

ASPECTS REGARDING TOURISM IN THE WEST REGION

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Abstract: *Tourism is an important activity and frequent concern of regions in Romania. Tourism and agritourism have a great importance because both can generate new jobs, attract investments or investors and implicitly to increase the income of a region, so tourism and agritourism can lead to an increase in the standard of living population. Also, the way in which tourism is structured affects development policies in various fields: social (if there is a well-qualified workforce), transport and communications (as the quality of the roads is presented, the various tourist attractions are accessible), the quality of the environment (in particular for natural tourist resources), protecting historical monuments, etc.*

Key words: *tourism, tourists, reception structures, West Region*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important economic activity with upward developments and impact in the socio-cultural, economic and environmental environment [11]. A large part of small and medium-sized enterprises have tourism as their main object of activity, which also represents in the Western Region and beyond, a significant weight in terms of the workforce and economic growth [1]. At the national level, tourism is of major importance [9] due to the fact that it manages to contribute to a large extent to the gross domestic product of Romania, given the fact that the workforce is closely linked to this sector, but also because it represents a way development and modernization of the country, due to the chance to produce certain products with high added value [7]. Most of the time, tourism is a tool that supports local and regional development, the reorganization of economic activities, especially in disadvantaged areas, but also in rural areas [6].

The tourism resources of the Region are based on the extremely varied natural framework, the diversity in terms of types of relief, the climatic elements that are under oceanic and sub-southern influences, the hydrographic network, the forest fund, the hunting fund, being divided into the 4 component counties of Region and making up tourist destinations with a high degree of attractiveness [4]. The Western Region is located in the western part of Romania, being administrative-territorially composed of 4 counties: Arad, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara and Timis. The most developed from the point of view of the economy are Timiș and Arad, which also present a predominantly plain relief, which imposes on them a predominantly human tourism. In the case of the other two component counties of the Region, whose wealth consists in a mostly mountainous relief, we can talk about a tourism whose main object is the objectives and natural resources. Thus Timiș and Arad counties benefit from favorable locations that ensure the development of several forms of tourism. Arad is differentiated by balneo-climate tourism (in the Moneasa location) [19], cultural tourism (the fortresses of Șiria, Șoimoș; the castles of Săvârșin, which by the way was the residence of King Michael I of Romania and still belongs to the Royal Families, Curtici, Birchiș, Șiria, the churches of Lipova, Halmagiu), rural, sports, vineyard (Podgoria Aradului). Tourism in Timiș County has a greater impact on human resources, being urban, cultural tourism (Queen Elisabeta's Castle in Banloc, the Partoș and Săraca monastic complexes), spa (mineral and thermal waters from Calacea and Buziaș), wine-growing (Recaș, Petrovaselor wineries). In Timișoara there are impressive

objects and buildings that are part of the cultural heritage such as: Huniade Castle, which is also the oldest building in the city, being built between 1308-1315 [18], the Baroque Palace, the Art Museum, the Banăţean Village Museum [19].

Caras-Severin and Hunedoara counties, due to their favorable geographical position, benefit from tourism based on natural resources, but not exclusively. Since the Western Region has 5 national parks and 4 natural parks, Caras-Severin County enjoys the presence of 4 of them: Retezat National Park, was the first in Romania, whose existence dates back to 1932, being included by UNESCO in the category of natural reserves of the Biosphere[3]; The Domogled - Valea Cernei National Park is the second largest park in Romania, having in its composition the most numerous mountainous massifs, the Cheile Nerei - Beuşniţa National Park and the last one is the Semenic - Cheile Caraşului National Park [3,13].

Hunedoara County also enjoys a very well-preserved cultural heritage, of particular historical importance, but also impressive natural resources. It also includes the Retezat National Park and the Jiului Gorge National Park. At the same time, the county is harmonized by the presence of Roman archaeological remains in Şara Haţegului [12] (Ulpia Traiana, Sarmisegetusa), by the presence of fortresses and castles (Cetatea Devei and Castelul Corvinilor). All this explains the greater presence of tourist stops and villas in these two counties [3].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study in the present work is based on the information extracted from the statistical database of the region and the country. All the data obtained were processed using various calculation methods, finally providing a clear view of the situation, through tables and graphs. We approached the indicators from the perspective of the tourist infrastructure, analyzing the evolution of reception units, accommodation capacity. Due to this fact, we used the comparison method, using it to make a clear situation of the differences between the 1990s and the present, and in order to highlight the differences between the sizes of the regions, we used a relevant indicator, namely the tourist density measured in accommodation/km² inhabitants³.

