

STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURIST CIRCULATION IN THE MARAMUREȘ COUNTY, ROMANIA

Jenica CĂLINA, Aurel CĂLINA

University of Craiova, Faculty of Agronomy, 19 Libertatii Street, Craiova, Romania,
E-mails: jeni_calina@yahoo.com, aurelcalina@yahoo.com

Corresponding author: aurelcalina@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study is a continuation of the research previously undertaken in the beautiful and authentic area of Maramureș, where the influence of the pandemic in the period 2016-2020 on the tourist circulation was primarily followed. In the first part, an analysis was carried out on the main aspects that can positively or negatively influence the attraction and circulation of tourists in the researched area, such as the accessibility study and road, rail and air infrastructures. After that, aspects were studied regarding the demographic evolution of the population and its occupation in different areas, which can directly influence the activity and tourist circulation in the area. Also, the main cultural, social and sanitary facilities that can contribute to the significant increase in the qualitative value of a tourist destination and implicitly the tourist circulation were studied. Finally, based on the analyzed and interpreted data regarding the main indices that characterize tourist circulation in the studied area, it was concluded that the pandemic had a significantly negative influence on tourist circulation, especially in 2020, when it was also the peak year of this one.

Key words: agritourism, pandemic, rural tourism, tourist circulation

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies of international tourist circulation have found that Europe dominates international tourism, accounting for over 60% of total arrivals and receipts. America ranks second with over 20%, followed by East Asia and the Pacific with around 14%, but this area has seen sustained growth in recent years, with Africa, the Middle East and South Asia accounting for over 6%. It has also been found that this is a complex economic phenomenon, with many goals, and sometimes with different directions, which means that at the moment its role is recognized as a factor in ensuring the sustainability of world and national economic growth and combating poverty and underdevelopment [3, 15].

National and international tourist circulation represents the movement in time and space of tourist flows, and the latter are movements of consumers of material goods and services, as well as operations related to them (reservations, expense accounts, etc.) [6, 26]. Tourist circulation in general can be influenced by: language and culture affinities, tourist and administrative facilities, strong

motivations, domestic demand is not sufficiently satisfied, export of own tourist products, competition offers specific, clearly differentiated tourist products [1, 10]. At the global and national level, a thorny problem of tourist circulation is seasonality, a phenomenon that has created great problems in terms of maintaining the activity and the specialized staff in tourism. From this point of view, WTO specialists considers that the international tourist circulation includes two major categories of tourism, namely: - sun tourism motivated by natural factors and called "sunlust"; - knowledge tourism motivated by culture, science and bearing the name "wonderlust" [4, 23]. The specialized tourism literature contains numerous references regarding the factors that influence the development of national and international tourism [8, 14]. In Romania, the poor satisfaction of domestic demand stems from the following reasons: the low quantity and inadequate quality of the national offer, as well as the greater attraction presented by the tourist offer of other countries. Based on the statistics of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), it was concluded that the main motivation of tourist circulation is vacation,

70% of the total world arrivals, and satisfaction is one of its most important stimuli [11, 27]. Also, from this it was found that the tourist circulation is directly influenced by the tourist demand, which presents the following essential particularities; - dynamic character; - concentration in economically developed countries and regions; - diversity, heterogeneity and instability in motivation; - accentuated and rigid seasonality, due to strict regulations as well as due to psycho-social, cultural and natural factors [12, 16]. Tourist consumption, which depends on national income and individual income, has an influence on tourist circulation both nationally and internationally, even if for a very long-time tourism was considered a luxury, and in recent decades, due to the extent of the development of this phenomenon, tourism has become a consumer good [5, 17]. Based on the data provided by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), it was concluded that experimental niche tourism, such as tourism based on ecological principles (agritourism, rural tourism and ecotourism) will experience a very rapid development, the international market of this type of tourism, will increase on average by at least 10-12 % year-1 [24]. This increase was due to the fact that tourists have come to the conclusion that tourism based on ecological and sustainable principles is not necessarily accompanied by a lack of comfort [19]. Tourists who practice this type of tourism stated that this activity itself constitutes a positive vacation experience and that the unique experience they have is the most important reason why they go on vacation [30]. Starting from the above, we considered it opportune to carry out this study in the Maramureş County, especially now that the tourist circulation at the level of the area and even at the level of the entire country, has been significantly affected by the pandemic and its effects [13].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study carried out by us is a complement to the study carried out previously and published in the work "Study on the current

stage of development, planning and promotion of rural tourism and agritourism in the ethnographic area of Maramureş", in which several aspects regarding the tourist potential of area and those regarding the current stage of development of rural tourism and agritourism [9]. Having these aspects analyzed and interpreted previously, we thought to complete this study with aspects regarding the impact of the pandemic on the tourist circulation in the same Maramureş County.

In this study, unlike the previous study, we will no longer insist on the aspects related to the natural and anthropogenic tourist resources, as a defining factor of the tourist attraction, and we will directly present aspects related to the tourist circulation. The main aspects targeted were primarily an overview of accessibility in the area by rail, road and air, the study of the socio-economic and socio-cultural factors that directly contribute to the influence of tourist circulation in the area. In addition to these aspects, the main indicators that define the tourist circulation in the area were studied, such as: the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in rural and agritouristic boarding houses, the average length of stay, the average number of tourists arriving per day and the degree of occupancy of boarding houses [2, 7].

