

Chapter 1

A Diagnose of Equestrian Tourism: The Case of France and Romania



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1.1 Introduction

The equestrian tourism is a fast growing sector considered as a form of active recreation, of adventure tourism, ecotourism or nature-based tourism.

Equestrian activities are diversified, as horseback riding, hiking with a donkey, travelling the countryside with a caravan in the step of a horse discovering the fauna and flora, several days or just a few hours, but also site visits, sports events, museums, shows, etc. Besides the staff specialized in the breeding and the horses it is also necessary to feed them and to look after them, to maintain the material, to plan the home sites of the tourists and their frame, to maintain ways, etc., which represents a means to develop some economic elements.

The aim of this research is to analyze the equestrian tourism in France and Romania, highlighting the potential of each country, in order to see how the experience of a country could be used by another one, how this kind of tourism contributes to sustainable development and how could be an ecotourism alternative.

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1.2 Literature Review

Equestrian tourism has begun to develop in Europe, North America and Australia since 1950s–1960s (Konyves & Suta, 2009; Delambre, 2011; Cochrane & Daspher, 2014; cited by Pickel-Chevalier, 2015).

According to Delambre (2011), the first definition of equestrian tourism consists of a tourism activity for pleasure, on the back of a horse of over 24 h.

Equestrian tourism is defined as “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” (International Federation of Equestrian Tourism, 2012). Le Borgne and Kouchner (2002) added a temporal dimension to this definition: “all forms of leisure related to equines (horse, pony, donkey) practiced by a person travelling outside his/her usual residence for a period of at least 24 h and not more than 4 months”.

According to Atout France (2011) the equestrian tourism offer consists of:

- *activities with the horse*, divided into: activities on horseback (sports stays, discovery stays, multi activity stays, leisure and travel) and not on horseback (harness, trailer, hiking donkey);
- *activities related to the horse*, placing the horse as a main center of interest (site visits, exhibitions, sport events, museums) or as a secondary one (shows, traditional festivals).

Leaning on the typology of the activities defining the sports tourism, including, among others, a travel to practice sport or to attend a sports event (Gibson, 1998; Pigeassou, 2002), the definition of the equestrian tourism includes all the aspects of travels with and/or for horses, as well a trail as travelling to attend an equestrian event. In parallel with the opportunity sport tourism, the equestrian activities during holidays are undertaken in the definition. This way, the market is wider and wider but it is not surprise. During the last twenty years the outdoor activities are the fastest growing segment of sport tourism. Equestrian tourism follows this trend.

The International Federation of Equestrian Tourism (FITE—Fédération Internationale du Tourisme Équestre), created in 1975 at the initiative of French National Committee of Equestrian Tourism (CNTE—Comité Nationale du Tourisme Équestre) and greatly influenced by the French federation through economic support (Delambre, 2011) “groups together the organizations who are in charge in their national territory of the organization of equestrian tourism, and horse riding as leisure activity in all its forms...” (FITE, 2016). Currently, FITE counts 21 national equestrian tourism organizations, Romania being part of it.

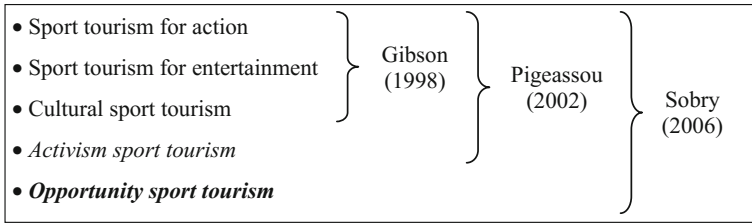


Fig. 1.1 Sport tourism typology

1.2.1 From Equestrian Tourism to Sustainable Sport Tourism

When speaking about sport tourism and sustainable sport tourism, the most difficult is to define the terms and concepts to obtain the widest possible consensus (Sobry, Liu, & Li, 2016).

