

## STUDY REGARDING THE SITUATION OF LODGING STRUCTURES IN BĂILE HERCULANE, CARAS-SEVERIN COUNTY

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**Abstract:** Băile Herculane is the oldest tourist resort in the country and also among the most important and visited permanent spa resorts in Romania and Eastern Europe. Thanks to the healing waters, the large number of tourists and visitors, recent investments as well as the picturesque natural setting, the resort is experiencing a revival, many hotels, guesthouses and tourist villas are being built, and the private sector is developing strongly, especially the trade sector and services. The diversification of accommodation types in recent years (small hotels, boarding houses, etc.) did not, however, mean a diversification of demand and an increase in the number of Romanian and foreign tourists, aspects already signaled before the manifestation of the crisis due to the pandemic.

**Key words:** Băile Herculane, lodging structures, accommodation capacity, evolution

### INTRODUCTION

A reputation such as that of the Băile Herculane can only be acquired through an undeniable historical, cultural and natural heritage. Thus, the two-millennium history of the resort begins with its first documentary attestation in the year 153 CE, attestation recorded on a votive tablet discovered in the archaeological sites opened in the middle of the 19th century in the area of the town.[13]

The balneo-climatic resort Băile Herculane is part of Caraș-Severin county, being located in the South-West part of Romania, 8 km away from the border with Mehedinți county and only 25 km from the border with Serbia, the resort is located in Valea Cernei. In the Eastern part of the resort are the Mehedinți Mountains, and in the West, the Cernei Mountains.[5,11]

Băile Herculane is part of the Valea Cernei National Park, the second largest in the country and the only one that includes a hydrographic basin as an ecological sea. The altitude at which the resort is located is 168 meters, here one breathes ionized air similar to that at a height of 3000 meters.[10,12]



**Figura 1. Location of Băile Herculane within the county, the country and satellite view**

Source: <https://earth.google.com/> [15]

In the spring of 1887, Empress Elizabeth (Sisi) came to Herculaneum. He would spend a six-week stay in this location, benefiting from the mild spring climate, with sub-Mediterranean influences and a rich negative air ionization, as well as from the resort's famous thermal waters.[14]

Sissi was among the most important European personalities in love with Banat. The leading place goes to Empress Elizabeth of Austria, better known as Sissi. Franz Josef's wife was fascinated by the beauty and grandeur of the Herculaneum Baths, which she visited repeatedly. Returning to the reality of our days, the historian Mircea Rusnac believes that the empress should become a real emblem of this area, which would greatly help the development of tourism. [2,4]

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve this study, we used various methods of analysis. In order to better highlight the accommodation structures in Baile Herculane, I studied numerous monographs, studies carried out in this area and consulted the national statistics. The authorities in the area were also of great help, providing us with various current data and presenting the situation in the analyzed area very well. [1,6,7]

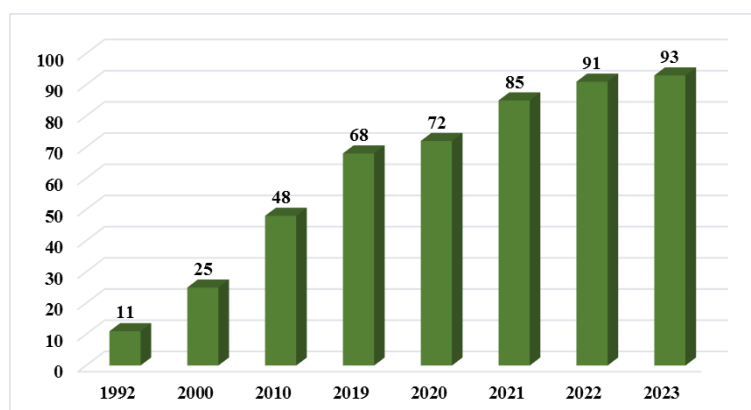
Following the in-depth documentation, we managed to centralize a series of data, to present the evolution of the structures in the area in graphic form and at the end we extracted the most important conclusions.[8,9]

### RESEARCH RESULTS

Tourists who choose to stay in Baile Herculane can find a variety of lodging options, from modern hotels to traditional guesthouses, private villas, rest stops, agro-tourism guesthouses and others. [3]

Many lodging units are located near the tourist attractions of the resort, such as the Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park, the Danube Boilers, the public thermal baths and the famous statue of Hercules or the Outlaws' Cave. Due to the resort's position in a picturesque natural setting, many tourists opt for lodging that offers easy access to the trails.[12]

