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RURAL TOURISM IN DOBRUDGEA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

ABSTRACT

In the context in which the European states have shown an increasing interest in the positive role that rural tourism can play in their economies through the diversification of the economic activities, job creation, improvement of infrastructure and services for a better life quality in the rural areas, the paper attempts to make an analysis concerning promotion and stimulation of tourism activities, as part of rural development in Dobrudgea, from the European integration perspective.

Located in the South-Eastern part of Romania, Dobrudgea is a well individualized territory from the geographic point of view, limited by the Black Sea to the east, by the Danube to the west and north and by the border with Bulgaria to the south; it consists of two counties from the administrative point of view: Tulcea and Constanța. Taking into consideration the geographic position, as well as the cultural-historical profile, this region can easily develop many types and forms of tourism, namely: summer tourism, business tourism, cultural-historical tourism, religious tourism, rural tourism, agro-tourism and ecotourism.

The promotion and stimulation of tourism activities in the rural area is both a present and future option, as part of rural development in Dobrudgea, from the perspective of European integration. The methodology used is based on the quantitative data analysis regarding the main indicators of the tourism activity in the rural area. The statistical data were completed with other information from articles and studies published in specialty journals as well as in the Government documents.

Following the analysis, it results that there is a great number of opportunities provided to rural entrepreneurs by Dobrudgea's tourism potential, yet these are not sufficiently valorized.

Key words: European integration, rural development, rural tourism, Dobrudgea.

JEL Classification: Q01, R10, L83.

1. INTRODUCTION

The diversification of the rural economy through fostering tourism activities in the rural space is an essential component of the European rural development policy and it represents an important factor both for the relaunching and development of the rural communities and for the diversification of the tourism supply at national level. Acting in the direction of introducing the natural, historical

and cultural patrimony in the economic circuit, rural tourism stimulates the development of activities in other branches, creating new jobs and generating alternative incomes through the diversification of activities; thus it contributes directly and/or indirectly to economic growth in certain localities, zones and regions and implicitly to the growth of population incomes.

The Romanian effort to develop and promote tourism in the rural area is also complemented by the support from the European funds starting with the year 2000, according to the rural development priorities and directions of the National Rural Development Plan (NRDP), established in close connection with the community priorities according to the analysis of the socio-economic and environmental situation, obtained on the basis of available statistical data.

In this context, the paper contains an analysis of the statistical data following the implementation of measures that foster the promotion and development of tourism activities in the rural communities from Dobrugea.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Located in the south-eastern part of Romania, between the Black Sea to the east, the Danube to the west and north, and the border with Bulgaria to the south, Dobrugea's territory is a historical and geographic province that exceeds Romania's present boundaries. From the administrative point of view, in Romania it covers an area of 15,570 km², divided between two counties: Constanța (7,071 km²) and Tulcea (8,499 km²), included in the South-East development region of Romania; it has 17 urban settlements (4 municipalities and 13 towns), 104 communes and 322 villages with a population of 884,406 inhabitants on January 1, 2016 (4).

Constanța county is the most urbanized county from Romania, marked by the presence of three municipalities (Constanța, Medgidia, Mangalia), eight towns (Cernavoda, Eforie, Hârșova, Murfatlar, Năvodari, Negru Vodă, Ovidiu, Techirghiol) and by the entire network of tourist resorts on the Black Sea shore (Năvodari, Mamaia, Constanța, Agigea, Eforie Nord and Sud, Costinești, Olimp, Neptun, Jupiter, Cap Aurora, Venus, Saturn, Mangalia, 2 Mai, Vama Vache).

In Tulcea county, 40.54% of its area (i.e. 3446 km²) is covered by the newest relief unit, represented by the Danube Delta and the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe, with limited dwelling possibilities; this relief unit, at present, has a triple international status: Biosphere Reservation, Ramsar site (wetland of international importance) and World Natural and Cultural Heritage site.