Concerning sport tourism and since Weed and Bull (2004) show it is a field of research in itself the definitions flourished. Starting from the definitions of the pioneers, we keep the definitions of Pigeassou (2002) and Gibson (1998) but rejecting the Pigeassou’s idea according to which it is the motivation which determine if a travel is sport tourism or not. We add to the four elements of his typology, three being common with Gibson’s, the *opportunity sport tourism* (Fig. 1.1), what Leiper (1990) calls *tertiary attraction*, and Gammon and Robinson (2003) *tourism sport*: “The holiday or visit, rather than the sport, is the prime travel motivation”. Many small and very small-scale companies subsist on this kind of practice of opportunity, as the activity they offer comes in addition to a site that is the main tourist attraction (Bouchet & Bouhaouala, 2009; Bouhaouala & Sobry, 2017).

Equestrian tourism enters perfectly in this definition. Examples can be found at every level and, as said earlier, the opportunity equestrian sport tourism is well developed with the holiday cards and all the riders out of any structure.

Can this specific form of sport tourism participate in the sustainable local development of a territory? How to confine the notion of sustainable tourism and how does it apply to sport tourism?

We hold the notion of sustainability such as expressed by the Brundtland¹ report: a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The three pillars of sustainable development are a combined and, if possible, simultaneous development of the components: economy, social and environmental.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines the sustainable tourism as “*Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment*

¹In 1987 a report entitled «Our Common Future» was written by United Nations, World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), chaired by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.

and host communities". In other words, the three keys for sustainable tourism are: "meeting the needs of the host population in terms of improved living standards both in the short and long term; satisfying the demands of a growing number of tourists; and safeguarding the natural environment in order to achieve both of the preceding aims" (Cater, 1993; cited by Liu, 2003, p. 460).

On its side, the United Nations Organization works on the notion of sustainable development thanks to sport, resting on the International Labour Office. The object of this work is to set up the conditions to attract international tourists by valuing the local natural and human resources and to develop the material and human conditions of welcome at the local level to create a synergy appropriate to an economic development which is in line with the sustainable development concept.

According to these approaches, the *bucket² theory³* explains metaphorically that, in the complex systems, when we consider the vital subsets of the system (as the vital organs of a body), they are any important. It is of no use to have an excellent level on one of the pillars or the element of sustainability (the economy for instance) if another element (social or environment) is degraded, because the quality or performance level of the set is controlled by the lowest board of the bucket.

In the case of sport tourism, it is of no use to be very successful in one (the economic) or two domains if the third one is totally neglected. In both cases the system will dysfunction, maybe not in short-term but in medium or long-term.

Leaning on a work of Atout France (2011), Pickel-Chevalier (2015) wonders if equestrian tourism can be a tool for local sustainable development. She focuses on three case studies where the tourism development of local protected areas (Natural Regional Parks) is associated, through deep historical or/and geographical links, with horses and equestrian tourism:

- the Natural Regional Park of the Camargue (Camargue horse)—south of France;
- the Natural Park of the Marquenterre (Henson horse)—north of France;
- the Natural Regional Park of the Cevennes (Przewalski horse)—center of France.

If the three cases generally meet the sustainable criteria (local economic development by increasing the number of tourists; social cohesion by involving the host population; intercultural meetings by bringing a positive experience for local people and tourists; environmental awareness and environmental protection policy), they cannot meet all of them at the same level.

Then she studies the practices and motivations of the equestrian tourists. The results of her cross analyze of different surveys are clear: their common centers of interest concentrate on comfort, safety and conviviality. "They are not insensitive to the quality of the landscape or the presence of tourism, cultural or natural sites, but these attractions only come after the more practical criteria which ensure the comfort and safety of the excursion". She adds "Regard for economic and social issues (local development, social cohesion) does not seem to characterize the riders'

²Here, it is a bucket made of wooden small boards, as in the past.

³Lamiot, http://wikipedia.org/wiki/developpement_durable.

collective consciousness. They are looking more for friendly relationships with other enthusiasts”.

She concludes, this characteristic leads to the fact that whereas equestrian tourism can be an agent for sustainable development, lack of interest or misinformation often lead to conflicts of interests, especially in protected areas such as public forests. The French Equestrian Federation (FFE) tries to raise riders’ awareness through riding schools. In 2010 the FFE got together with the Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and the Sea and encouraged clubs to organize events during Sustainable Development Week, in particular for children. However, only 40 clubs took part out of more than 8000 riding schools throughout France. Professionals have not yet understood the advantages for them and their club members of such associations and do not automatically register their activities within the tenets of sustainable development.

