

## RELAUNCHING POSSIBILITIES OF RURAL AREA FROM MOUNTAIN BANAT THROUGH AGRITOURISM ACTIVITIES

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**Abstract:** *This study represents an analysis of the tourist activity carried out in Mountain Banatul, indicating the readiness of this area for rural tourism and, more importantly, for agritourism. The purpose of this research is to identify the development level of tourist activity carried out in the area under study and to separate a series of measures, which support its intensification, having the effect of the overall economic development of the area and the reduction of the discrepancies of the mountain area.*

**Key words:** *agritourism, rural tourism, rural area, Mountain Banat*

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research is to identify reception structures with accommodation functions from Caras-Severin County and to analyze the occupancy degree in the period before the pandemic, during the pandemic and after the pandemic, respectively the years 2019-2022.

Agritourism is spatially placed in the rural environment, which is why it is fully integrated into rural tourism. Thus, the concept of rural tourism has a broader area than agritourism, whose scope is narrower. [2,8,15]

Both rural tourism and agritourism pursue a form of fundamental tourism based on classical, commercial tourism. The tourist who comes from a rural environment (town, agricultural holding) comes directly into contact with this world, with its material, cultural, natural, economic, social values. [1,13,14]

Rural tourism and agritourism are not only a tourist alternative but also an essential factor in the economic development of rural environment as a whole and of agricultural holdings, in particular.

Rural tourism and agritourism activities intertwine, complement and support each other, constituting a field with a specific organization. This organization considers both the geographical, economic, social specificity, but also the specificity of its products and the role it must play in the development of the rural environment.

Agritourism activity, due to its complexity, contributes to the overall development of rural areas, and this development in turn will lead to an increase in tourist traffic. Agritourism represents a real chance for the local economy, it creates the main motivations in the training and development of some initiatives, some traditional activities that have been neglected for a long time, some crafts, local artistic creations for the satisfaction of tourists. All these activities boost local economic life. [4,6,9,10]

Agritourism, a component of rural tourism, has the greatest implications in capitalizing on local tourist resources and in raising the living standard of the inhabitants, in the socio-economic development of the rural locality and the community in general, and last but not least, in protecting and preserving the natural environment and built, in the context of an economic activity based on ecological principles (tourism encourages the protection of the environment).

Therefore, the interest of the community and the local authority is to develop an organization strategy for sustainable development and promotion of rural tourism, especially agritourism, at the local level, with the participation of all the economic agents involved in carrying out this activity. [3,5,7,12]

Caras-Severin is in the historical region of Banat and the West Development Region. Located on the southwest Danube border of Romania, Caras-Severin County is one of the Romanian territories with the most remarkable historical heritage and at the same time the holder of a natural endowment that makes it one of the most important concentrations of nature reserves and protected area, totaling over 20% from the total area of the county. [3,11,13]

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The achievement of this study was based on the analysis of the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics and the local communities in the studied area, regarding the development degree of the tourist activity from Caras-Severin County. The data provided by the various official sources allowed a statistical interpretation of them, for the period 2019-2022, using the specific indicators of tourist circulation.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

Caras-Severin County, the third largest county in the country, has a predominantly mountainous relief, offering modest opportunities for the development of agriculture, but it favors the development of a rich hydropower network. The tourist potential is also high and although, for the moment, it is still very poorly exploited, it could constitute a credible alternative in the economic reconversion of the area. [1,10,16]

In table 1 is presented the situation of tourist reception structures, existing at the level of Caras-Severin County, in the 2019-2022 period.

Table 1.

Tourist reception structures, Caras-Severin County

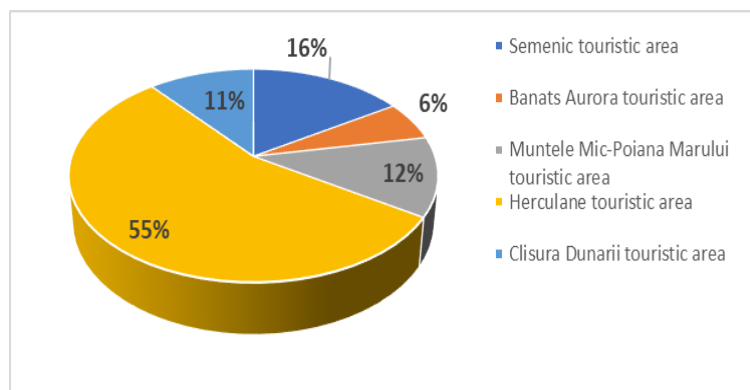
	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Hotels</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Hostels</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Motels</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Tourist villas</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Tourist cabins</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Bungalows</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Campgrounds</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Tourist stops</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Tourist cottages</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Camps for students and preschoolers</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Tourist guesthouses</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Agritourism guesthouses</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>267</b>

Source: INS – Tempo online 2019-2022

In the 2019-2022 period, the number of accommodation structures increased in the first three years (2019, 2020 and 2021) from 244 to 268 units (+9.38%), followed by a stagnation in 2022 at 267 units.