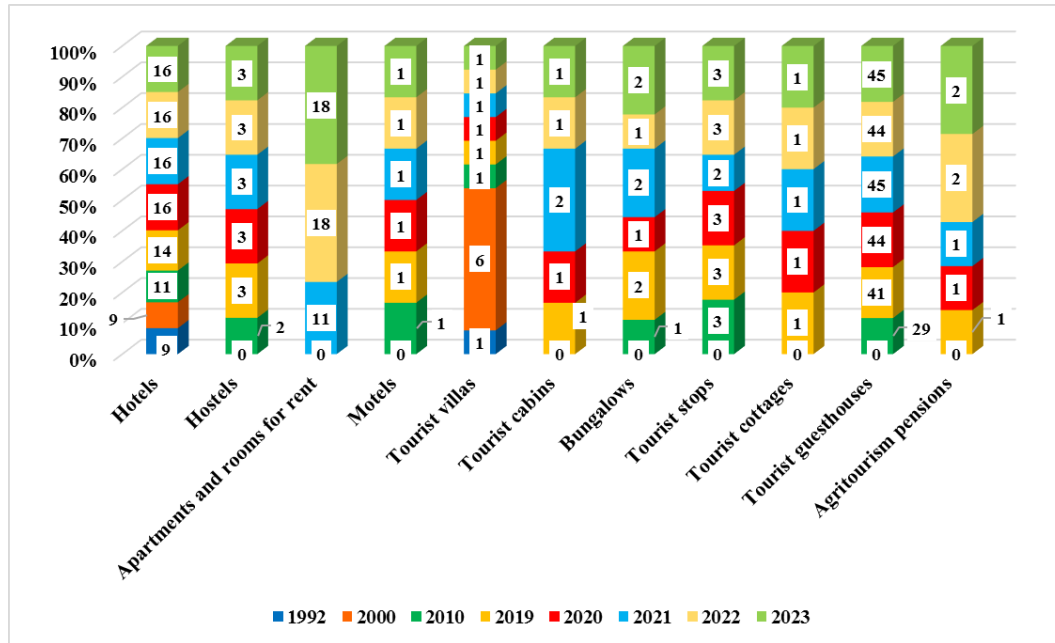
Next, the evolution of lodging structures in the analyzed area in the period 1992-2023 is presented. From the figure below, it can be seen that in the analyzed years the total number of structures registered a significant increase. (Figure 2.) [9]



**Figure 2. The total evolution of lodging structures (number)**

*Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]*

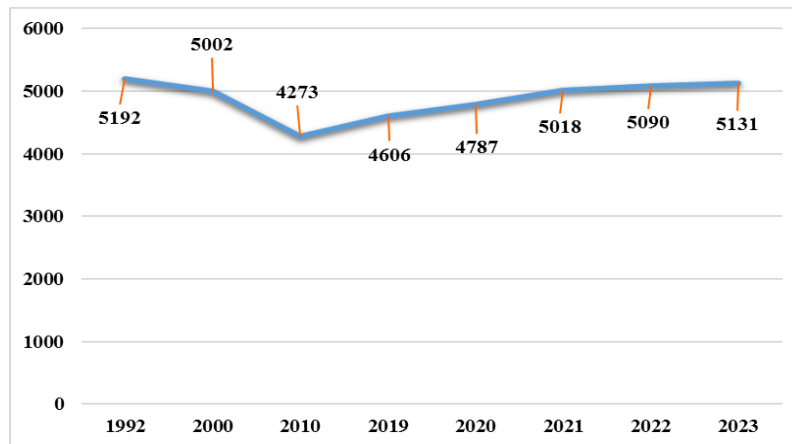
In Figure 3, the reception structures with lodging function are presented by category. The most significant increases can be seen in hotels, apartments and rooms for rent, tourist guesthouses and agro-tourism guesthouses. [7]



**Figure 3. Tourist reception structures with lodging function between 1992-2023**

Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]