1.3 Methodology

In the first phase of the research we explore the potential of each country concerning the development of equestrian tourism, starting with infrastructure (accommodation, tracks and trails, lodges and stopovers) and continue with equestrian tourism products. In the second phase we analyzed if equestrian tourism complies with ecotourism and sustainable development.

For the purposes of this study we collected secondary data provided from different sources like: websites of different associations, federations and national bodies, books, articles, laws, national strategies, reports etc. We tried to highlight more clearly the equestrian activities in the two countries and the transfer of good examples to Romania.

1.4 The Development of Equestrian Tourism in France

The world’s first tourist destination with 82.6 million international visitors in 2016 (UNWTO), France is also the first destination of equestrian tourism.

Equestrian tourism started and grown in France during the 1950s–1960s, in the same time than in other countries in Europe, North America, and Australia (Equipe MIT & Knafou, 2005). It followed the expansion of other leisure activities (Sobry, 2003).

Created in 1921 (under the name of French Federation of Equestrian Sports), the French Equestrian Federation is the 3rd French Olympic Federation in number of license-holder (after football and tennis) and the first one in number of women. Under its umbrella is National Committee for Equestrian Tourism, the Regional Committee for Equestrian Tourism (CRTE—for each French region) and depart-

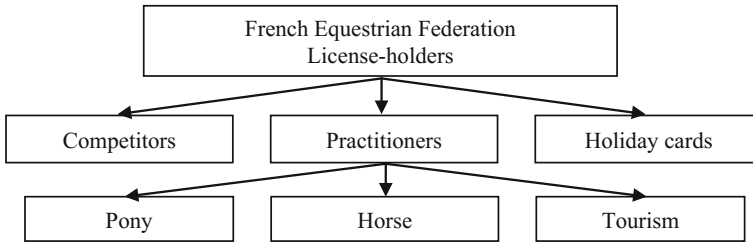


Fig. 1.2 The categories of license-holders in France

mental committees. They have to maintain the marked trails and organize events, training and competitions.

In 1963 was created the National Association for Equestrian Tourism (Association Nationale pour le Tourisme Équestre). It became the National Confederation for Equestrian Tourism (Délégation Nationale au Tourisme Équestre) in 1987 then the National Committee for Equestrian Tourism in 2000.

France has 60,000 km of equestrian trails, of which 20,000 are marked (Delambre, 2011).

In France, the FFE license-holders are divided into three categories: competitors, practitioners, and holiday cards. Occasional riders can choose a holiday card, valid only for one month and includes the same insurance as the other licenses. This card could be purchased from a club, an association or owners of a stable affiliated to the FFE.

License-holders are segmented in three kinds of practitioners: horse, pony and tourism (Fig. 1.2).

With 813,452 license-holders in 2017, 59.11% more than in 2001 (FFE, 2018b), the FFE is the 3rd of the French Olympic Federations in number of license-holder (after football and tennis) and the first one in number of women (82.93%).

Concerning the holiday cards, 6853 tourists purchased in 2017, of which 74.97% were women. An important increase was recorded from 2001 to 2008, from 5501 to 7762 license-holders (41.1%). We observe that the number of these license-holders actually began to slightly decrease since 2013 (Table 1.1).

The share of holiday cards licenses in the total number of license-holders during the last 17 years was registered a maximum in 2007 (1.12%), with 1.48% for the males and 1.02% for the females (Fig. 1.3).

The share of tourism licenses in the total number of license-holders had a maximum in 2006 (10.56%), with the majority being males. The maximum was reached by males in 2012 (13.96%), while females registered the best share in 2006 (9.59%) (Fig. 1.4).