RESEARCH RESULTS

At the regional level, in 2021, the most widespread tourist reception structures are agro-tourist guesthouses (31%), tourist guesthouses (29%), hotels and motels (21%), tourist villas and tourist cabins (15%), and the remaining 4% is evenly distributed to campsites, student camps, tourist stops and tourist lodges [16]. As a regional strategy regarding the development of tourism, a significant increase can be observed in terms of the number of accommodation units in the four component counties of the Western Region (Table 2). At county level, out of the complexity of 846 tourist reception structures, 293 (34%) are located in Hunedoara county, 260 (31%) in Caraş-Severin county, 150 (18%) in Timiş county and 143 (17%)) in Arad county. Compared to 1990, when the total amounted to only 217 tourist reception structures, this being equally distributed, 54 units (25%) in Timiş and Caraş-Severin counties, 62 (28%) in Hunedoara county and 22% , respectively 47 units in Arad county (Table 1).

Table 1.**Tourist reception units at regional level, in 1990**

Types of tourist reception structures	Arad	Caras-Severin	Hunedoara	Timis
Hotels	14	18	17	18
Hostels	0	0	0	0
Inns and motels	3	6	7	4
Tourist villas	24	10	14	28
Tourist cabins	2	16	19	0
Campings	4	4	5	4
Tourist stops	0	0	0	0
Tourist cottages	0	0	0	0
Camps for students and preschoolers	0	0	0	0
Tourist guesthouses	0	0	0	0
Agritourism pensions	0	0	0	0

Source: <https://insse.ro/cms/>, 2022 [16]

In terms of tourist accommodation units, in 2021, Timiș County has the most hotels in the Region, 50 in number, with a 36% share, followed by Caraș-Severin County with 35 hotels, (25%), Arad county with a weight of 21%, having 29 hotels, and the last place in this category is occupied by Hunedoara county with 26 hotels (18%) [17].

Regarding the situation of the number of tourist and agro-tourism guesthouses, the situation is much different from that of hotels. The counties of Caraș-Severin and Hunedoara have the highest shares in the Region, but at the same time similar, 29% and 30%, as can be seen in Table 1. Hunedoara County, however, leads by far in the number of villas and tourist stops, totaling 89 units, respectively 73% [2,17].

Table 2.**Tourist reception units at regional level, in 2021**

Types of tourist reception structures	Arad	Caras-Severin	Hunedoara	Timis
Hotels	29	35	26	50
Hostels	6	13	7	12
Inns and motels	0	0	0	0
Tourist villas	7	4	44	5
Tourist cabins	1	21	45	1
Campings	4	4	2	1
Tourist stops		4	0	1
Tourist cottages	1	6	0	2
Camps for students and preschoolers	0	3	2	3
Tourist guesthouses	54	73	72	47
Agritourism pensions	41	97	95	28

Source: <https://insse.ro/cms/>, 2022 [16]

With the closure of the communist chapter, a process of tourism stagnation began in the Western Region, due to the changes in the political environment [5]. The year 1990 saw declines in all tourism indicators. But, later on, a set of proposals were voted to start the modernization process, a process that also included initiatives to reorganize and develop tourism and agritourism. A significant increase could be observed only after 1995,

or even after 2000, which also marked the year of economic growth. Even if the first 5 years after communism were transitional, from Figure 1. it can be seen that from 1990 until 2018, an upward trend was registered in terms of tourist reception structures at the level of all four competent counties. $\approx 209\%$, Caraş-Severin county by $\approx 292\%$, Hunedoara by $\approx 242\%$, and Timiş county by $\approx 169\%$ [15,16,17].

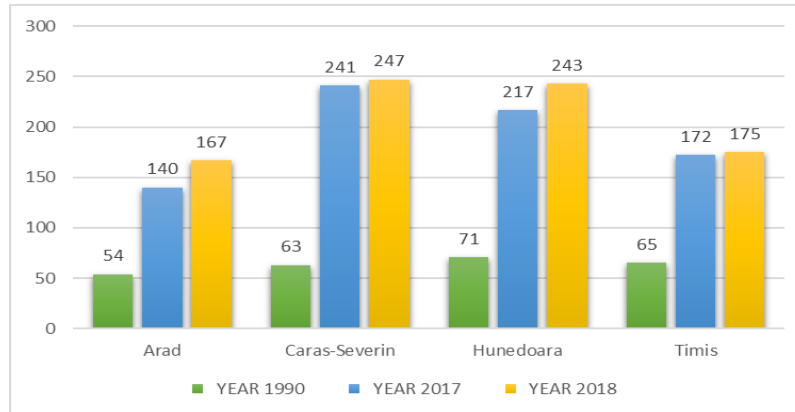


Figure 1. The evolution of tourist reception structures 1990-2018

But since 2018, the situation regarding the evolution of tourist reception is fluctuating (Figure 2.), respectively in Caraş-Severin county there was a significant increase of 9.84% from 2019 to 2021. Also an increase of 14.23% was also recorded in Hunedoara county from 2019 to 2020, but also a decrease of 3.83% was recorded in 2021. On the other hand, Arad and Timiş counties recorded constant losses of 2.55%, respectively 10.06%, in terms of the number of accommodation units from 2019 to 2021 [16, 17].