The ethnic structure of the two counties includes: Romanians and Macedo-Romanians (over 90%), Turks (over 3%), Tatars (over 3%), Roma people (under 1%), Lipovans (under 1%), Hungarians (under 0.5%) and other nationalities (under 0.5%). As a result, the religious structure includes: Orthodox (over 90%), Muslims (over 6%), Roman Catholics (under 1%), Old-Rite Christians (under 0.5%), Pentecostals (under 0.5%), Adventists (under 0.5%), other religions (under 0.5%).

Another important characteristic is represented by the harmonious blending of the old and new, of tradition and modernity. This complementarity makes Dobrugea more attractive to tourists and gives them the possibility to know and understand the history and tradition of the places they visit.

Dobrugea's territory represents a true reason for a travel in space, time and spirituality, where nature, history, creed and traditions are intermingled into a unique picture. The Dobrugean tourism is dominated by mass tourism, with great potential for summer tourism, balneary tourism, recreational and leisure tourism, sports and nautical tourism, scientific and business tourism, cultural and historical tourism, cruise tourism, eco-tourism, rural tourism and agro-tourism. The main tourist attractions in Dobrugea are the Black Sea Coast, the Danube Delta and the Măcin Mountains National Park.

After the year 2000, the number of all categories of rural tourism accommodation structures from Dobrugea grew as a consequence of Romania's EU membership and of using non-refundable financing for the tourism sector development. The European pre-accession program 2000–2006 provided Community financial support through SAPARD fund (created for the pre-accession program for agriculture and rural development, the acronym for "Special Pre-Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development"). The European post-accession programs 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 continued to provide Community financial support through EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development).

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This paper contains an analysis and synthesis of the information on the promotion and stimulation of tourism activities as part of rural sustainable development in Dobrugea's countryside, from the European integration perspective. The methodology comprised the statistical analysis of primary data using Excel quantitative analysis program as working tool. The statistical data on which the analysis was based were national data and data for two counties: Tulcea and Constanța, which covered the period 2000–2018 and had the following sources: i) statistical data from the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) available online – www.tempo-online; ii) the web sites of the Sud-Est Regional Development Agencies; iii) other official sources.

The paper also contains a brief characterization of the natural and anthropic potential from Dobrugea, followed by the analysis of the main indicators of the rural tourism activity: tourist reception structure with accommodation functions, tourist existing accommodation capacity, tourist existing accommodation capacity in operation, tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the rural localities with tourism activity and a brief characterization of the four rural settlements with the greatest tourism potential in Dobrugea.

On the basis of these synthetic indicators of the rural tourism activity we calculated: a) net utilization index of the tourist accommodation capacity in operation, according to the formula: $I_n = (N/C_f) \times 100$, where: I_n is the net utilization index of the tourist accommodation capacity in operation; N is the number of overnight stays in a certain period; C_f is the tourist accommodation capacity in operation; b) average length of stay, according to formula: $DM = (N_{in}/N_s)$, where: N_{in} is the number of overnight stays, and N_s is the number of tourist arrivals in a certain period. On this basis we shall briefly outline the rural tourism trends in the two counties and the main factors that have determined the respective evolutions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. THE TOURISM POTENTIAL IN DOBRUDGEA

Dobrugea's tourism vocation is equally conferred by its geographic position, characterized by a beautiful and diverse landscape, as well as by the cultural-historical profile of the region, with rich and various archaeological remains and historical monuments.

Natural potential in the region. In Dobrugea, the natural tourism resource is determined by:

– The Romanian Black Sea Coast, with its specific tourism potential represented by the entire network of tourist resorts;

– The Danube Delta and the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe with a great diversity of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, with true opportunities for ecotourism activity;

– The Măcin Mountains, located in the north-western part of Tulcea county, are a special and unique territory from Europe, with protected ecosystem characteristics for the Pontic-Balkan steppe, the SubMediterranean and Balkan forests, within the Hercinic mountains, the oldest mountains in Romania and among the first formed on the European Continent.

Anthropic potential of the region. The Dobrugean tourism patrimony is enriched by the numerous monuments and archaeological sites, of architectural ensembles and reserves, of memorial monuments and ensembles, of technical and art monuments, of museums and other elements of folk art located both in the urban and rural areas.

