

ASPECTS REGARDING THE STATE OF TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE WEST REGION AND TIMIS COUNTY IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract.** *Tourist infrastructure comprises all goods and resources created by man, designed to highlight the natural and human tourist resources available to a particular territory. Specific tourist infrastructure includes all the accommodation establishments, leisure, treatment, catering or touristic special transport in order to satisfy the tourist demand. The development of tourist phenomenon cannot be achieved without the existence of adequate tourist infrastructure, known in some studies as the material basis of tourism or tourist accommodation structures. Tourist values of West Region are given by a particularly rich and varied environment, with many types of relief, climatic elements with oceanic and sub-Meridional influences, a representative hydrographic network and a rich and varied forestry and cynegetic fund, all these being considered tourist destinations with a high degree of attractiveness.*

*The main types and forms of tourism practiced in West Region are: traffic and transit tourism, thermal and spa tourism, leisure and recreation tourism, business tourism, cultural and historical tourism, mountain tourism, speleological tourism, sports tourism, hunting and sport fishing tourism, religious tourism, cruise tourism, ecotourism, urban tourism, cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism, rural and agro-tourism, industrial tourism, adventure tourism.*

**Key words:** *infrastructure; development; tourism; region.*

## INTRODUCTION

The West development region, also called the West Region, is one of the eight development regions of Romania. The West Region was established on 28 October 1998 by the association of Arad, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara and Timis Counties. Historically, the region includes the *province of Banat* (respectively Arad - the territory to the south of Mures, Timis and Caras-Severin), a Romanian historical province with an early economic development and much stronger compared to other provinces in the country. The West Region includes the land of *ancient Dacia* with its capital in Sarmisegetusa which currently overlaps Hunedoara County.<sup>1</sup>

The West Region has a diverse and harmonious relief composed of plains, hills and mountains. The plains are part of the Great Western Plain and they are characteristic to Timis County. Climate is moderate continental, with sub-Mediterranean influences, especially on the Danube corridor and Cerna Valley, with average annual temperatures that range from 10 to 12<sup>0</sup>C. The precipitations are around an average of 560-580 liters/m<sup>2</sup>, slightly higher in mountain areas. The region is linked to Hungary and Serbia by European road and railways. Arad and Timisoara have airports with modern capacities for air flow.<sup>2</sup>

The West Region is part of Danube - Kris - Mures - Tisa Euroregion (DKMT), which consists of three counties of Western Region, two counties of Hungary (Bács-Kiskun and Csongrád) and Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in Serbia. The Euroregion was established in 1992 based on a bilateral agreement signed by local authorities within the components regions (Timis and Csongrád Counties). The Regional Cooperation Protocol DMT was signed in 1997 which proved to be a strong support for the occurrence

<sup>1</sup>\*\*\*, *Planul de Dezvoltare Regională 2007-2013. Regiunea Vest România*, Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională Vest, versiunea mai 2007, <http://www.adrvest.ro>

<sup>2</sup>\*\*\*, *Programul Operațional Regional 2007-2013*, Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Turismului, București, 2010

of the first cross-border institutions and for the development of relationships, as intense as possible, between administrations located on both sides of border.<sup>1</sup>

One of the characteristics of West Region consists of varied and harmonious relief composed of plains, hills and mountains, which confer it an outstanding tourist potential. The West Region is an area relatively rich in natural resources, which has led in time to an increasing economic development, with a higher position, being one of the most developed regions of the country. The positive economic development of the region is determined by a balanced distribution of economic sectors.

Natural, economic and demographic coordinates of the region are represented by important subsoil resources (coal, anthracite -in exhaustion or at economic limit of exploitation-, iron ore, oil, copper, precious metals, silver, gold, building rocks, radioactive deposits, hot springs and mineral), by relief and various soils with large areas of fertile soils, forests with valuable essences, moderately influential sub-Mediterranean climate, dense and diverse transport network, easy connection to central Europe and a population well qualified, disciplined.

The development of West Region has been influenced and continues to be supported by existing natural resources in the region with various relief, including both highly fertile plains of western part in Timis and Arad Counties and hilly areas with significant mineral resources, as well as an important segment of Occidental and Meridional Carpathians, which includes one of the most important natural parks in Europe, Retezat National Park. Taking into account this rich endowment, currently we cannot speak about a full exploitation of natural resources in the West Region. In this regard, two sectors with great potential for growth are the agro-food sector and the tourism.