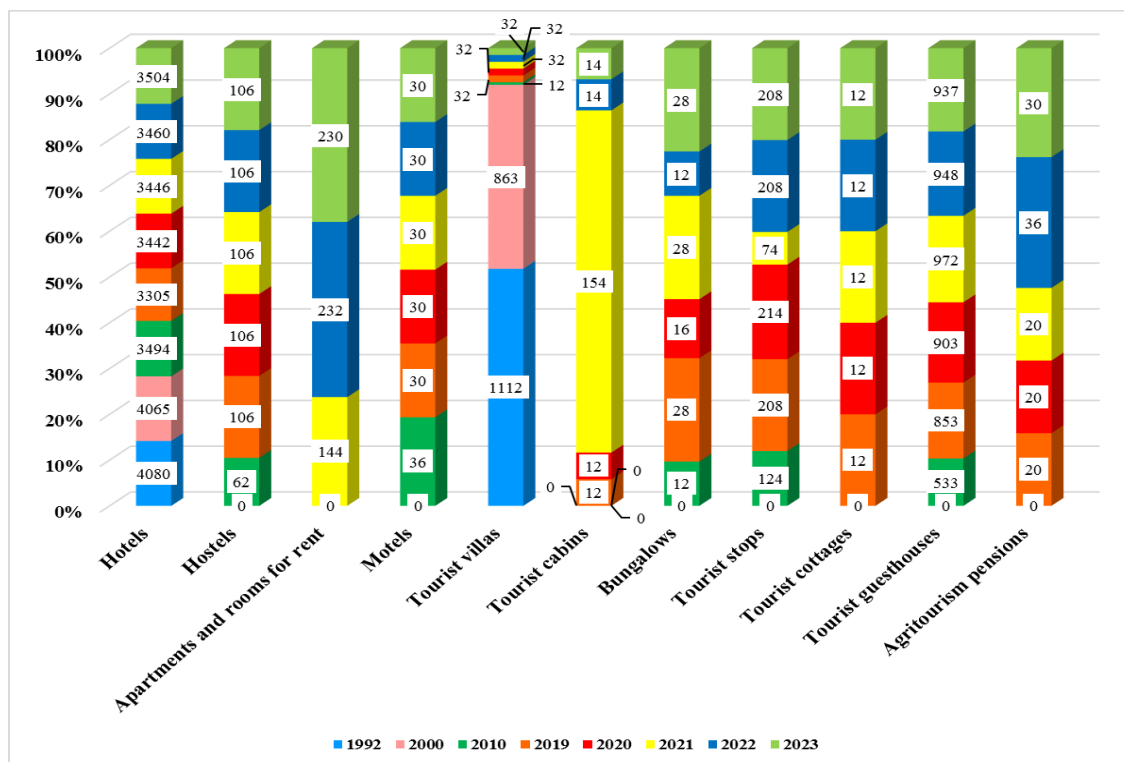
Regarding the lodging capacity in the area, in Figure 4 it can be seen that in 2010 the fewest lodging places were registered. After this period, the lodging capacity slowly began to grow, reaching 5131 places in 2023.[9]



**Figure 4. The total evolution of the existing tourist lodging capacity (places)**

Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]

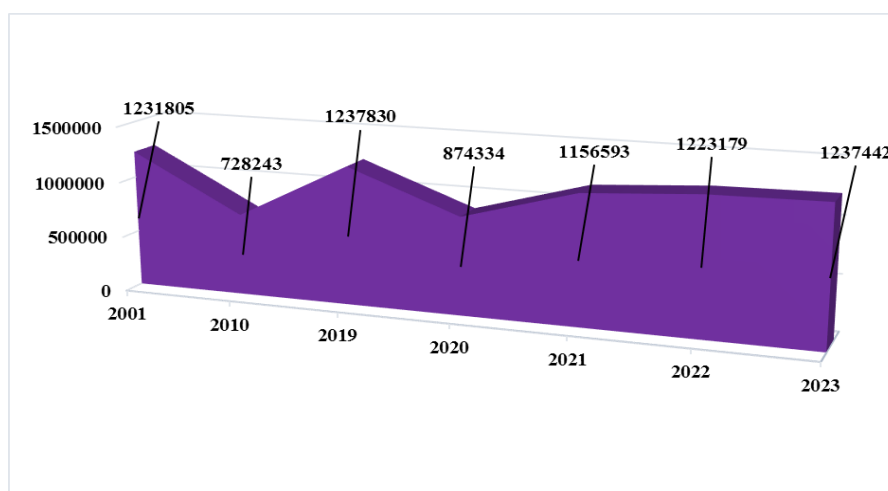
In Figure 5, aspects of the lodging capacity of the main existing structures in the area are highlighted. In the hotel category, a decrease of 14.11% was recorded from 1992 until now. The most significant decrease in lodging capacity in the analyzed years can be seen in tourist villas, tourist cabins. In the categories of tourist guesthouses and agri-tourism guesthouses, the lodging capacity registers smaller decreases. [13]