The data for solving the proposed theme and all the objectives related to the tourist circulation in the Maramureş County were collected from the field and from the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), after which they were processed and interpreted in a scientific and rigorous way, formulating a series of conclusions and recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to solve the proposed objectives, a study was first carried out regarding the position and accessibility of tourists in the area, because this aspect can positively or negatively influence the attraction of tourists in the area and their circulation.

Accessibility in the Maramureş County

The main access routes to the area are by rail, road and air, especially for foreign tourists.

In 2018, the railway network in Maramureş County was 207 km in total length, an unchanged value since 2010, this being in a moderate but constant decrease since 1990. Of the total railway lines, 64 percent represent normal single-track lines. The technical condition of the railway network is generally good. However, the level of equipment and the technical condition of the lines do not allow train speeds higher than 60 - 80 km/h.

The road network is not an advantage for the Maramureş County, the public road network being relatively poorly represented. In 2018, the length of public roads was 1,809 km, of which 79.50% (1,438 km) represented county and communal roads and 20.50% (371 km) national roads. The length of public roads in Maramureş County represents 14.20% of all public roads in the North-West Development Region and 2.1% of public roads in Romania [28, 20]. The advantage they present is that they ensure good internal and international openness, facilitating access from and to other states. The most important international roads are: European Road DN1C (E58) and DN18.

Accessibility in the area by air is ensured by the Baia Mare Airport, which was established on the current site in 1964, when the construction of the concrete runway began. It was later extended to its current length of 1,800 m (30 m wide, plus 7.5 m concrete shoulders on each side of the runway). Baia Mare Airport currently has the status of autonomous management with particular specificity, being subordinated to the Maramureş County Council [22].

Population and cultural, social and sanitary facilities

Another aspect that can contribute to the increase of tourist circulation in the studied area is related to the population, because it can influence the increase in the number of visits made by relatives and their knowledge in the area of origin, and the large number of the active population in a certain area can contribute to the sustained development of all sectors of economic activity and implicitly to the development of this area.

From Figure 1 it can be seen that the demographic evolution of Maramureş County, as population by domicile, starting from 1930

and until 2018 (January 1), took place as follows, until 1966 there was a relatively large increase, this continued in a more moderate pace until 1992, after which a constant decrease was achieved until 1998, with approximately 10,000 - 15,000 inhabitants per year. This fact was primarily due to the massive migration of the active population, with the emergence of the possibility to move freely, to Western countries, where the inhabitants of the area were able to lead a more decent life and where they found better-paid jobs.

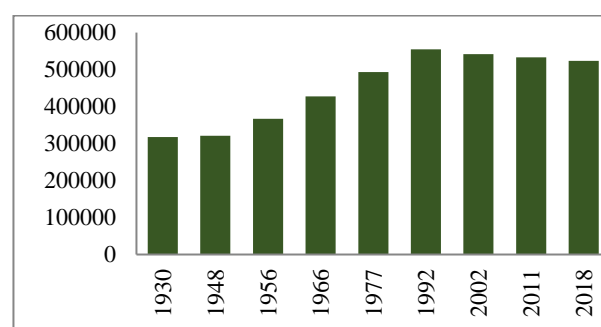


Fig. 1. Evolution of the population by place of residence in Maramureş County (1930-2018)

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

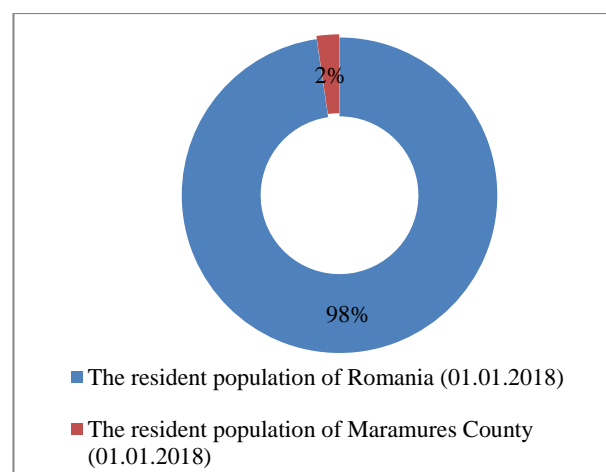


Fig. 2. The resident population of Maramureş County (01.01.2018)

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [20].

Regarding the resident population of Maramureş County, the study found that on January 1, 2018, it was 463,354 inhabitants, which represented 2.37% of the total resident population of Romania at that time, of 19,530,631 inhabitants (Figure 2).

Also, a very important aspect in terms of tourist circulation in the area is related to the type of occupation of the civilian population. Table 1 shows that, at the level of 2018, the highest share of the civilian population employed in the activities of the national economy is in the industrial sector with 56.9 thousand people out of a total of 194.3 thousand, and the lowest share in the extractive industry and in the field of real estate transactions, with 500 places each. The small percentage of residents from the extractive industry indicates that since 2007, with the entry of our country into the European Union, this sector had to be drastically reduced, due to the high degree of pollution. It was a beneficial thing for the

tourist activity in the area, because some of them had to reorient themselves towards the tourism activity and the most important aspect is that the degree of pollution of the area was considerably reduced. Also, from this table and from the study carried out, it was found that the number of tourist structures in the area increased, reaching approximately 130 in 2018 and 156 in 2020. This increase also led to an increase in the number of people working in the hotel sector and restaurants, reaching the level of 2018, at 4,200 people, an aspect that has a direct impact on the evolution of tourist circulation. The active population can contribute to the development of the tourist sector in the area and implicitly to the revival of tourist circulation.