West Region has a remarkable tourist potential due to the presence in the region of several natural tourist resources (Karstic landforms, mountain landscapes, lakes, gorges, mineral and thermal-mineral springs, forestry fund, cynegetic fund, national parks, natural parks and reserves, dendrological parks, ski areas, speleological reserves) and anthropic tourist resources (archeological sites, historical and art monuments, architectural complexes, plastic arts and commemorative monuments, museums and collections, art galleries, ethnography and folklore, technical industrial heritage).

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, the West Region was on last place with a total population of 1,910,469 inhabitants and a density of 59.6 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, far below the national average of 89.6 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

In 2011, the population of West Region was 1,910,469 inhabitants, representing 8.94% of total population in Romania. In the last years, under the combined influence of different levels of natural growth, internal migration flows and intensity of external migration, the population of region, respectively of components counties, decreased.<sup>82</sup>

In 2011, the highest number of inhabitants from the region have Timis County (679,848 persons), followed by Hunedoara, Arad, Caras-Severin counties. Timis County is ranked 8 in the country by population.

Table 1

**Population and density in the West Region (2008 - 2011)**

| Macroregion/<br>Region | Total population |            |            |            | Density (loc./km <sup>2</sup> ) |      |      |      |
|------------------------|------------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|------|------|------|
|                        | 2008             | 2009       | 2010       | 2011       | 2008                            | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
| România                | 21,504,442       | 21,469,959 | 21,431,298 | 21,354,396 | 90.2                            | 90.1 | 89.9 | 89.6 |
| MACROREGION 4          | 4,187,651        | 4,172,265  | 4,155,550  | 4,135,577  | 68.4                            | 68.1 | 67.9 | 67.5 |
| West                   | 1,925,377        | 1,921,700  | 1,916,907  | 1,910,469  | 60.1                            | 60.0 | 59.8 | 59.6 |
| Arad                   | 457,257          | 455,952    | 454,922    | 454,073    | 59.0                            | 58.8 | 58.7 | 58.6 |
| Caras-Severin          | 325,269          | 322,941    | 320,840    | 318,616    | 38.2                            | 37.9 | 37.7 | 37.4 |
| Hunedoara              | 468,318          | 464,739    | 461,450    | 457,932    | 66.3                            | 65.8 | 65.3 | 64.8 |
| Timiș                  | 674,533          | 678,068    | 679,695    | 679,848    | 77.6                            | 78.0 | 78.2 | 78.2 |

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012

In 2011, the population of county seat in the region was: 164,208 inhabitants in Arad, 81,807 inhabitants in Resita, 65,998 inhabitants in Deva, respectively 307,561 inhabitants in Timisoara<sup>3</sup>. Arad and Timisoara municipalities are the most developed cities of the region in terms of economic, real growth poles; this is also reflected on population number. The total population of the four county seats is almost a third of the total population of West Region – 32.43%.

It appears, in the long-term, that the demographic dynamics of populations from Transylvania and Banat was always lower than in the country, a trend that was accentuated in recent years. Another explanatory factor of population decrease in recent years would be the emigration. The emigration to Hungary, Germany or other Western countries, more distant, knows a new growth, especially for the population with higher education. This loss of "gray matter" appears to raise currently bigger problems than a few years ago to leading enterprises.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study aims to analyze the tourist infrastructure both in the West Region and in Timis County; it was performed using especially a quantitative method - secondary analysis of quantitative data, analysis that is based on the data presented in the Statistical Yearbook of Romania (2012) and Statistical Yearbook of Timis County for 2010. The secondary analysis of quantitative data refers to the analysis of data collected by another researcher or institution, often from another question. The secondary analysis of data series can provide tools that researchers, often with limited funds, can use. The secondary analysis is a modern technique of archived data processing which consists in using data already collected and recorded by other people and institutions, for other purposes than those of researched subject.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

West Region has a remarkable tourist potential due to the presence in the region of several natural tourist resources (Karstic landforms, mountain landscapes, lakes, gorges, mineral and thermal-mineral springs, forestry fund, cynegetic fund, national parks, natural parks and reserves, dendrological parks, ski areas, speleological reserves) and anthropic tourist resources (archeological sites, historical and art monuments, architectural complexes, plastic arts and commemorative monuments, museums and collections, art galleries, ethnography and folklore, technical industrial heritage).