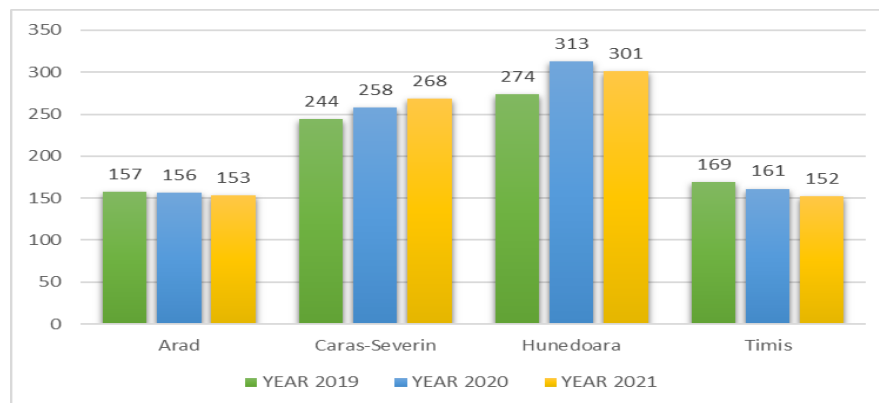


Figure 2. The evolution of tourist reception structures 2019-2021

The significant increases in tourist and agro-tourism guesthouses can be due to the support given to tourist units, in order to initiate and expand tourism, in accordance with the standards in the field of the European Union and which should be further intensified, so that tourism becomes a fixed point of support in order to develop as many communities as possible. This is because in the current objective social-economic conditions, which characterize the evolution of rural communities in the Western Region, rural tourism represents one of the few valid options for a sustainable economic development of communities, as a foundation for increasing the quality of life for the contemporary Romanian village. On the other hand, the decreases recorded in Timiş and Arad counties can be attributed to the pandemic context which, strongly affected tourism industry.

Regarding the accommodation capacity (Figure 3.), between the years 2017-2021, there were fluctuations in the number of accommodations at the national level, indicating increases and decreases from one year to another. In 2021, the Western region had 30,173 accommodation places, ranking 5th among Romania's 8 regions. In first place, with the largest accommodation capacity of 108,888, is the South-East Region, followed by the Center Region with a capacity of 71,654, and the North-West Region in third place with 44,007 accommodation places [10,17].

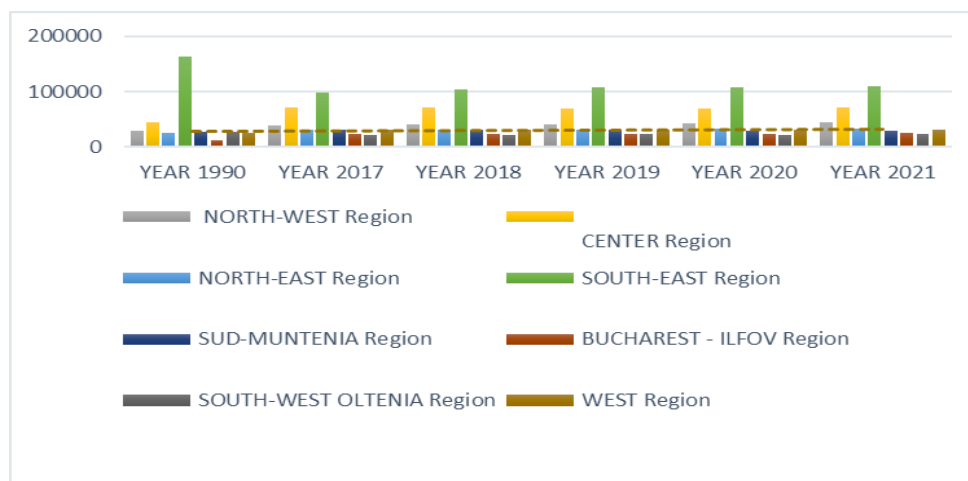


Figure 3. Tourist accommodation capacity by Romania's Regions

CONCLUSIONS

The Western Region enjoys a truly rich, valuable natural setting intertwined with elements of the historical setting that provide multiple opportunities to practice tourism in its various forms. It is precisely from this point of view that we want an awareness on the part of the inhabitants of the Western Region in order to appreciate, recognize and capitalize on the resources in a sustainable way, in order to preserve and preserve this valuable heritage, gathered during the many years of existence of the Romanian ancestors. The very positioning of the Western Region superimposed on a land of three ancient historical regions leads to a very clear conclusion, namely the fact that in this territory were formed and still exist a multitude of customs, popular traditions, beliefs, customs,

Strategies for the development of tourism must be intertwined with various policies from the social field (quality of trained human resources, criminality), economic (quality roads, accessibility) but also the protection of natural and human resources and also to promote them worldwide [8, 14]. Certainly, problems such as the lack of efficient infrastructure, the restoration of various heritage objects will be able to be solved with plans aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in a form in which all the heritage of the Region (natural resources, material and spiritual culture) is transmitted and appreciated by future generations.

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