Table 1. The civilian population employed by activities of the national economy at the level of section CAEN Rev. 2 Year 2018

Activities of the national economy	Thousands of people	Activities of the national economy	Thousands of people
1. agriculture, forestry and fishing	52.3	10. financial intermediation and insurance	1.5
2. industry	56.9	11. real estate transactions	0.5
3. production and supply of electricity and heating, gas, hot water and air conditioning	0.6	12. professional, scientific and technical activities	2.6
4. water distribution; sanitation, management waste, decontamination activities	2.5	13. administrative service activities and support services activities	3.3
5. constructions	12.2	14. public administration and defense; social insurance from the public system	3.6
6. wholesale and retail trade; motor vehicle and motorcycle repair	23.3	15. education	8.7
7. transportation and storage	9.8	16. health and social assistance	9.6
8. hotels and restaurants	4.2	17. performance, cultural and recreational activities	1.1
9. information and communications	1.3	18. other service activities	3.4
		Total	194.3

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

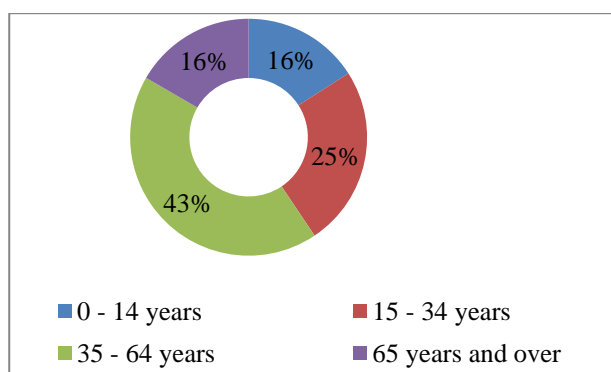


Fig. 3. Structure of the resident population of Maramureș County on January 1, 2018 by age category
 Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

Figure 3 shows that the structure of the resident population in the Maramureș area, on

January 1, 2018, according to age categories is as follows: the largest age category is represented by the category between 35 - 64 years, with a weight of 43%, followed by the category between 15 - 34 years, with a percentage of 25%. The young and newly born population is increasingly reduced, with the same percentage of representation as the inactive elderly population over 65, of only 16%.

From the same study we found that from the structure of the resident population in Maramureș during the analyzed period according to the living environments, it is presented as follows; - the urban population is

265,199 inhabitants, and the rural population is 198,155 inhabitants.

Technical - building, social, cultural, commercial, sanitary facilities are aspects that can contribute to increasing the attractiveness and quality of a tourist destination, a fact that led to an analysis regarding cultural facilities: theaters-1, cinemas-2, museums -20, libraries-65, art institutions-4, cultural hostels-60, houses of culture-12, ethnographic museums Baia Mare Ethnography and Folk Art Museum, Lăpuș Village Museum Collections, Maramureș Museum in Sighetu Marmăției and Ethnography Museum and History from Vișeu de Sus. The cults are represented as follows; from the total of 473 churches: - 361 are Orthodox; - 54 Greek - Catholic - 30 Reformed - 29 Roman - Catholic. There are also many monasteries in the area - 36, of which: - 31 Orthodox and 5 Greco-Catholic.

In terms of education, Maramureș has an extensive and diversified network of public and private educational institutions, covering all educational levels. Following the reform process in the educational system, a total number of 354 units were identified in the area, with about 4,700 classes, and of these, 203 are in the urban environment, and 151 in the countryside. Of the total of those with legal personality, 174 are in the public system and 28 in the private system (accredited and authorized) and 2 student palaces and clubs, the House of the Didactic Corps, the County Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance and the County School Inspectorate. Regarding higher education, there are 4 universities operating in Maramureș, of which 2 are public and 2 are private, with over 5,188 students.

Regarding the sanitary facilities, it was observed that there are: 8-Public hospitals; 7-Private medical units with continuous and one-day hospitalization beds; 24-Medical analysis laboratories; 2-Medico-social assistance units; 1- County ambulance service, with 6 substations organized at county level; 270-Family medicine offices/general medicine; 12-Centres of permanence; 349-Dental offices.

From what has been presented, it can be seen that the level of general facilities at the level

of the studied area is a good one, which can ensure services both for the resident population and for all tourists visiting the area, at a very good level.

Based on the study carried out and the data obtained, the main statistical indicators characterizing the tourist circulation in the tourist and agritourism boarding houses in the Maramureș County were calculated and interpreted.

Indices that characterize tourist circulation in the studied area

Arrivals of tourists in rural and agritouristic boarding houses

As is known, the number of tourists staying in tourist accommodation units is represented by all people (Romanians and foreigners) who travel outside the localities where they have their permanent residence, for a period of less than 12 months and stay at least one night in a tourist accommodation unit, and the main reason for the trip is other than to carry out a remunerated activity in the places visited.