In 2011 the French riding tradition was listed by UNESCO as an example of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It is probably why, according to several inquiries 24% of the French people that have never ridden declare they would like

Table 1.1 Evolution of the FFE holiday cards and tourism license-holders in France (data processed from FFE, 2018b)

Year	HC	HC	HC	HC	HC	T	T	T	T	T
	Female	%	Male	%	Total	Female	%	Male	%	Total
2001	3768	68.50	1733	31.50	5501	29,385	64.44	16,216	35.56	45,601
2002	3633	66.71	1813	33.29	5446	32,635	65.67	17,063	34.33	49,698
2003	3834	68.01	1803	31.99	5637	36,249	66.65	18,138	33.35	54,387
2004	4058	68.77	1843	31.23	5901	40,751	67.66	19,481	32.34	60,232
2005	4005	70.14	1705	29.86	5710	44,896	68.97	20,199	31.03	65,095
2006	4740	68.97	2133	31.03	6873	47,091	69.93	20,247	30.07	67,338
2007	5384	71.01	2198	28.99	7582	50,612	71.02	20,653	28.98	71,265
2008	5658	72.89	2104	27.11	7762	54,546	71.98	21,238	28.02	75,784
2009	5478	73.07	2019	26.93	7497	58,762	73.31	21,390	26.69	80,152
2010	5218	73.57	1875	26.43	7093	63,127	74.17	21,984	25.83	85,111
2011	5209	75.17	1721	24.83	6930	65,882	75.18	21,745	24.82	87,627
2012	5355	75.21	1765	24.79	7120	67,005	75.59	21,637	24.41	88,642
2013	5588	74.90	1873	25.10	7461	66,606	76.04	20,984	23.96	87,590
2014	5393	74.38	1858	25.62	7251	66,829	76.46	20,580	23.54	87,409
2015	5526	74.92	1850	25.08	7376	64,657	76.76	19,573	23.24	84,230
2016	5575	75.00	1858	25.00	7433	63,781	77.13	18,913	22.87	82,694
2017	5138	74.97	1715	25.03	6853	60,374	77.06	17,970	22.94	78,344

HC Holiday cards licenses; T Tourism licenses

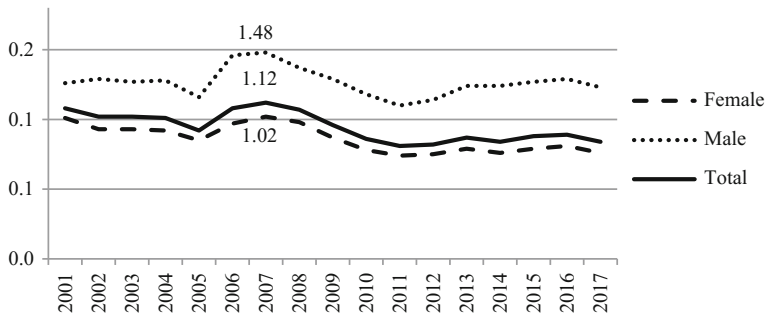


Fig. 1.3 Share of holiday cards licenses in the total number of license-holders

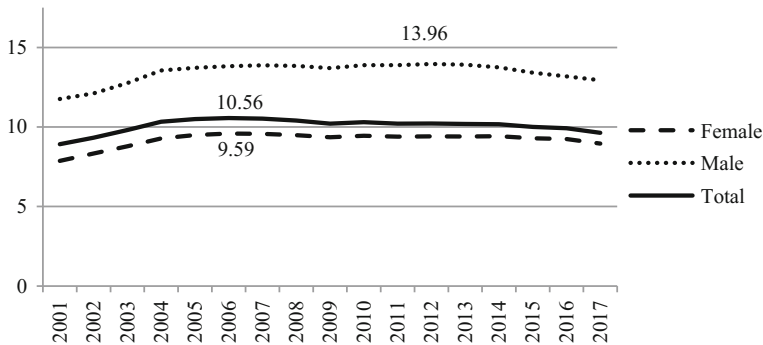


Fig. 1.4 Share of tourism license holders in total number of license-holders

to do it (Sociovision Cofremca, 2006) and that 53% would like equestrian holidays (FFE, 2011).

It is noticeable that the profile of outdoor riders is different from the riders in clubs. Female riders are the majority too but with only 70% (vs. 82.93%). The average age is 36 years, when the average age for horse riders in general is 62% under 17, mostly because of pony riding and the change of sport activities after 15. This client base comes from the middle and upper classes, with a generally modest level of horsemanship (Pickel-Chevalier, 2016).