The monuments and archaeological sites of ancient times can be known by visiting the remains of human settlements established by the pre-historical, Geto-Dacian, Greek and Roman civilizations existing on the territory of Constanța and Tulcea counties.

The religious tourism objectives include worship places and cemeteries belonging to several religions and represent attractiveness elements by the

significance of feasts (titular saints), age of settlements and architectural style, location. The new worship places were added to the old monasteries and churches with important religious significance in Constanța county and Tulcea county.

In the southern part of Dobrudgea, in Constanta county, where Turkish and Tatar communities are living, there is a large number of mosques and Muslim places of worship, while in Tulcea County there is a smaller number of Muslim worship places.

Dobrudgea is one of the most multicultural parts of Romania, with a rich diversity of languages, religions and customs. The many ethnical communities created an original material and spiritual culture, where we can notice the traditional houses from reed and earth from the Danube Delta.

Of great importance for cultural tourism, we can mention the archaeology museums (Adamclisi, Histria), art museums (Limanu, Topalu), ethnographic museums (Enisala), scientific and technical museums, memorial houses (Panait Cerna, in Tulcea county). The hydro constructions (bridges, lighthouses on the Danube and the Black Sea) stand out in the areas where they are located.

4.2. THE MAIN INDICATORS OF THE RURAL TOURISM ACTIVITY IN DOBRUDGEA

In this chapter, we shall investigate the main indicators of tourist circulation in the rural area from Tulcea county and Constanța county in the period 2000–2018; on this basis, we shall briefly outline the rural tourism trends in the two counties and the main factors that have determined the respective evolutions.

In Tulcea county, the Danube Delta was and remains an important tourism objective, both for internal and foreign tourism. Five rural localities with tourism activity are located in the Danube Delta (Sfântu Gheorghe, C.A. Rosetti, Chilia Veche, Crișan and Maliuc), and the access to them is by the three Danube Arms: Chilia, Sulina and Sfântu Gheorghe. The other rural localities with tourism activity lie in the limitrophe area of the Danube Delta, with access by modernized county roads (Table 1).

Constanța county has 12 rural localities registered in the statistical database, out of which six localities (Limanu with the villages 2 Mai and Vama Veche, 23 August, Costinești, Tuzla, Agigea, Corbu) are located in the proximity of the Black Sea shore, near the tourism resorts with proper accommodation, leisure and treatment infrastructure; other four localities are located on the right bank of the Danube River (Oltina, Saligny, Seimeni, Horia), and other two (Valu lui Traian and Mihail Kogălniceanu) lie at 16 km and 27 km respectively from Constanța municipality (Table 1).

Each rural locality represents an entity with personal particularities and specific activities, which have to be identified and valued as efficiently as possible, also from tourism point of view.

Table 1

List of rural localities statistically monitored from tourism activity point of view

Crt. no.	Tulcea county	Constanța county
1	Baia	23 August
2	Bestepe	Agigea
3	C.A. Rosetti	Corbu
4	Chilia Veche	Costinești
5	Crișan	Horia
6	Jurilovca	Limanu
7	Mahmudia	Mihail Kogalniceanu
8	Maliuc	Oltina
9	Murighiol	Saligny
10	Nufăru	Seimeni
11	Sfântu Gheorghe	Tuzla
12	Somova	Valu Traian
13	Valea Nucarilor	–

Source: Tempo-online database, 2018, <http://www.insse.ro/>

Out of the existing indicators, we selected the following for the rural localities with tourism activity from Tulcea and Constanța counties: tourist reception structure with accommodation functions, tourist existing accommodation capacity, tourist existing accommodation capacity in use, tourist arrivals and overnight stays (beds).

The rural tourism accommodation structures represent the most important component of the specific technical-material base, as they respond to one of the fundamental needs of tourists, i.e. rest and lodging.

In the investigated period, from the total tourism accommodation structures in Tulcea county, the share of rural tourism units in total ranged from 72% to 87%, while in Constanța county the share of rural tourism units in total ranged from 6% to 9%. A first finding reveals that the rural tourism accommodation structures are characteristic for Tulcea county as against Constanța county, where the urban tourism accommodation structures have a large number.