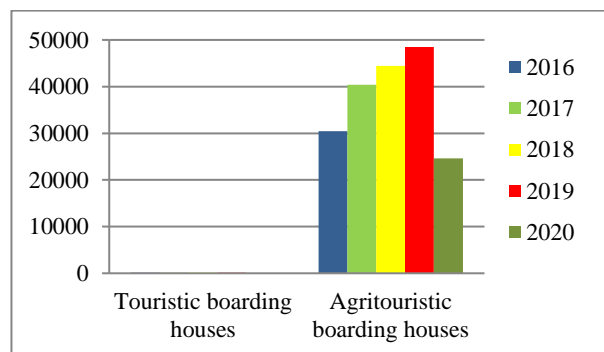


Fig. 4. Total number of tourists arriving per year in tourist reception structures by types structures in the period 2016-2020

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

From Table 2, it can be seen that the evolution of the number of tourists registers a sustained increase, being the result of the increase in demand and consumption for this form of tourism until 2019, with 2020 having a dramatic decrease, below the last reference year, 2016. Practicing rural tourism is accessible to all categories of consumers and thus the prices and tariffs must be accessible to all those who choose this form of tourism. As a result, the basis of the highlighted results regarding the number of tourists arriving in

rural tourist boarding houses, viewed from the point of view of classification by comfort category, is also the financial situation that tourists face.

Figure 4 highlights the fact that the number of arrivals in agritourism boarding houses in Maramureş in the period 2016-2020 had a visible growth trend from 2016 (30,465 people), until 2019 (48,452 people), and then in the last year, due to the pandemic situation,

a drastic decrease, by half - 24,463 people arrived. Regarding the situation of tourist boarding houses, table 4 highlights the fact that the number of arrivals in tourist boarding houses in Maramureş in the period 2016-2020, remained relatively constant until 2020, where due to the pandemic situation, the number of arrivals also decreased here, to only 92 people.

Table 2. Arrivals and overnight stays of tourists in tourist reception structures on types of structures in the period 2016-2020

Tourist reception structures	Localities	Arrivals					Overnights				
		number of tourists/years					number of tourists/years				
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Touristic boarding	Vadu Izei	121	110	141	136	92	171	167	344	396	294
Agritouristic boarding houses	Băiuţ	121	138	109	77	69	255	429	399	193	121
-	Bârsana	1346	649	1,307	1,163	126	1,846	1,364	2,093	2,381	173
-	Băseşti	15	-	-	-	-	30	-	-	-	-
-	Bogdan Vodă	180	107	178	181	112	323	261	349	332	174
-	Botiza	698	782	861	1,334	514	1,224	1,858	2,020	2,799	908
-	Budeşti	540	796	1,174	1,198	859	1,396	1,984	2,846	3,271	1,897
-	Călineşti	-	119	184	549	565	-	243	337	1,120	1,504
-	Cerneşti	-	319	275	-	-	-	563	601	-	-
-	Cicârlău	623	509	240	276	21	1,200	670	443	477	32
-	Coaş	441	681	538	-	-	622	892	996	-	-
-	Colţău	646	1,093	1,295	1,222	365	978	1,957	2,446	2,297	593
-	Copalnic-	96	89	115	197	100	232	275	226	387	153
-	Deseşti	735	1,485	1,167	1,034	1,264	1,699	3,216	2,544	2,268	3,121
-	Dumbrăviţa	591	396	402	540	163	696	726	892	1,095	282
-	Giuleşti	413	388	573	702	284	2,007	1,022	1,177	1,488	522
-	Groşii	-	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	10
-	Ieud	392	567	559	637	413	761	1,164	1,318	1,299	839
-	Mireşu Mare	88	72	90	106	20	110	182	260	280	100
-	Moisei	2,920	3,343	4,714	5,560	2,843	5,562	5,991	9,140	9,871	5,370
-	Ocna Şugatag	6,313	8,311	7,321	8,416	4,101	12,808	16,729	17,055	20,667	9,430
-	Onceşti	597	1,258	1,488	1,976	815	800	2,341	2,837	3,889	1,278
-	Petrova	62	3,055	4,986	2,521	1,274	218	5,679	8,054	6,467	2,859
-	Poienile Izei	901	885	1,186	1,423	846	1,576	2,034	2,816	3,231	1,960
-	Recea	2,409	2,064	1,748	2,097	548	2,746	2,543	2,981	3,866	677
-	Rona de jos	-	350	94	101	40	-	980	186	230	48
-	Rona de sus	593	696	675	1,604	889	952	1,609	1,351	3,876	1,826
-	Ruscova	-	-	878	756	467	-	-	1,712	1,638	1,097
-	Săcălăşeni	99	144	128	174	72	159	367	269	317	114
-	Săcel	1,348	1,843	1,575	1,171	514	2,647	2,725	3,292	2,486	942
-	Săpânţa	170	288	900	1,295	601	335	766	1,843	2,396	994
-	Sarasău	1,099	2,057	2,596	2,409	2,036	1,711	3,599	5,625	5,881	4,391
-	Satulung	54	49	128	195	121	114	118	407	493	453
-	Şieu	79	207	301	749	281	167	710	750	1,545	487
-	Şişeşti	891	1,188	1,256	1,361	796	1,692	2,003	2,063	2,190	1,246
-	Strâmtura	728	491	487	523	413	1,376	986	1,041	1,251	1,018
-	Suciu de sus	382	462	495	588	279	877	996	1,424	1,614	695
-	Vadu Izei	3,959	4,739	3,761	5,232	2,617	6,497	8,410	8,516	12,296	4,679
-	Valea	387	422	341	480	149	628	607	596	836	233
-	Vişeu de jos	549	352	327	605	57	1,167	654	520	1,073	73
	Total	30,465	40,394	44,452	48,452	24,642	55,411	76,653	91,425	105,800	50,299

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

Tourists' overnight stays in rural and agritouristic boarding houses

The tourist overnight stay is the 24-hour interval, starting from the hotel time, for which a person is registered in the tourist

accommodation space and benefits from accommodation at the rate related to the occupied space, even if the actual length of stay is lower than the mentioned interval.