**Figure 5. Tourist lodging capacity by types of reception structures (1992-2023, places)**

Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]

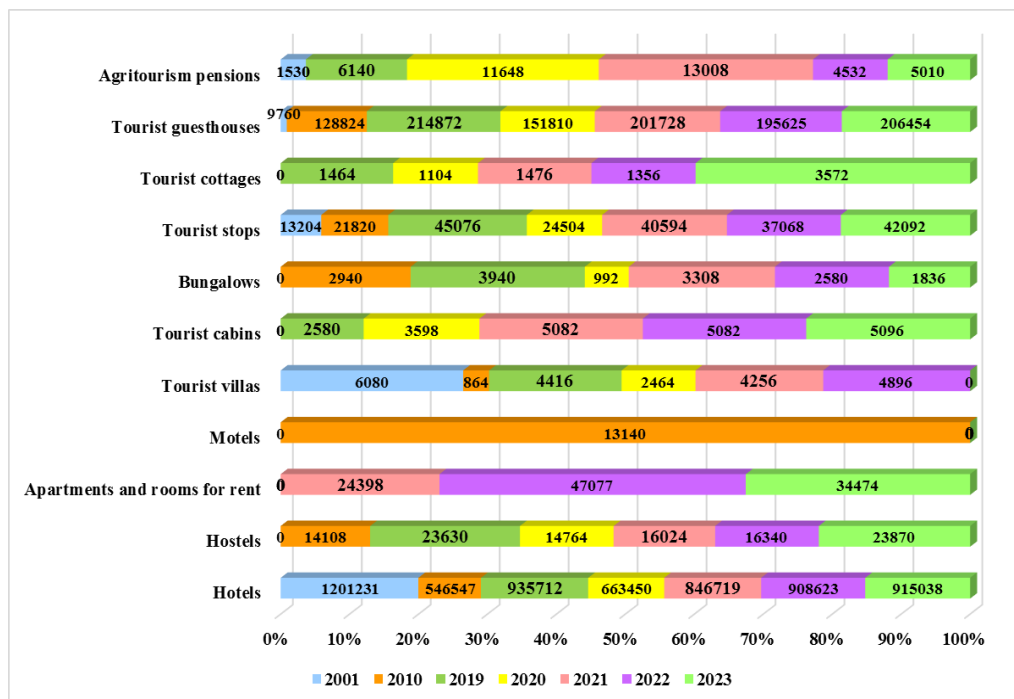
Some aspects related to the total lodging capacity of the structures in operation (number of places per day) are highlighted in the figure below. The lowest values were recorded in 2010 and 2020, due to the pandemic crisis. After the pandemic period, the values registered visible increases annually.



**Figura 6. Tourist lodging capacity in operation, total (Number of places-days, 2001-2023)**

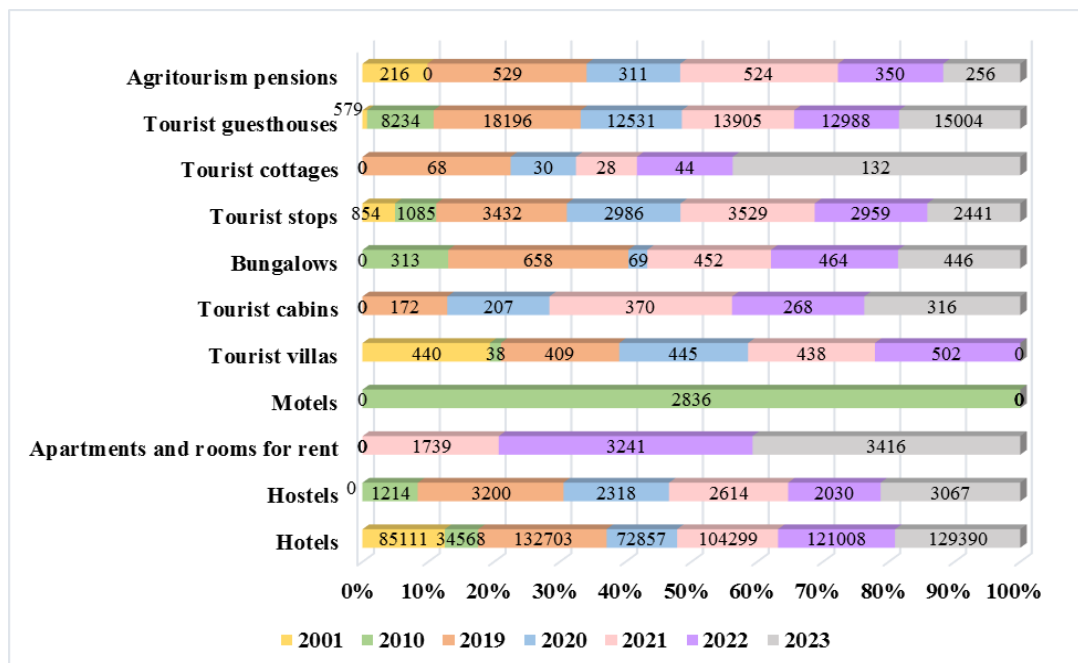
Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]