At the level of Caras-Severin County, it can be observed that the most tourist reception structures, with the function of accommodation, are agritourist guesthouses (105), followed by tourist guesthouses in number of 71, then hotels - 35 and tourist cabins 19. There are only two tourist camps for youth and only 4 campsites.

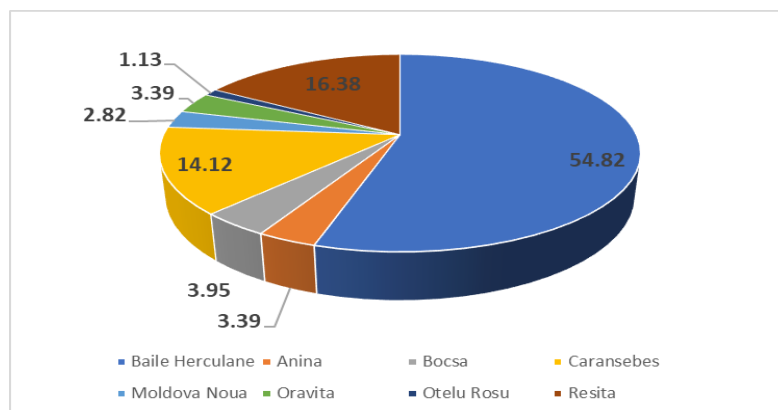
The 267 accommodation units, registered in 2022, at the level of Caras-Severin County, are distributed unevenly on the main tourist areas of the county. Most of them (figure 1.) are concentrated in the tourist area of Herculaneum, where 55% of the total number of accommodation units can be found.



**Figure 1. The structure of accommodation units, in the main tourist destinations, Caras-Severin County, 2022**

Source: INS – Tempo online 2019-2022

It should be noted that there are currently accommodation units in all five tourist areas of Caras-Severin County: the Semenic tourist area with the towns of Resita and Bocsa and the surrounding localities, the Aurora Banatului tourist area with the towns of Anina and Oravita and the localities of Tara Almajului, the tourist area Muntele Mic-Poiana Marului, with the towns of Caransebes and Otelu Rosu and the towns of Valea Bistrei and Tara Gugulanilor, the tourist area Baile Herculane with the resort of Baile Herculane and the surrounding towns and the tourist area Danube Gorge with the town of Moldova Noua and the towns of along the Danube Gorge.



**Figure 2. The distribution of tourist reception structures on the main cities of Caras-Severin County**

Source: INS – Tempo online 2019-2022

Tourist reception structures are unevenly distributed at the county level. The city of Baile Herculane concentrates 54.8% from the total number of tourist reception structures, followed by Caransebes with 14.12%, Resita with 16.38%, Bocsa with 3.95% and Anina and Oravita with a percentage of 3.39%, each. [1,15,16]

The existing tourist accommodation capacity is given by the number of accommodation places for all tourist structures. [3,14]

The existing tourist accommodation capacity in the reception structures with tourist accommodation function is currently 9590 places, increasing from one year to the next, during the analyzed period. Thus, it increased from 9184 places in 2019 to 9924 places in 2021, an increase of 8.6%. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2022, there is a decrease in the number of places.

In 2022, the largest share of existing accommodation capacity was concentrated in hotel-type accommodation units (48.33%), followed by agritourism guesthouses (17.71%) and tourist guesthouses (15.46%). [1,16]

The capacity of tourist accommodation in operation is another important indicator of the analysis of tourist traffic. Table 2 shows the evolution of this indicator, in the period 2019-2022, at the level of Caras-Severin County.

Table 2.