The main types of establishments with accommodation functions, in which the tourism activity of the rural settlements has developed, are the following: hotels, tourism villas and agro-tourism boarding houses (Table 2). The number, comfort level and their facilities have fluctuated from year to year and from one locality to other.

Table 2

The distribution of the rural tourism establishments with accommodation functions
in the rural settlements from Dobrugea, in the period 2000–2018

No.	Type of establishments	Constanța county	Tulcea county
1	Hotels	23 August, Costinești, Limanu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Seimeni	Beștepe, Crișan, Mahmudia, Maliuc, Murighiol, Somova, Valea Nucarilor
2	Motels	Saligny	Murighiol
3	Hostels	Costinești, Limanu, Saligny	–
4	Tourist inns	–	Valea Nucarilor
5	Tourist villas	Agigea, Costinești, Limanu, Tuzla	Jurilovca, Murighiol, Sfântu Gheorghe, Somova
6	Bungalows	Costinești	–
7	Tourist chalets	Limanu	Jurilovca
8	Holiday villages	–	Nufăru
9	Camping sites	Limanu	Sfântu Gheorghe
10	School and pre-school camps	Limanu	–
11	Tourist halting places	Limanu	Maliuc
12	Tourist cottages	Costinești	Jurilovca
13	Tourist boarding houses	Costinești	Valea Nucarilor
14	Agro-tourist boarding houses	Costinești	Baia, C. A. Rosetti, Chilia Veche, Crișan, Jurilovca, Mahmudia, Maliuc, Murighiol, Nufăru
15	Ship accommodation places		Maliuc, Valea Nucarilor

Source: Tempo-online database, 2019, <http://www.insse.ro/>

In Tulcea county, the evolution of the main indicators for the rural tourism activity (Table 3) reveals that:

- the number of tourist accommodation structures increased from 66 units in 2000 to 261 units in 2013;
- the existing rural tourism accommodation capacity increased from 1085 beds in 2000 to 5229 beds in 2018;
- the accommodation capacity in use (number of beds-day) fluctuated from year to year, best years being 2008 and 2018;
- the number of tourist arrivals in the rural tourism reception structures had a fluctuating trend;
- it also results a modest evolution of the number of tourists who stayed overnight in the rural tourism accommodation structures, which shows that the promotion and quality of the rural tourism product has not received sufficient attention;
- the net use index of accommodation capacity and the average length of stay in the rural accommodation structures had an oscillating evolution in the investigated period.

The decrease in the rural tourism activity, not only in the year 2011, can be explained by the effects of the legislative changes in the accreditation of the tourist accommodation structures. The low value of synthetic indicators of the rural tourism activity also indicates other causes, such as: low accessibility to certain tourism areas, poor quality of services provided in certain tourism areas, unequal modernization of existing infrastructure, poor promotion of existing rural tourism potential.

Table 3

Evolution of the main indicators of the rural tourism activity
in the rural areas of Tulcea county

Years	Structures	Tourism accommodation capacity		Tourism accommodation activity			
	Number	existing no. places	in use no. places-days	arrivals no.	beds no.	Net use index	Average length of stay
2000	66	1085	:	:	:	:	:
2001	69	1117	107242	10487	19322	18.0	1.8
2002	67	1082	109465	8632	17535	16.0	2.0
2003	83	1507	91082	10903	17611	19.3	1.6
2004	105	1747	151069	21242	36995	24.5	1.7
2005	96	2173	121081	22914	45180	37.3	2.0
2006	115	2480	196230	15788	35084	17.9	2.2
2007	74	1708	185490	19119	38497	20.8	2.0
2008	79	2285	255518	37346	74145	29.0	2.0
2009	119	3320	197714	22488	47514	24.0	2.1
2010	110	3120	194947	20997	40739	20.9	1.9
2011	96	2307	213453	22879	48750	22.8	2.1
2012	112	3015	191856	19229	41859	21.8	2.2
2013	109	2482	207942	22937	68839	33.1	3.0
2014	115	1699	98888	17781	39584	40.0	2.2
2015	118	2348	100598	18595	44907	44.6	2.4
2016	116	2082	150179	25060	69827	46.5	2.8
2017	105	2288	199453	31284	75854	38.0	2.4
2018	261	5229	578879	75421	190670	32.9	2.5