The main types and forms of tourism practiced in West Region are: traffic and transit tourism, thermal and spa tourism, leisure and recreation tourism, business tourism, cultural and historical tourism, mountain tourism, speleological tourism, sports tourism, hunting and sport fishing tourism, religious tourism, cruise tourism, ecotourism, urban tourism, cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism, rural and agro-tourism, industrial tourism, adventure tourism.

**Traffic and transit tourism** can be realized on the main roads: Mures Corridor, Timis - Cerna Corridor, Danube Gorge or Jiu Valley, through the Iron Gate of Transylvania, Crisul Alb Valley, through Banat Mountains, or through an itinerant tourism for visiting tourist attractions. In Banat Mountains, Poiana Rusca Mountains, Zarand Mountains or Metaliferi Mountains, rings of thematic tourist traffic were shaped, according to the categories of attractive tourist resources.

**Thermal and spa tourism** is a point of tourist interest with mineral and thermal springs whose curative qualities are valued through a satisfying network of spa resorts. Among them, the first place is held by Baile Herculane, as a resort with international

recognition, followed by regional and national resorts Geoagiu-Bai, Moneasa, Lipova, Buzias and local resorts as Calacea, Bogda, Calan-Bai and Vata-Bai. Geo-thermal springs could be found in Arad, exploited in the thermal pool.

**Leisure and recreation tourism** is practiced in all tourist resorts, in townships with recreation facilities, on the river banks, at the edge or in forest glades, on weekends or holidays, vacations.

**Business tourism**- The four counties from the region represent a perfect ground for Romanian and foreign businessmen, both through existing economic traditions and possibilities for exploiting the tourist potential in urban areas.

**Cultural - historical tourism** is developed due to a rich network of historical and archaeological sites, historical and architectural monuments and museums. Historical tourist attractions include: Dacian complex from Orăștiei Mountains and Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa colony; medieval fortresses of Arad, Timisoara, Deva, Soimos, Siria, Dezna, Cetatea de Colt, Jdioara Fortress; many medieval castles, among which stands out Corvin Castle - Hunedoara, Huniazilor Castle - Timisoara, the castles of Macea, Curtici, Sofronea, Mănăștur, Siria, Pancota, Conop, Savarsin, Birchiș, Mintia, Santamaria Orlea, Banloc, Ciacova; monasteries and churches of stone and/or wood with impressive age, proving even the beginning of Christianity in Romania.

**Mountain tourism** is practiced by mountain trekking, favored by the presence of mountains: Zarand, Codru Moma, Banat, Poiana Rusca, Țarcu, Godeanu-Cerna, Mehedinti, Retezat, Șureanu, Parang, Metaliferi, Vâlcan, Gaina, Bihor or depressions: Hațeg, Brad, Zarand, Petrosani, Almaj, Brebu Nou - Garana.

**Speleological tourism.** The existence of several caves in the area, with the most outstanding formations or some of them crossed by underground water, attracts a significant number of tourists.

**Sports tourism.** The mountain area is particularly favorable for practicing winter sports. The mountain resorts of Semenic, Straja and Muntele Mic are characterized by a relatively developed accommodation (more quantitative than qualitative). Important sights are the areas landscaped for winter sports in the Parang Mountains, Vâlcan and Retezat.

**Hunting and fishing tourism.** The region is known for its excellent hunting possibilities. Although the richness of quality fish in Danube River is notorious, the commercial offer of fish products is almost absent or does not satisfy the quality demands. It must be mentioned the trout offers from few trout farms in the region which often purchase the raw material from other places, because their production is deficient.

Other types of tourism, equally important which could be practiced in this area, but insufficiently exploited until now and which may constitute alternatives for the relaunch and development of disadvantaged areas, are:

**Religious tourism**, with a real potential for future development due to the numerous churches, cathedrals and monasteries in the region.**Cruise tourism** can be practiced on Danube Gorge and Middle Danube basin as well as on Bega River.

**Ecotourism** can be practiced in national parks and natural reserves: Mures Meadow Natural Park, Retezat National Park, National Park Nera Gorges - Beusnita, Caras-Semenic Gorge National Park, Domogled - Cerna Valley National Park, Satchinez Reserve etc.

**Urban tourism** is practiced in the 42 towns of the region of which 12 have the status of municipalities, which preserves a valuable architectural heritage, monuments and museums in various fields: history, archeology, art, natural science, mineralogy, ethnography, and technical, some of them also being in open air.

**Intercultural tourism** can be developed in DKMT Euroregion (Danube - Kris -

Mures - Tisa).

**Gastronomic tourism** with local specificity: Sausage Festival, Beer Festival, Wine Festival in Timisoara; Culinary Arts Festival at Nădlac etc.