Table 3. The average length of stay and the number of tourists arriving per day in the structures of tourist reception in the period 2016-2020

Tourist reception structures	Localities	Average duration of stay - days/year					Number of tourists/days				
		Years					Years				
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Touristic boarding houses	Vadu Izei	1.41	1.51	2.43	2.91	3.19	0.33	0.3	0.38	0.37	0.25
Agritouristic boarding houses	Băiuț	2.1	3.1	3.66	2.5	1.75	0.33	0.38	0.29	0.21	0.18
-	Bârsana	1.37	2.1	1.60	2.04	1.37	3.68	1.77	3.58	3.18	0.34
-	Băsești	2.0	-	-	-	-	0.04	-	-	-	-
-	Bogdan Vodă	1.80	2.43	1.96	1.83	1.55	0.49	0.29	0.48	0.49	0.36
-	Botiza	1.75	2.37	2.34	2.09	1.76	1.91	2.14	2.35	3.65	1.4
-	Budești	2.58	2.49	2.42	2.73	2.2	1.47	2.18	3.21	3.28	2.35
-	Călinești	-	2.04	1.83	2.04	2.66	-	0.32	0.50	1.5	1.55
-	Cernești	-	1.76	2.18	-	-	-	0.87	0.75	-	-
-	Cicârlău	1.92	1.31	1.84	1.72	1.52	1.7	1.39	0.65	0.76	0.05
-	Coaș	1.5	1.3	1.85	-	-	1.2	1.86	1.47	-	-
-	Colțâu	1.51	1.79	1.88	1.87	1.62	1.76	2.99	3.54	3.34	1.0
-	Copalnic-	2.41	3.09	1.96	1.97	1.53	0.26	0.25	0.31	0.53	0.27
-	Desești	2.31	2.16	2.17	2.19	2.46	2.01	4.06	3.19	2.83	3.46
-	Dumbrăvița	1.17	1.83	2.21	2.02	1.73	1.61	1.08	1.1	1.47	0.44
-	Giulești	4.85	2.63	2.05	2.11	1.83	1.13	1.06	1.56	1.92	0.77
-	Groșii	-	-	-	-	1.25	-	-	-	-	0.02
-	Ieud	1.94	2.05	2.35	2.03	2.03	1.07	1.55	1.53	1.74	1.13
-	Mireșu Mare	1.25	2.52	2.88	2.64	5.0	0.24	0.23	0.25	0.26	0.05
-	Moisei	1.9	1.79	1.93	1.77	1.88	8.0	9.15	12.91	15.23	7.78
-	Ocna Șugatag	2.02	2.01	2.32	2.45	2.29	17.29	22.76	20.1	23.05	11.23
-	Oncești	1.34	1.86	1.90	1.96	1.56	1.63	3.44	4.07	5.41	2.23
-	Petrova	3.51	1.85	1.61	2.56	2.24	0.16	8.36	13.66	6.9	3.49
-	Poienile Izei	1.74	2.29	2.37	2.27	2.31	2.46	2.42	3.24	3.89	2.31
-	Recea	1.14	1.23	1.67	1.84	1.23	6.6	5.65	4.78	3.74	1.5
-	Rona de jos	-	2.8	1.97	2.27	1.2	-	0.95	0.25	0.27	0.1
-	Rona de sus	1.60	2.31	2.0	2.41	2.05	1.62	1.9	1.84	4.39	2.43
-	Ruscova	-	-	1.94	2.16	2.34	-	-	2.4	2.07	1.27
-	Săcălășeni	1.6	2.54	2.1	1.82	1.58	0.27	0.39	0.35	0.47	0.19
-	Săcel	1.96	1.47	2.09	2.12	1.83	3.69	5.04	4.31	3.2	1.4
-	Săpânța	1.97	2.65	2.04	1.85	1.65	0.46	0.78	2.46	3.54	1.64
-	Sarasău	1.55	1.74	2.16	2.44	2.15	3.01	5.63	7.11	6.6	5.57
-	Satulung	2.11	2.4	3.17	2.52	3.74	0.14	0.13	0.35	0.53	0.33
-	Șieu	2.11	3.42	2.49	2.07	1.73	79	207	301	749	281
-	Șișești	1.89	1.68	1.64	1.60	1.56	0.21	3.25	3.44	3.72	2.18
-	Strâmtura	1.89	2.0	2.13	2.39	2.46	1.99	1.34	1.33	1.43	1.13
-	Suciu de sus	2.29	2.15	2.87	2.74	2.49	1.04	1.26	1.35	1.61	0.76
-	Vadu Izei	1.64	1.77	2.26	2.35	1.78	10.84	12.98	10.3	14.33	7.17
-	Valea	1.62	1.42	1.74	1.74	1.56	1.06	1.15	0.93	1.31	0.4
-	Vișeu de jos	2.12	1.85	1.59	1.77	1.28	1.5	0.96	0.89	1.65	0.15
Total		1.81	1.89	2.05	2.18	2.04	80.5	110.7	121.8	132.7	67.5

Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

The overnight stays related to the additionally installed beds (paid by customers) are also taken into account. In the period 2016-2020, according to Table 3 and figure 5, there is an upward evolution in the number of overnight stays by tourists in the agritouristic boarding houses in Maramureș, until 2019 (105,800 overnight stays), and in 2020 (50,299 overnight stays) there is a decrease very high, below the last reference year, 2016 (55,411

overnight stays), the decrease also being caused by the pandemic situation in 2020 and the restrictions during it.

