathered that tourists would focus on capitalizing on local resources through tourism, would work on leisure opportunities, sales promotion.

Starting from the idea that the specific resources of the area are numerous, we took into account as possible/future proposal the idea of a tourist circuit, developed over three

days, with overnight stays at some of the accommodation structures from the area. Therefore, the emphasis was on rural resources, considered to be the most attractive from Apuseni Mountains area.

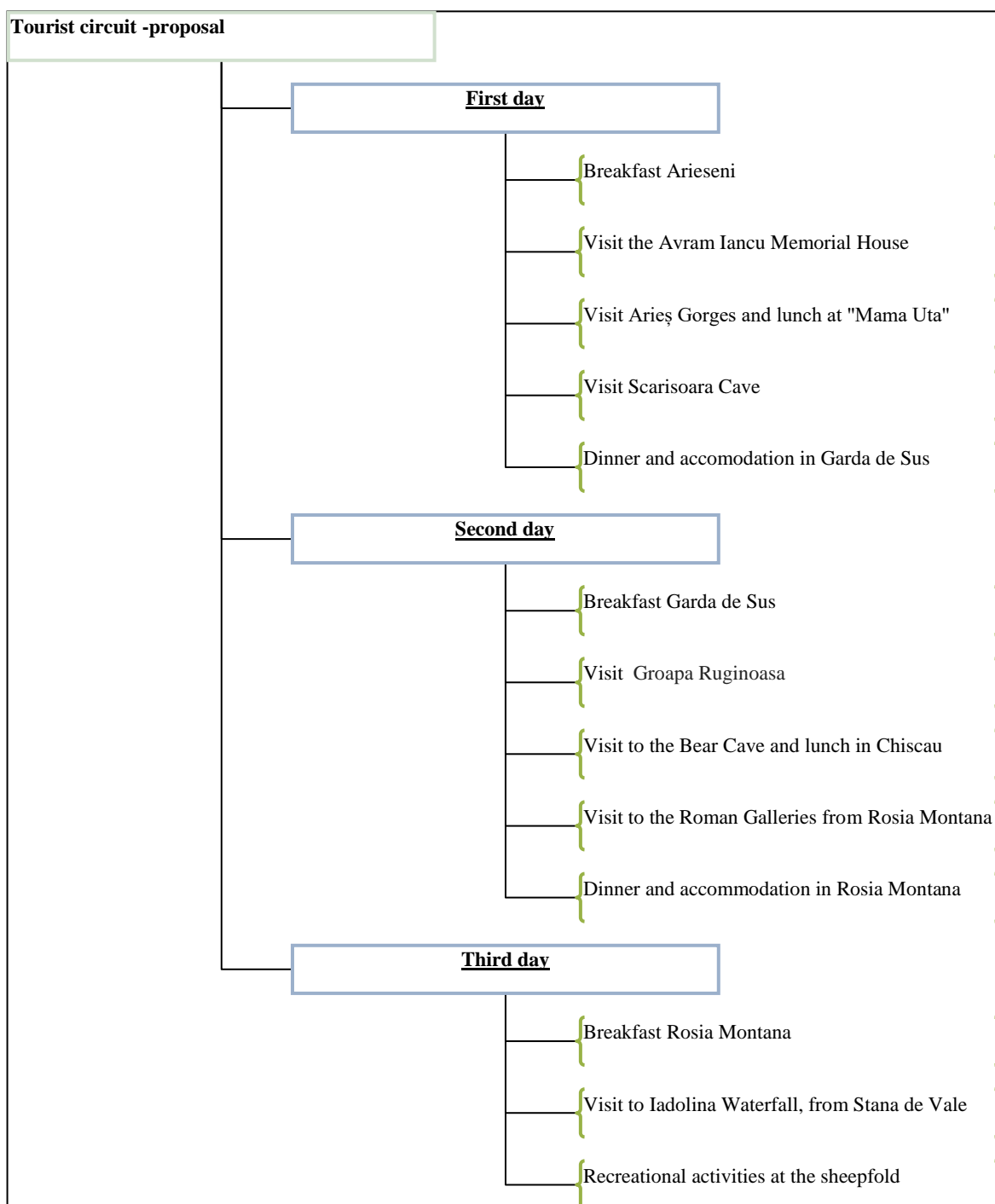


Figure 10. Proposed tourist circuit for the studied area
CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we can say that the Apuseni Mountains area has great tourist potential, not currently valued at the real value, this aspect being noticed by the tourists who arrived here.

There are a number of elements/strengths that "highlight" the Apuseni Mountains area, among them we mention: the unique character of the resources owned by the area,

exceptional natural resources, authentic gastronomic products, a favorable quality/price ratio, etc. Among the reasons that in the eyes of tourists put this area on the tourist and agritourism map of our country, are: unique rural resources, in proportion of 34.16%, gastronomy with specific heritage was another motivation appreciated by tourists, in proportion of 28.33%, the traditions and customs of the area were another attractive reason for tourists, in proportion of 32.5%, and in the percentage of 5.00% other reasons are added such as: various activities practiced or possible to practice, quality of reception, etc.

67.33% of those surveyed consider the idea of designing agritourism guesthouse opportune, but do not consider relevant only this action, they march on the emphasis that should be placed on the tourist product, on leisure opportunities, promoting sales at existing structures. Tourists consider that there are a relative number of tourist structures, but there is still work to be done to make them profitable, in terms of capitalizing on local resources through their prism.

Due to the competition on the tourist market, convincing a potential tourist to visit the Apuseni Mountains area, in the variety of offers and various choices on the market, a strong diversification, is not easy, but the emphasis on the specific elements of the area can make the difference in the future, a possible product, circuit type being presented..

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