**Rural tourism and agro-tourism:** the potential is represented by traditional rural farms, but also by monastic spaces and hunting chalets.

**"Ethnic groups' tourism"**. In Caras-Severin County, a great number of ethnic groups (30) coexist; there are places where the majority population belongs to other nationalities than Romanian. These communities have their own traditions and spiritual manifestations. A great opportunity could consist in attracting the former members of those communities, but not only to win them as tourist customers. An example is the Czech communities, so-called "pemi" from the Danube Gorge, population that keeps strictly the traditions and whose towns has a geographical situation and a natural environment with tourist potential, ideally for practicing especially agro-tourism or rural tourism.

**Industrial tourism** can be developed due to the numerous former industrial sites in the region where the production activity is no longer performed. They can be transformed by rigorous investment in tourist landmarks on the map of the region and especially on the map of Hunedoara and Caras-Severin Counties. These potential tourist attractions are found in many localities of the two counties with a mainly industrial past: the cities from Valea Jiului, Hunedoara, Resita, Anina etc.

**Adventure tourism** can be practiced especially in Hunedoara and Caras-Severin Counties. They have a various relief which allows the practice of a wide range of extreme sports: paragliding, hang gliding, rock climbing, all of them being practiced in Baile Herculane, Caras or Nera Gorges as well as in Retezat and Parang Mountains, rafting - where water flow allows, extreme skiing - Țarcu Mountain offers the possibility for skiers to descend steep slopes at different levels of approximately 1000 meters etc.

Regarding existing accommodation capacity in 2011, the West Region provides only 8.4% of Romania's accommodation capacity. The West Region is on the second lowest place among the regions of the country in terms of tourists arrived in the region (8.9% of the tourists who have visited Romania in 2010) and ranks sixth in terms of the number of overnights (1,682,800), although it has a great tourist potential. In a ranking of regions concerning the indices of net capacity utilization in use, the West Region ranks fourth in the country after the South-West, Southeast and Bucharest-Ilfov Regions. However, the index value in region is equal to the country. (Table 2)

The poor development of tourism in West Region is due to non-competitive tourist products, under-qualification of personnel in tourist field and to the lack of networks between companies in order to develop specific tourist products and promote the tourist activity.

The current profile of West Region confirms that it is in full development, creating within business environment an economic spirit of competition which provides favorable prospects to the development of economy on functional market.

Although the touristic offer in Timis County provides the conditions to practice different types of tourism, the tourist services are not competitive, the use of tourist accommodation being very limited.

Table 2

**The capacity and tourist accommodation activity on macroregions, development regions and counties, in 2011**

| Macroregion/<br>development<br>region/county | Accommodation capacity |  | Arrivals<br>(thousands) | Overnights<br>(thousands) | Indices of net<br>capacity<br>utilization in<br>use (%) |
|--|------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|---|
|  | Existing<br>(places)   | In use<br>(thousands places<br>- days) |                         |                           |   |
| <b>ROMANIA</b>                               | <b>278,503</b>         | <b>6,8417.3</b>                        | <b>7,031.6</b>          | <b>17,979.4</b>           | <b>26.3</b>   |
| <b>Macroregion 1</b>                         | <b>73,847</b>          | <b>2,1698.0</b>                        | <b>2,235.6</b>          | <b>5,396.2</b>            | <b>24.9</b>   |
| North-West                                   | 28,459                 | 8,830.6                                | 799.8                   | 2,084.6                   | 23.6  |
| Center                                       | 45,388                 | 12,867.4                               | 1,435.8                 | 3,311.6                   | 25.7  |
| <b>Macroregion 2</b>                         | <b>117,514</b>         | <b>20,759.7</b>                        | <b>1,831.0</b>          | <b>5,606.7</b>            | <b>27.0</b>   |
| North-East                                   | 21,927                 | 6,423.5                                | 696.2                   | 1,556.4                   | 24.2  |
| South-East                                   | 95,587                 | 14,336.2                               | 1,134.8                 | 4,050.3                   | 28.3  |
| <b>Macroregion 3</b>                         | <b>45,197</b>          | <b>14,843.9</b>                        | <b>1,898.5</b>          | <b>3,807.5</b>            | <b>25.7</b>   |
| South-Muntenia                               | 24,111                 | 7,199.8                                | 615.9                   | 1,677.9                   | 23.3  |
| București-Ilfov                              | 21,086                 | 7,644.1                                | 1,282.6                 | 2,129.6                   | 27.9  |
| <b>Macroregion 4</b>                         | <b>41,945</b>          | <b>11,115.7</b>                        | <b>1,066.5</b>          | <b>3,169.0</b>            | <b>28.5</b>   |
| South-West Oltenia                           | 18,274                 | 4,761.2                                | 426.8                   | 1,486.2                   | 31.2  |
| <b>West</b>                                  | <b>23,671</b>          | <b>6,354.5</b>                         | <b>639.7</b>            | <b>1,682.8</b>            | <b>26.5</b>   |
| Arad   | 5,182                  | 1,443.7                                | 190.4                   | 345.6                     | 23.9  |
| Caraș-Severin                                | 7,071                  | 1,583.2                                | 106.9                   | 545.7                     | 34.5  |
| Hunedoara                                    | 3,946                  | 915.5                                  | 82.0                    | 230.9                     | 25.2  |
| Timiș  | 7,472                  | 2,412.1                                | 260.4                   | 560.6                     | 23.2  |