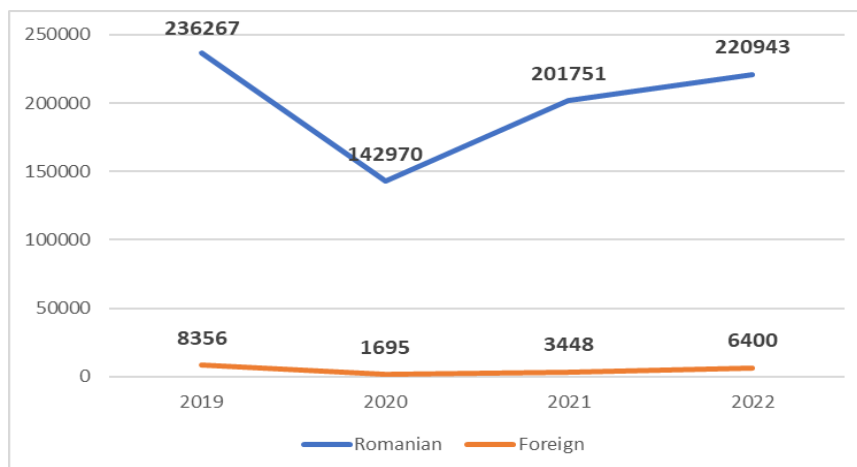
<b>Tourist accommodation capacity in operation, (places-days)</b>				
	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>Hotels</b>	<b>1204953</b>	<b>850055</b>	<b>1089225</b>	<b>1162682</b>
<b>Hostels</b>	<b>53856</b>	<b>35434</b>	<b>41414</b>	<b>37580</b>
<b>Apartments and rooms for rent</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>140325</b>	<b>194863</b>
<b>Motels</b>	<b>29239</b>	<b>16973</b>	<b>25106</b>	<b>25857</b>
<b>Tourist villas</b>	<b>25130</b>	<b>13540</b>	<b>17182</b>	<b>17326</b>
<b>Tourist cabins</b>	<b>87261</b>	<b>63128</b>	<b>71938</b>	<b>69473</b>
<b>Bungalows</b>	<b>10824</b>	<b>6946</b>	<b>11512</b>	<b>8984</b>
<b>Campgrounds</b>	<b>5280</b>	<b>12880</b>	<b>19640</b>	<b>14990</b>
<b>Tourist stops</b>	<b>60028</b>	<b>24504</b>	<b>40594</b>	<b>37068</b>
<b>Tourist cottages</b>	<b>7532</b>	<b>8124</b>	<b>12196</b>	<b>10188</b>
<b>Camps for students and preschoolers</b>	<b>11317</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>2821</b>
<b>Tourist guesthouses</b>	<b>357972</b>	<b>252061</b>	<b>303043</b>	<b>294641</b>
<b>Agritourism guesthouses</b>	<b>322314</b>	<b>236565</b>	<b>279457</b>	<b>249710</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2175703</b>	<b>1520210</b>	<b>2051632</b>	<b>2126193</b>

Source: INS – Tempo online 2019-2022

Due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, in the first year of the pandemic, the value of this indicator decreased from 2175706 place-days to 1520210 place-days, a decrease of 30.16%. A slight increase then followed, up to today's value of 2126195 place-days, but without reaching the value of 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of Romanian and foreign tourists who visited Caras-Severin County is presented in figure 3.

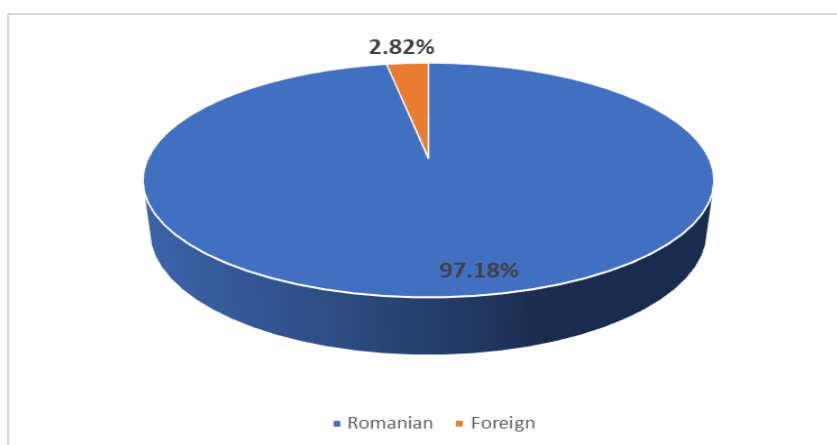
The data presented indicate the evolution of tourist arrivals for the period 2019-2022. During the analysis period, this indicator registered a decrease of 7.06%. The highest decrease was recorded in 2020, with tourist arrivals being 40.86% less than the previous year. In the middle of 2022, tourism in Caras-Severin County is in the recovery period after the COVID-19 pandemic. By moving from passive, sedentary tourism to active tourism, there are enough premises that can convince that tourism in Caras-Severin County will never end its activity cycle, on the contrary, it will develop to another level of quality and attractiveness if the expectations of potential Romanian and foreign tourists will be considered. [2,15,16]