In the period 2016-2020, according to table 3 and figure 5, there is an upward evolution in the number of overnight stays by tourists in the agritouristic boarding houses in Maramureș, until 2019 (105,800 overnight stays), and in 2020 (50,299 overnight stays) there is a decrease very high, below the last

reference year, 2016 (55,411 overnight stays), the decrease also being caused by the pandemic situation in 2020 and the restrictions during it. Regarding the tourist boarding houses, it is highlighted in table 3 that the number of overnight stays in Maramureş from 2016-2020 increased from 171 overnight stays in 2016 to 396 overnight stays in 2019, then in 2020, due to the restrictions imposed by pandemic, the number of overnight stays dropped to only 294 people.

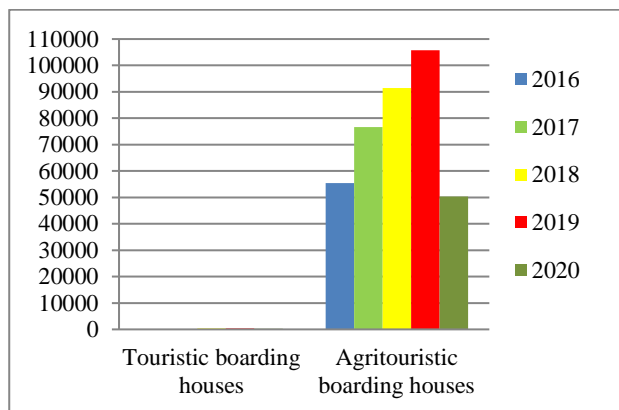


Fig. 5. Total overnight stays of tourists arriving per year in tourist reception structures on types of structures in the period 2016-2020
 Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

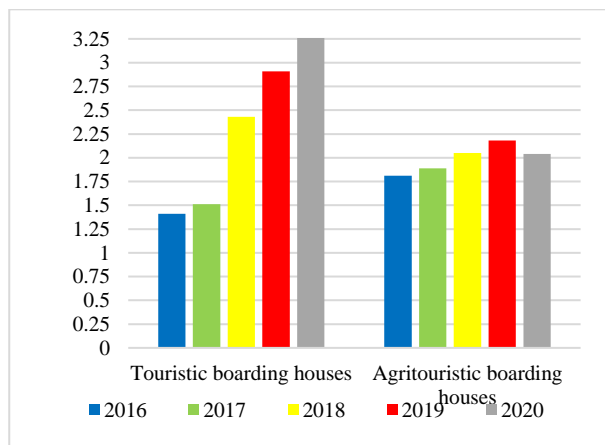


Fig. 6. Average length of stay
 Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

Regarding the average length of stay in agritourism boarding houses in the Maramureş area, table 3 and figure 6 show a progressive increase from 1.81, in 2016, to 2.18 in 2019, and in 2020, at the peak of the pandemic, an insignificant reduction, of only

0.14 units, due to the preference of tourists to visit during this period, the more secluded areas that allowed them some isolation, according to the requirements imposed.

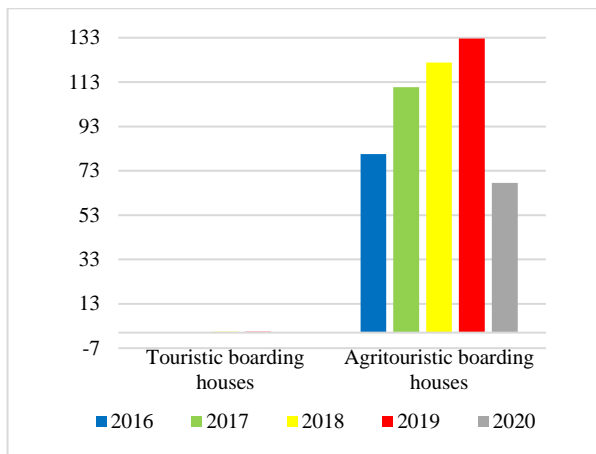


Fig. 7. Number of tourists arriving per day
 Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

With regard to the number of tourists arriving per day, it can be seen from the same table and figure 7, an obvious increase per year, reaching the maximum value of 132.7 tourists in 2019, later in 2020 reducing substantially, to only 67.5, in first of all due to the restrictions imposed on tourist reception structures to strictly comply with all safety regulations.

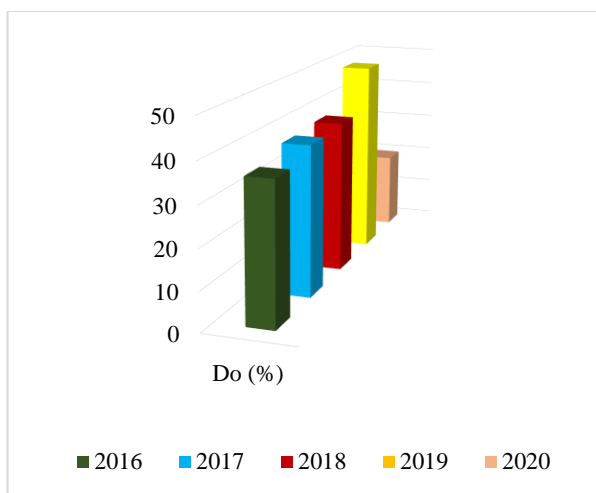


Fig. 8. The degree of occupancy (Do) of agritouristic boarding houses
 Source: processing according to data collected from the field and from NIS [21].