Source: Tempo-online database, 2019, <http://www.insse.ro/>

In Constanța county, the evolution of the main indicators of the rural tourism activity (Table 4) reveals that:

– the number of tourist accommodation structures increased from 134 units in 2000 to 166 units in 2013, with a good period between 2005–2010 when the number of tourism structures exceeded 200;

– the existing rural tourism accommodation capacity fluctuated from year to year from 5969 in 2011 to 8290 in 2010;

– the accommodation capacity in use (number of beds-day) fluctuated from year to year;

- the number of tourist arrivals in the rural tourism reception structures also had a fluctuating trend;
- the number of tourists who stayed overnight in the rural tourism accommodation structures had quite a modest evolution;
- the net use index of accommodation capacity and the average length of stay in the rural accommodation structures had an oscillating evolution in the investigated period.

The decrease manifested in the rural tourism activity is explained by legislative changes in the accreditation of the tourist accommodation structures, poor quality of services provided in certain tourism areas, unequal modernization of existing infrastructure, poor promotion of existing rural tourism potential.

Table 4

Evolution of the main indicators of the rural tourism activity
in the rural areas of Constanța county

Years	Structures	Tourism accommodation capacity		Tourism accommodation activity			
	Number	existing no. places	in use no. places-days	arrivals no.	beds no.	Net use index	Average length of stay
2000	134	7391	:	:	:	:	:
2001	137	6736	278570	22803	116977	42.0	5.1
2002	137	6377	321176	18575	91300	28.4	4.9
2003	158	7181	371705	26630	134070	36.1	5.0
2004	181	7596	380233	28415	129355	34.0	4.6
2005	203	7815	324420	23093	103236	31.8	4.5
2006	222	8093	340085	27755	107148	31.5	3.9
2007	223	8077	348014	32052	124432	35.8	3.5
2008	222	7791	372687	34869	145658	39.1	4.2
2009	224	7758	452561	42620	171294	37.8	4.0
2010	231	8290	334410	28466	103680	31.0	3.6
2011	148	5969	472332	35221	126073	26.7	3.6
2012	184	6582	526031	45589	165470	31.5	3.6
2013	181	6596	459521	37112	133572	29.1	3.6
2014	171	6249	428868	42515	155313	36.2	3.7
2015	182	7337	586135	54625	199811	34.1	3.7
2016	181	7447	551014	57801	213642	38.8	3.7
2017	176	7367	533317	62828	236892	44.4	3.8
2018	166	7694	565267	77015	272913	48.3	3.5

Source: Tempo-online database, 2019, <http://www.insse.ro/>

The Dobrudgean rural tourism in the Danube Delta or on the seashore is addressed to both Romanian and foreign tourists. The segment that mostly favours this kind of services is represented by second age people and less by senior citizens. The latter prefer the quietness of a rural boarding house, rather than the

turmoil of hotels on the Black Sea shore. We must not neglect the young people, but their share is lower, due to their preference for the hubbub of noise and excitement. The foreign tourists, who mostly ask for the rural tourism supply, are those interested to get familiar with local history and traditions, by visiting the picturesque zones, of great beauty, which preserve the old features and habits: house architecture, folklore clothes, handicrafts, food specialties.

4.3. RURAL SETTLEMENTS WITH TOURISM POTENTIAL IN DOBRUDGEA

In the tourism region Dobrudgea, tourism programs can be established for leveraging the tourism potential in the rural areas, throughout the year, with a higher frequency in the warm season for the tourists who come to the seashore. The rural settlements with tourism potential cover the largest part of Dobrudgea.

In the case of Tulcea county, 83% of the territory is represented by natural areas of high scientific and landscape value (the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, Măcin National Park, the Danube river plain) and the cultural-historical heritage (the relics alongside the Danube, Niculițel, Adamclisi, Enisala, Baia centers). Constanța county, by the balneary and cultural potential in the southern part of the Romanian coastline and the historical, cultural and religious resources from Oltina Plateau, accounts for 59% of this remarkable tourism potential.