The increase of riders' number induces a change in the demand of the riders (Tourre-Malen, 2009; Greffe & Pickel-Chevalier, 2015; Pickel-Chevalier & Greffe, 2015), expectations (Pickel-Chevalier, 2016) and expected services (Sigurðardóttir, 2015; Sigurðardóttir & Helgadóttir, 2015; Eslan, 2018). The FFE being mostly turned toward competition seems to meet problems to answer to these new ways of looking at the horses and riding. This induces an increasing self-organization of the equestrian activity. A study shows that more and more of equine owners having between 33 and 90% of the equines are not linked with the federation (Vial, Aubert, & Perrier-Cornet, 2011).

Among the touristic activities we can observe a decrease of the several days tours but an increase of one or two hours ballades, especially when there are thematic ballades for instance with a chief cook who propose gastronomic meals or these looking back on ancestral practices as on the transhumance. Or even just to discover the territory on a horse back listening to the guide comments.

If the equestrian tourism began to grow in France during the '50s–60s, it really launched during the '70s with the development of pony clubs (Tourre-Malen, 2009) which were officially recognized only in 1971. Less expensive and less impressive, pony riding made riding more accessible to more socially diverse population groups.

Very few equestrian structures in France are specialized in stabling and/or equestrian tourism, only 20% of the 8,000. It is mostly because club members specialized in outdoor tourism are not numerous: 78,344 out of a total of 644,800 (12.15% of the riders) (FFE 2018c). It is probably because these outdoor riders often owned their

horse and don't need to be club members, plus, as said earlier, the gap between the demand of these riders and the offer of the FFE and its member clubs.

If we compare with golf for instance, we find a similar typical profile of outdoor/tourism riders: adult riders with average skill level and some purchasing power wishing to escape from the technical abilities taught in clubs with a performance objective. They enjoy free riding in the countryside and they require comfort, safety and ease of use. This profile fit with the one of the French people having an outdoor activity: essentially middle and upper classes most of the time during holidays, and for recreational and relaxation purposes (Ministère de la Jeunesse des Sports et de la Vie Associative and INSEP, 2005).

The development of equestrian tourism impulses a higher standard of professionalism. The equestrian tourism services in France are labelled with the *Equestrian Tourism Center* (Centre de Tourisme Equestre) for the establishments specialized in organization of different activities (horseback riding, trekking etc.). It covers around 3000 schools which link this activity to a high-quality welcome and choice of horses. Another label, the *Stopover Accommodation for Horses* (Cheval Etape), was created to identify and promote high quality accommodations which can accept horses and ponies during stopovers, of at least a night, particularly in the context of equestrian tourism (FFE, 2018a).

The French Horse and Riding Institute (IFCE), a state operator in terms of information about the equine sector, develops, among others, a set of institutional cooperation actions that favouring rapprochement between different countries of the world (IFCE).

1.5 Some Aspects of Equestrian Tourism in Romania

Every year, equestrian tourism becomes more and more popular in Romania. Although at the beginning, this kind of tourism tries to develop the local economy of the country. Horseback riding holidays in the Carpathian Mountains and rural areas become increasingly attractive for both domestic and foreign tourists.

An investigation of routes and equestrian accommodation were done by FITE, in different national committees organizations with the purpose "to realize an international group of routes – with maps - to move from one country to another without breaking off of continuity". Several indicators like: framework of equestrian routes, equestrian routes mark out, specific mark, list of accommodations, projects implemented etc. were taken in consideration.

The conducted inquiry shows that in Romania there is no framework of equestrian routes and no listed accommodations. Also, the maintenance and management of routes is not assured. The positive side of the answers was that exist equestrian routes marked out and specific mark in the national/natural parks and national reserves, thanks to the collaboration with the National Governance of Forests (ROMSILVA).

Concerning the projects implemented in Romania, the "On horse in the Carpathians" aims "to turn equestrian tourism into an eco-tourist alternative while contributing

to the development of the communities living in the protected areas” (Piper & Pop, 2012).

According to the National Strategy for Ecotourism Development in Romania (2009), ecotourism activities may include, among others, equestrian tourism on pre-determined routes. The equestrian tourism activities in this country are available in 7 of 28 major natural protected areas (biosphere reserve, national parks and natural parks), the majority of them (57.14%) being in national parks. There are nine suitable equestrian activities in the protected areas (Table 1.2).