**Figure 3. The evolution of tourists' number in the agritourism guesthouses from Caras-Severin County, 2022**

*Source: INS – Tempo online 2019-2022*

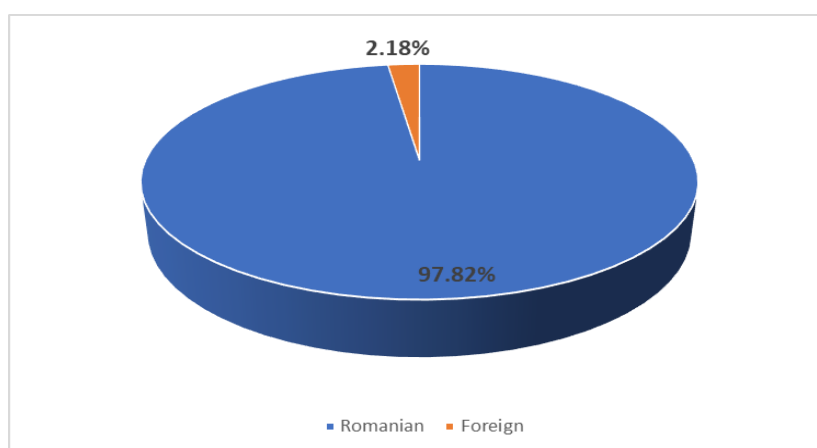
Regarding the evolution of the number of tourists staying in agritourism guesthouses in Caras-Severin County, a decrease in them is observed during the pandemic period, in 2020, after which the value of this indicator starts to increase again, reaching 227343 in 2022 tourists, value 0.07% lower, compared to 2019.



**Figure 5. The structure of tourist arrivals, in the tourist reception structures of Caras-Severin County, 2022**

*Source: INS – Tempo online 2019-2022*

It can be observed that in 2022 the number of tourists before the pandemic was not reached. Last year, there were only 227345 tourists, from which 220943 are Romanian tourists (97.18%) and only 6400 foreign tourists (2.82%).



**Figure 6. The structure of tourist arrivals, in agritourist guesthouses in Caras-Severin County, 2022**

*Source: INS – Tempo online 2019-2022*

In 2022, the total number of tourists who visited Caras-Severin County, 97.82% are Romanian tourists and only 2.18% are foreign tourists. The main conclusion is the need to promote more of the tourist attractions in Caras-Severin County so that the entire Mountain Banat becomes a tourist destination sought by foreign tourists. [3,11]

The same trend was also manifested in the case of overnight stays by tourists, registering a decrease to almost half of the number of overnight stays in 2020 compared to 2019, from 789936 overnight stays to 439922 overnight stays. A slight increase then followed, from 594593 overnight stays in 2021 to 664558 overnight stays in 2022.

In the case of overnight stays registered in tourist guesthouses, the decrease in their number was 41.63%. For Romanian tourists, the decrease is 42.79%, in the period 2019-2022. Overnight stays by foreign tourists decreased by 70.39%, in the period 2019-2021, in 2022, registering a 167.50% increase compared to the previous year. [16]

Overnight stays by tourists, in agritourism guesthouses, recorded a decrease of 41.09%, for the period 2019-2022. For Romanian tourists, the decrease was 37.18% and for foreign tourists 83.29%.

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the analysis of the statistical data, we separate some structural and territorial elements that must be considered in the future, at the level of strategies and actions. The general remark is that we are dealing with a county that operates at different speeds:

- the tourist phenomenon here depends on only a few localities. Only at Baile Herculane, Brebu Nou and Valiug and the ratio between the number of accommodation places and the number of inhabitants is higher.

- Caras-Severin County can come up with creative and attractive offers to make the Mountain Banat (Caras-Severin County and Cazanele Dunarii area up to Orsova) a desired tourist destination within the "Timisoara 2023 - European cultural capital" event.

We recommend, schematically, the following directions:

- designing some strategies and actions to include/integrate several tourist areas from Banat and develop tourist circuits.

- the promotion of Caras-Severin County in the international sphere, to increase the visibility of the diversity of tourism forms that can be practiced here, directly reflected in the number of Romanian and foreign tourists.

- the creation of some events that highlight the human and natural potential of the Banat countryside and offer the villages a point of development through culture, capturing the interest of tourists.

- investments in the technical-building infrastructure have a triple role, meaning improving the living conditions in these areas, increasing the attractiveness for investors, and increasing the number of Romanian and foreign tourists.

Having an extraordinary natural tourist potential, Caras-Severin County has a real chance for tourism development only in the condition of an overall economic and infrastructure development, which would facilitate and support tourist activity.

In this study, we presented the main possibilities for tourism development of the Banat mountain, through an effective exploitation of the existing natural and human potential. Thus, tourism development strategies must be based on the natural and human resources identified in the researched area, so necessary for the mountainous area of Caras-Severin County.

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