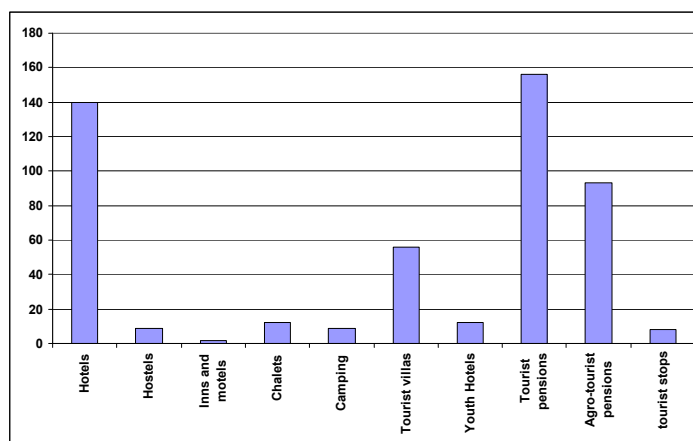
Source: Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2012

Table 3

**Tourist accommodation structures in Timis County (2007-2010)**

| Specification                                 | 2007       | 2008       | 2009       | 2010       |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>ACCOMMODATION UNITS- total, of which :</b> | <b>102</b> | <b>104</b> | <b>115</b> | <b>122</b> |
| Hotels  | 47         | 46         | 49         | 53         |
| Apartments hotels                             | -          | -          | -          | 1          |
| Hostels                                       | -          | -          | -          | 3          |
| Youth Hotels                                  | 3          | 3          | -          | -          |
| Inns and motels                               | 3          | 3          | 3          | 2          |
| Chalets                                       | -          | -          | -          | -          |
| Camping                                       | 1          | 1          | 1          | 1          |
| Tourist villas                                | 9          | 11         | 11         | 9          |
| Tourist pensions                              | 31         | 32         | 37         | 42         |
| Agro-tourist pensions                         | 4          | 4          | 5          | 7          |
| Camps for students and preschool children     | 4          | 4          | 4          | 4          |

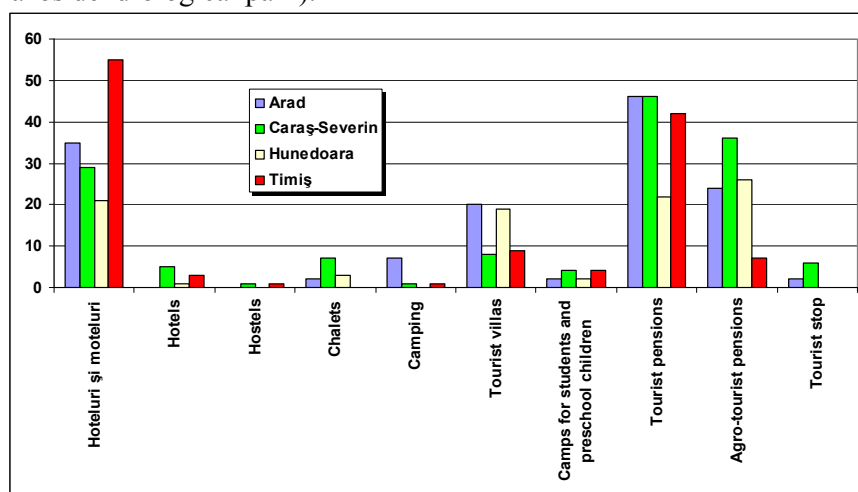
Source: Statistical Yearbook of Timis County in 2010, 2012