The variation of the lodging capacity at the main structures are analyzed (number of places-days), is centralized in the following graph. Following the data presented, it can be observed that, in most of the analyzed structures, this indicator registered a visible increase. [9]



**Figure 7. Lodging capacity by types of tourist reception structures - evolution (Number of places-days, 2001-2023)**

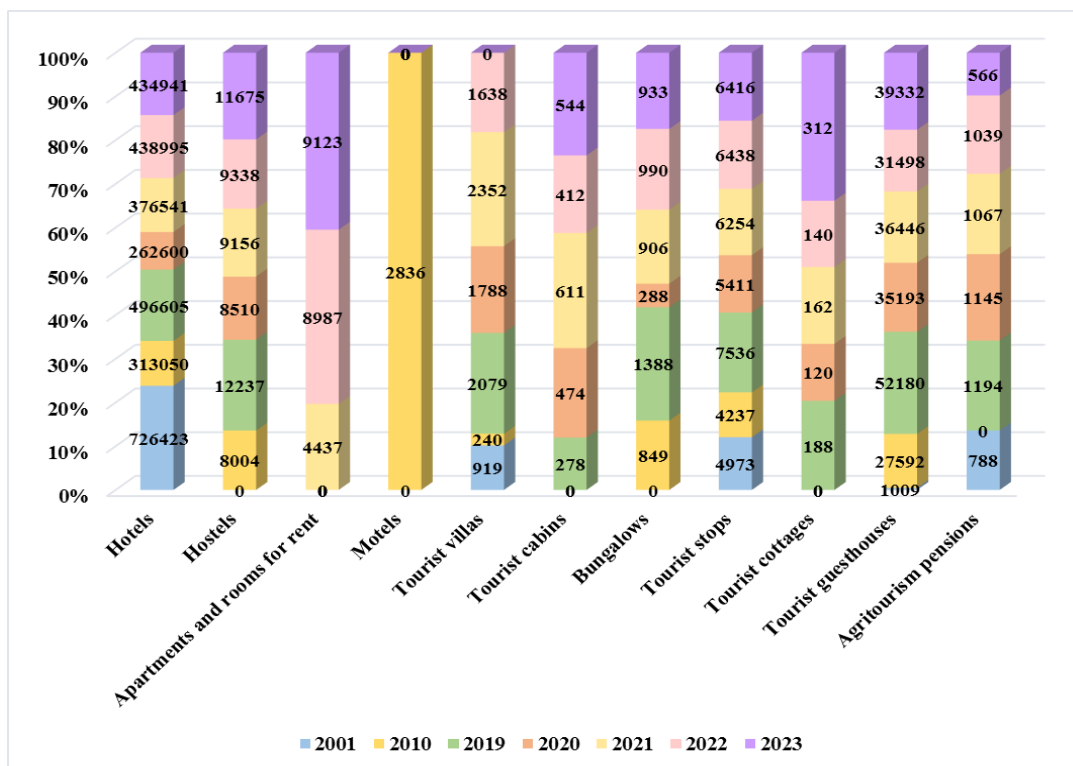
Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]



**Figure 8. Arrivals of tourists in the main tourist reception structures**

Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]