From the point of view of the degree of occupancy, especially of the agritourism

boarding houses, it can be seen from Figure 8 that this is a very good one for the entire period under study, increasing until 2019, to over 49.51%, a value that exceeds by over 30%, on the national level, corresponding to the analyzed period. The lowest value was recorded in 2020, of only 19.67%, due to the restriction applied to all tourist reception structures from us in the country, not to stay at the maximum capacity of 100% and to respect certain values depending on the infection rate in the area at that time.

Based on the study, we made some recommendations that could lead to an increase in the value of tourist circulation in the Maramureş County, such as the start and implementation here of a program similar to the one called "The European Gastronomy Region", applied in 2019, and which aims to raise awareness of the importance of cultural and gastronomic uniqueness, to promote, among other things, better tourism standards. The program was successfully implemented in Sibiu, offering the opportunity to promote Transylvanian gastronomy on an international level. From what we found, it could be successfully implemented in the Maramureş area and throughout the country, in order to develop new tourist products based on gastronomy and lifestyle specific to each ethnographic area, an aspect that will significantly contribute to attracting tourists to the area and will lead to increased tourist circulation between the various historical provinces of the country. The Maramureş County must use all its assets to the maximum.

Another program that could be implemented at the level of the researched area and that will contribute substantially to the revival of tourist circulation especially after the pandemic period, is the "Nature and adventure" program which represents a niche field of tourism and is a combination of all forms of ecologically specific tourism (agritourism, rural tourism, ecotourism), with sports tourism activities. All these new forms of tourism contribute to the wider development of sustainable tourism, from all economic, social and environmental points of view. The studied area and even the entire

country offer competitive prices for such tourist packages and have certified destinations and private operators that also deal with this niche tourism. The tourist packages focus on the Carpathian Mountains, where there are over 77% of the remaining virgin forests [25], untouched natural landscapes, village traditions, customs and rituals, preserved with sanctity in the countryside, authentic, natural and traditional products accompanied by selected wines [18], handicrafts and workshops, wooden churches and monasteries of unique beauty [29], all part of the tangible and intangible heritage of the area and of Romania.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study we found, first of all, that in the Maramureş County, accommodation and meal services can be offered to tourists in authentic, personalized conditions and with a strong note of local specificity, and permanent craft exhibitions (for sale) or museums can be organized ethnographic in the open air. It was also noted that this area is a true enclave of preserving and perpetuating folklore and especially ethnography (wear, work techniques, architecture, furnishing and interior decoration, etc.) in their original traditional forms.

These aspects that give the area the possibility of having an original, diversified, very good quality tourist offer, organized and managed by the local people, led to the sustained increase in tourist circulation during the studied period, a phenomenon that can be seen from the evolution of the number of tourists, which registered a sustained growth of approximately 59%, until 2019. This is the result of the increase in demand and consumption for this form of tourism until 2020, when a dramatic decrease is observed, below the last reference year, 2016, due mainly to the restrictions imposed in this peak year of the pandemic. Regarding the situation of the tourist boarding houses, the number of arrivals in the tourist boarding houses in the area during 2016-2020 remained relatively constant until 2020, where due to the same

conditions it dropped drastically, below the reference year 2016.

In the case of overnight stays, there was an upward evolution of approximately 91% in the number of overnight stays by tourists in agro-tourism boarding houses in Maramureș, until 2019, compared to 2016, but in 2020, a very large decrease was noted, below 2016, the decrease being caused by the special situation during the pandemic. The evolution of this indicator in tourist boarding houses showed as follows: the number of overnight stays in Maramureș County in the period 2016-2020 doubled from 2016 to 2019, then in 2020, the number of overnight stays fell below 2018.

Analyzing the above and the current state of tourism development in the region, we can confidently state that it has not reached a maximum level of development, despite the rich and varied potential, and its development prospects are promising provided there is a greater awareness of public authorities and of the private sector, but especially of consumers, regarding the capacity of agritourism and rural tourism to contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and to the improvement of living standards in this region of the country.

REFERENCES

[1]Abadi, A., Khakzand, M., 2022, Extracting the qualitative dimensions of agritourism for the sustainable development of Charqoli village in Iran: The promotion of vernacular entrepreneurship and environment-oriented preservation perspectives. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 24(11), 12609-12671.

[2]Adamov, T., Iancu, T., Peț, E., Popescu, G., Șmuleac, L., Feher, A., Ciolac, R., 2023, Rural Tourism in Marginimea Sibiului Area—A Possibility of Capitalizing on Local Resources. *Sustainability*, 15(1), p.241.

[3]Arroyo, C.G., Barbieri, C., Rich, S.R., 2013, Defining agritourism: A comparative study of stakeholders' perceptions in Missouri and North Carolina. *Tourism Management*, 37, 39-47.

[4]Barbieri, C., Xu, S., Gil-Arroyo, C., Rich, S.R., 2016, Agritourism, farm visit, or...? A branding assessment for recreation on farms. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(8), 1094-1108.