Romania is one of the first countries in Europe who developed a system for evaluating eco-destinations, based on the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard and recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (OECD, 2016). This certification system is provided by the National Authority for Tourism (ANT) and the Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER), and concerns: ecotourism programs offered by tour operators or guides (maximum 15 participants) and boarding houses in rural and natural areas with an accommodations capacity of up to 25 rooms (AER).

According to the current Romanian legislation (Order no. 1832/856 of July 6, 2011) regarding the approval of the Classification of Occupations in Romania issued by Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, the profession of equestrian tourist guide could be practiced by any person who has completed a professional specialization course for career development offered by an authorized training provider in tourism and the hospitality industry.

One important event which helped to promote the equestrian tourism was the first edition of the Equestrian Travel Forum of Romania, held in Bucharest, in 2016. This event gathered media representatives, travel agencies, accommodation providers with equestrian facilities, and equestrian tour guides. Some of the issues raised during this forum were related to non-collaboration between accommodation providers and travel agencies, to the low number of specialized equestrian guides (it exists only one training school in Romania), to the quality of services (unfortunately, of the 100 equestrian accommodation structures only 40 offer good quality services), to the classification of equestrian centres according to their facilities etc. Currently, Romania has only one tour operator agency specialized in promoting equestrian tourism and there are no statistical data concerning the number of equestrian tourists (InfoTravel Romania, 2016).

As S. Saveja (former general secretary of the Romanian Equestrian Federation) declared, Romania faced a boom in the last three years regarding the development of Romanian equestrianism. There are about 150 riding centers in Romania and the number of clubs affiliated to the federation is 51 (Romanian Equestrian Federation). There are also many private clubs owned or run by stuntmen or private individuals.

Table 1.2 Activities and attractions available (A) and suitable (S) in Romanian national/nature parks and nature reserves (adapted from ROMSILVA, cited by National Strategy for Eco-tourism Development in Romania, 2009)

	Biosphere reserve (1)			National parks (13)			Nature parks (14)			Total		
	A	%	S	A	%	S	A	%	S	A	%	S
Climbing	0	0	0	10	71.43	0	4	28.57	0	14	0	0
Cross-country skiing and skiing	0	0	0	3	75	3	42.86	1	25	4	57.14	4
Cultural attraction	1	5.26	0	6	31.58	1	100	12	63.16	0	0	19
Cycling	1	12.5	0	3	37.5	7	53.85	4	50	6	46.15	8
Equestrian tourism	1	14.29	0	4	57.14	0	0	2	28.57	9	100	7
Fishing	1	8.33	0	2	16.67	0	9	75	1	100	12	1
Nautical sports (canoe, kayaking, rafting)	1	25	0	1	25	2	22.22	2	50	7	77.78	4
Ornithology tourism	1	11.11	0	4	44.44	6	50	4	44.44	6	50	9
Scientific	1	4.35	0	13	56.52	0	9	39.13	4	100	23	4
Skiing	0	0	0	3	50	1	50	3	50	1	50	6
Speleology	0	0	0	5	50	2	100	5	50	0	0	10
Trails	1	4.76	0	13	61.9	0	7	33.33	1	100	21	1
Wildlife tourism	1	10	0	4	40	7	53.85	5	50	6	46.15	10
Total	9	-	0	71	-	29	67	-	45	147	-	74

1.6 Conclusion and Implications

With a high-quality tourism activity, France, represented by National Equestrian Tourism Committee and French Equestrian Federation, plays an important role in organizing, developing and promoting equestrian tourism at national and international level. Although at the beginning, Romania tries to develop this kind of tourism despite of an inadequate equestrian infrastructure. In this regard, the Romanian National Equestrian Tourism Committee needs to have the government support, and not only, to implement an equestrian tourism trail project, in link with protected areas, as an ecotourism solution.

The development of equestrian tourism needs several elements: a real equine sector plus a structured tourism sector plus an environmental politic, all the actors working together in the framework of a will, at the highest level of State, to develop an economic segment. This segment is already seriously developed in France, and Romania has all the assets to reach the aim to develop equestrian tourism. When comparing the two countries concerning this sector it is possible to bring to the fore the lacks in Romania but, more important, the possibilities of collaboration between the two countries for the benefit of both, thanks to the existing structures as the IFCE in France.

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