In the literature, the rural settlements with tourism function from Dobrudgea or those with tourism function besides their basic function can be classified as follows:

- tourism rural settlements for recreation and helio-marine cure: Agigea, Corbu, Tuzla, Limanu with Vama Veche and 2 Mai, 23 August;
- eco-tourism rural settlements: Crișan, Caraorman, Mila 23, Maliuc, Murighiol, Mahmudia;
- cultural tourism rural settlements: Adamclisi, Enisala, Istria, Slava Cercheză;
- agro-tourism rural settlements: Jurilovca, Niculițel, Oltina, Ostrov, Sarichioi;
- multifunctional tourism rural settlements: Sfântu Gheorghe, Costinești.

From the point of view of tourist circulation (tourist arrivals and beds), in the investigated period, the most intense tourism activity was noticed in the localities:

- Jurilovca and Murighiol from the Danube Delta (Tulcea county);
- Costinești and Limanu with the villages 2 Mai and Vama Veche on the Black Sea shore (Constanța county).

Jurilovca commune (with the villages: Jurilovca – commune residence, Sălcioara and Vișina) has lately become the biggest fishermen community in the Danube Delta, having a Collection and Processing Center for fish caught both from the Danube and from the lakes from the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe and from those of the Black Sea. The sustained effort of the local communities has also transformed this locality into a tourist attraction point, the housing capacity and the

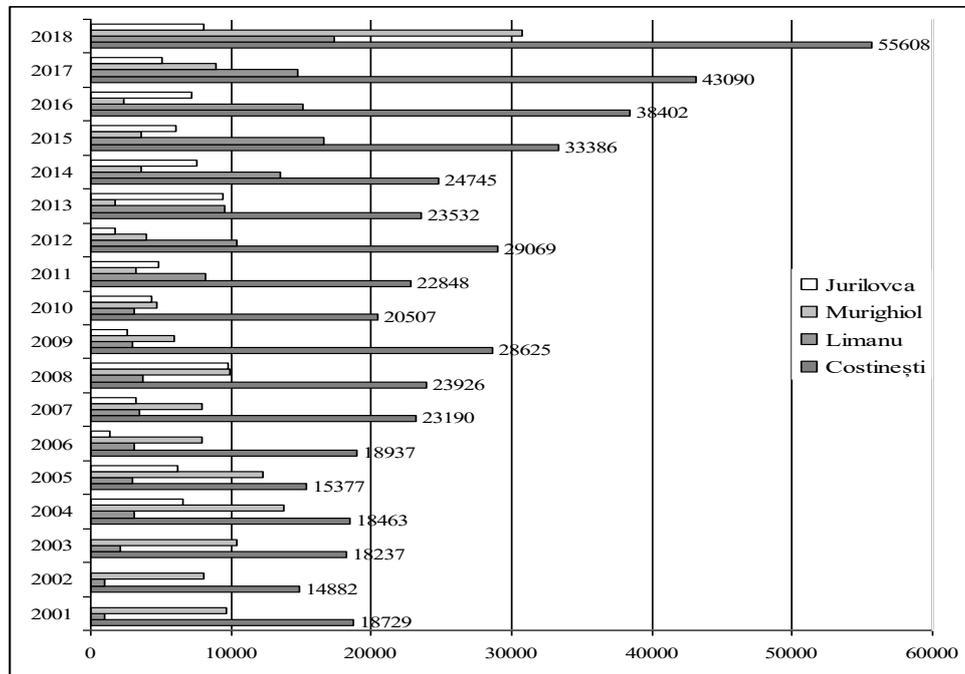
tourism activity being supported by the presence of small entrepreneurs, since 2004. The number of tourists arrived and bedded in the tourism reception structures in Jurilovca has also increased, due to the fact that from this locality you can reach by boat Gura Portiței, a vacation village located on the narrow land strip between Golovița lake and the Black Sea, while by car you can get to the ruins of the ancient Greek and Roman fortress Arganum (dating from the 7th century B.C.), partially restored.