[5]Benedek, K., 2018, Aspects in Romanian nature conservation-a review. *Environmental Engineering & Management Journal (EEMJ)*, 17(1), 95-106.

[6]Bran, F., Marin, D., Simon, T., 1998, *Economy of tourism*, Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, pp. 18-112.

[7]Buluk Esitti, B., 2022, The role of destination image and destination attachment in destination loyalty of tourists attending rural tourism activities: The case of Canakkale. *University of South Florida (USF) M3 Publishing*, 16(9781955833103), p.32.

[8]Călina, J., Călina, A., 2022, Study on the current stage of development, planning and promotion of rural tourism and agritourism in the ethnographic area Maramureș. *Scientific Papers: Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, 22(3), 101-112.

[9]Călina, J., Călina, A., Ciobanu, A., 2022, Identification of the best apple and pear tree varieties suitable to be grown in farms and agritourism households in the south-west area of Romania. *Environmental Engineering and Management Journal*, 21(6), 995-1009.

[10]Călina, J., Călina, A., 2021, Analysis of the indicators characterizing the activity of rural tourism and agritourism in Vâlcea county from the perspective of the total quality. *Scientific Papers: Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, 21(4), 101-110.

[11]Cheteni, P., Umejesi, I., 2023. Evaluating the sustainability of agritourism in the wild coast region of South Africa. *Cogent Economics & Finance*, 11(1), 1-12.

[12]Ciolac, R., Adamov, T., Iancu, T., Popescu, G., Lile, R., Rujescu, C., Marin, D., 2019, Agritourism- A Sustainable development factor for improving the 'health' of rural settlements. Case study Apuseni mountains area. *Sustainability*, 11(5), 1467-1480.

[13]Drăguleasa, I.A., Niță, A., Mazilu, M., 2023, Capitalization of Tourist Resources in the Post-COVID-19 Period—Developing the Chorematic Method for Oltenia Tourist Destination, Romania. *Sustainability*, 15(3), 2018-2050.

[14]Flanigan, S., Blackstock, K., Hunter, C., 2014, Agritourism from the perspective of providers and visitors: a typology-based study. *Tourism Management*, 40, 394-405.

[15]Galluzzo, N., 2022, The relationship between agritourism and social capital in Italian regions. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 94, 218-226.

[16]Karampela, S., Kavroudakis, D., Kizos, T., 2019, Agritourism networks: empirical evidence from two case studies in Greece. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22, 1460 - 1479.

[17]Kubal-Czerwińska, M., Mitrofanenko, T., Szabó-Diószeghy, Á., Szabó, M., Szpara, K., Zawilińska, B., 2022, Agritourism and local products in terms of protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians: a participatory discussion on key issues and challenges. *Human Geographies*, 16(1), 33-52.

[18]Markovic, N., Przic, Z., Todic, S., Beslic, Z., 2016, Productive and technological characteristics of table varieties growe in the conditions of oplenac vineyards. *Annals of the University of Craiova-*

Agriculture, Montanology, Cadastre Series, 46(1), 206-212.

[19] Marcuța, L., Marcuța, A., Popescu, A., Tindeche, C., Tudor, V., Smedescu, D., 2020, Study on the development of adventure tourism in Romania, *Scientific Papers: Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, 20(4), 339-346.

[20] Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, www.mturism.ro, Accessed on September 07, 13, 21, 2022.

[21] National Institute of Statistics, 2022, Tempo online data base, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempoonline/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, Accessed on November 04, 13, 18, 23, 27, 2022.

[22] National Institute of Statistics, About Maramures County (Despre Judetul Maramures), <https://maramures.insse.ro/despre-noi/despre-judetul-maramures/>, Accessed on October 06, 11, 17, 26, 2022.

[23] Opreșoni, A. R., Neda, D., Ciolac, R., 2019, Identification of the advantages resulting from an agritourism guesthouse projected in Bunila area, Hunedoara County, *Scientific Papers, Series I, Agricultural Management*, 21(3), 202-209.

[24] Phillip, S., Hunter, C., Blackstock, K., 2010, A typology for defining agritourism. *Tourism management*, 31(6), 754-758

[25] Răduțoiu, D., Stan, I., 2022, Vegetation damage to agricultural crops in Oltenia, Romania. *Scientific papers-Series B-Horticulture*, 66(1), 885-892.

[26] Shahini, E., Skuraj, E., Sallaku, F., Shahini, S., 2022, Recreational Opportunities through Agritourism Increases Relationships within Urban and Rural Communities in Western Balkan Societies, *Review of Economics and Finance*, 20, 283-287

[27] Solymannejad, R., Alibaygi, A., Salehi, L., 2022, Barriers and Facilitators of Agri-Tourism Sustainable Development in West of Mazandaran Province. *Geography and Environmental Planning*, 33(2), pp.37-62.

[28] *Turismul rural în România* (Rural tourism in Romania), <https://www.academia.edu/>, Accessed on October 05, 12, 23, 29, 2022.

[29] Vladimirescu, M.V., 2012, The suffering god and religion without God in the globalised world. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 8(2), 135-142.

[30] Yıldırım, İ., Deniz, G., Dalkılıç, F., 2022, Bibliometric analysis of publications within the scope of cultural heritage tourism. In L. Altınay, O. M. Karatepe, & M. Tuna (Eds.), *Daha iyi bir dünya için turizm* (Vol 2, pp. 1-16). USF M3 Publishing. <https://www.doi.org/10.5038/9781955833103>