**Figure 1.** Establishments of tourist reception with accommodation functions, existing on July 31st, 2010 - West Region – total

Regarding accommodation capacity existing in 2010, Timis County ensures only 29.4% of total accommodation capacity, the index value of the county being lower than the regional and national one. (Table 4)

Regarding tourist offer, Timis County provides the conditions of practicing several types of tourism, even if natural and anthropic heritage is not as rich as compared to other counties of the region. So, the business tourism is practiced in urban centers, particularly in Timisoara Municipality. Spa and leisure tourism is represented by Buzias and Baile Calacea resorts. Cultural-historical tourism includes network of rich historical and archaeological sites, historical and architectural monuments, churches and museums. Timis County also shelters Mures Meadow Natural Park (with Arad County), natural reserves and monuments of nature with a large number of rare plants and animal species (Satchinez swamp, Bazos dendrological park).



**Figure 2.** Establishments of tourist reception with accommodation functions, existing on July 31th, 2010 - West Region – counties

Table 4

**Tourist accommodation capacity in Timis County (2007-2010)**

| Specification  | 2007         | 2008         | 2009         | 2010         |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Places– total</b>                                   | <b>5,724</b> | <b>6,335</b> | <b>6,550</b> | <b>6,857</b> |
| of which :   |              |              |              |              |
| Hotels   | 4,057        | 4,237        | 4,338        | 4,603        |
| Apartments hotels                                      | -            | -            | -            | 63           |
| Hostels  | -            | -            | -            | 98           |
| Youth Hotels   | 64           | 74           | -            | -            |
| Inns and motels  | 100          | 100          | 100          | 70           |
| Chalets  | -            | -            | -            | -            |
| Camping  | 260          | 260          | 260          | 260          |
| Tourist villas   | 203          | 563          | 513          | 445          |
| Urban tourist pensions                                 | 722          | 781          | 806          | 912          |
| Agro-tourist pensions                                  | 65           | 67           | 83           | 137          |
| Camps for students and preschool children              | 253          | 253          | 269          | 269          |
| Accommodation capacity in use - thousands places, days | 1,997        | 2,072        | 2,079        | 2,142        |
| Net use indices of accommodation places -%             | 32.0         | 31.6         | 25.1         | 23.6         |

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Timis County in 2010, 2012

## CONCLUSIONS

West Region has a remarkable tourist potential due to the presence in the region of several natural tourist resources (Karstic landforms, mountain landscapes, lakes, gorges,

mineral and thermal-mineral springs, forestry fund, cynegetic fund, national parks, natural parks and reserves, dendrological parks, ski areas, speleological reserves) and anthropic tourist resources (archeological sites, historical and art monuments, architectural complexes, plastic arts and commemorative monuments, museums and collections, art galleries, ethnography and folklore, technical industrial heritage).

Regarding existing accommodation capacity in 2011, the West Region provides only 8.4% of Romania's accommodation capacity. The West Region is on the second lowest place among the regions of the country in terms of tourists number arrived in the region (8.9% of the tourists who have visited Romania in 2010) and ranks sixth in terms of the number of overnights (1,682,800), although it has a great tourist potential.

Although the tourist offer in Timis County provides the conditions to practice different types of tourism, the tourist services are not competitive, the use of tourist accommodation being very limited. Regarding accommodation capacity existing in 2010, Timis County ensures only 29.4% of total accommodation capacity, the index value of the county being lower than the regional and national ones.

The tourism is an important economic activity with a fast evolution and social, cultural and environmental implications. The crucial role that tourism plays in generating prosperity and jobs, its constantly growing importance as well as its impact on other policy fields - from regional policy, diversification of rural economies, maritime policy, employment, sustainability and competitiveness to social policy and inclusion (tourism for all) - are widely recognized throughout the European Union. (Eurostat regional yearbook 2010, Eurostat 2010, p. 184)

Frequently, tourism is perceived as a tool to support local and regional development, the restructuring of economic activities, especially for the less developed areas as well as for rural areas.

The strategies for tourism development must be combined with different policies in the social field (quality of trained human resources, criminality), economic fields (road quality, accessibility) but also the protection of natural and anthropic resources.

Tourism represents a vast field, mostly with complex problems so, it is necessary to be presented for each county of the West Region the main areas with tourist potential and the various issues affecting the smooth operation of this economic field with major importance, namely the tourism.

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