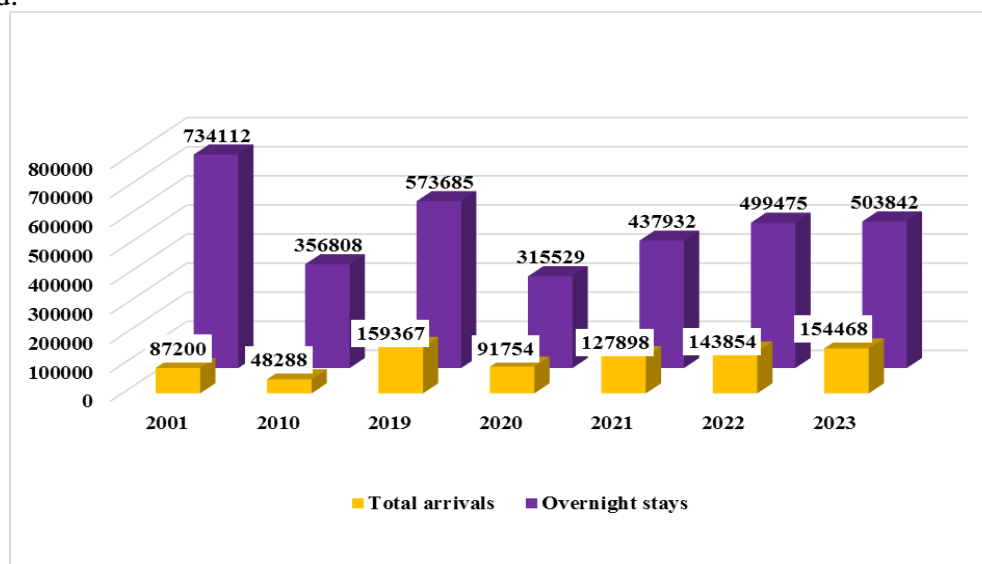
Figure 8 highlights the variation of tourist arrivals in the period 2001-2023, in the analyzed reception structures. Apart from the pandemic period, the recorded arrivals had a positive evolution.



**Figure 9. Overnight stays in the main tourist reception structures**

Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]

In relation to the situation of overnight stays highlighted in Figure 9., we can say the same thing, namely, that only during the pandemic there were decreases in the number of overnight stays. The trend being upward for this indicator in most of the structures studied.



**Figure 10. The total evolution of arrivals and overnight stays**

Source: Processing by authors according to INSSE [9]

The total situation of arrivals and overnight stays in the analyzed area is presented in Figure 10. The fewest arrivals are recorded in 2010, even less than in 2020, when there was a pandemic crisis. After 2020, the total number of arrivals in the area increased considerably until 2023. [9]

Regarding the total number of overnight stays, it can be seen in the graph that the most were registered in 2001, and the lowest number of overnight stays was in 2020. After this year, the total number of overnight stays had a positive evolution.

## CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, through the efforts of local authorities and some entrepreneurs, important funding was attracted for the restoration of the urban infrastructure and the rehabilitation of some historical, public and private ruins. In addition, new guesthouses and villas were built.

The town was transformed in the 1970s and 1980s from a medium-scale tourist and treatment town into a large-scale tourism project with over 5,000 beds. Today they are trying to make this base economically viable by maintaining and adapting it to the new trends of the international tourism market.

The development of the resort from the point of view of tourism connections must be thought of at the regional level, not only in the context of the county.

For the development of a competitive tourism sector, medical and hospitality services are needed, able to continuously attract tourists and investments. The participation of the tourism business community in actions to protect built heritage and environmental factors is another important aspect.

Cooperation between the tourism sector and the local community to obtain mutual benefits by creating jobs especially for young people should be considered.

The strong points of the resort are a favorable regional positioning, connectivity and accessibility by all means of transport, bioclimate and valuable, unpolluted natural environment, the existence of renewable resources (wood, wind, solar) that can be used within a local heating system, specific infrastructure for tourism, spa structures, thermal tourism, spa, sports in nature, free time, the presence of valuable thermal waters with curative properties, etc., all these aspects are an asset for this area for the development of tourism.

Some of the more unpleasant aspects of the studied area and which have a negative impact on tourism refer to the insufficient capitalization of local resources, the lack of qualified personnel in spa tourism, food and accommodation, the lack of a tourism marketing strategy and the use of IT technology in marketing, short tourist season, lack of evening activities/entertainment.

An opportunity in the development of tourism would be the promotion of high-performance tourist products throughout the whole year (4 seasons), the revitalization of mountain sports, the implementation of an attractive system of licenses in tourism. These and other aspects would bring a plus to the resort by attracting investments and more tourists.

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