Murighiol commune, by its housing and tourism capacity, is an attraction point accessible to tourists, as in the village proximity there is a network of canals by which you can enter the most savage and picturesque area from the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.

In *Costinești*, the tourism activity started in the 1920s, it developed with the opening of the first pioneers' camp in the year 1949 and continued, ten years later, when they opened the international students' camp (with a few hundreds of blue tents on the seashore); in the year 1966, the locality was declared youth resort. After the year 1989, Costinești was officially registered on the list of tourist resorts of national interest, as well as on the list of spa resorts attested (in the year 2004) by the General Directorate of the National Authority for Tourism within the Ministry of Transports, Constructions and Tourism, due to the beneficial climate factors and conditions for maintaining and improving people's health and/or work capacity, as well as for rest and relaxation.

Limanu commune is a locality "full of life and colour", due to the villages 2 Mai, which in summer time, becomes one of the most preferred resorts on the Romanian seashore and Vama Veche, which became a tourism brand of national importance with a unique resonance space of freedom and harmony with nature. The main attraction of the two mini-resorts is the proximity to nature, the simple free-spirited atmosphere, and the low housing fees and the convenient prices for fish-based dishes, from fresh fish from the Black Sea. In the area, there are also two other natural attractions: the huge Limanu Cave (with an area of 3400 m²), full of ramifications, it used to be inhabited for thousands of years, and the objects found here date from different historical periods, each room of the cave had a certain functionality; Hagieni Forest, a natural reserve with zoological and botanical profile, spread on 100 ha, with limestone plateaus, with steppe and bushes, a place where anyone can realize the significance of the Dobruđean biodiversity, where three of the most poisonous serpent species are living (e.g. the Dobruđean horned viper).

From Figure 1, it results a good evolution of the number of tourist arrivals in the tourism accommodation structures from Costinești, which is a holiday destination for the young people, considered a youth resort or summer festivals resort.



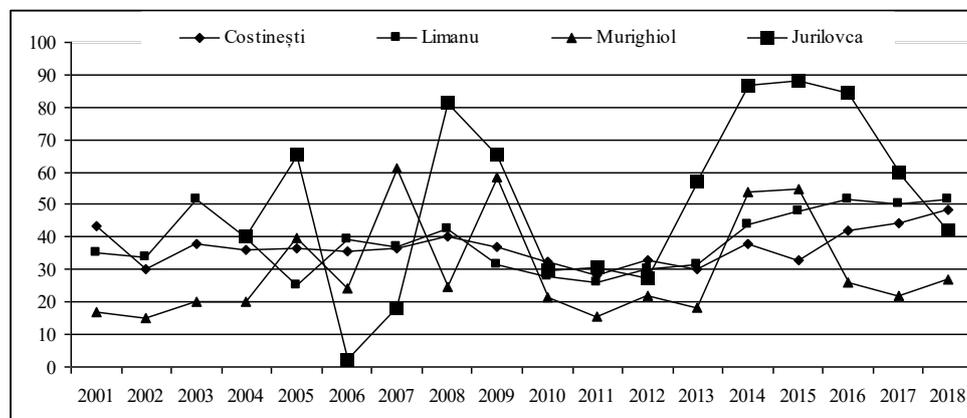
Source: Tempo-online database, 2019, <http://www.insse.ro/>

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of tourist arrivals in the rural tourism accommodation structures, in the investigated rural tourism localities, in the period 2001–2018

In Costinești, the beach is wide, the sea water is clean, and the sand is soft; the tourist accommodation structures (bungalows, villas, wood and stone cottages, discos) have been mainly designed for the young people.

The legal framework, the importance attached to rural tourism at local and national level, the development of the general and specific infrastructure are some of the conditions underpinning the evolution of the net utilization indices of the tourist accommodation capacity in use (calculated by the ratio of the number of overnight stays to the tourist accommodation capacity in use in a certain period). For the investigated localities, this index had a fluctuating trend (Fig. 2).

In Figure 2, we can notice that in Jurilovca, the development and consolidation of a positive attitude towards tourism had a different evolution. Although the period of economic crisis had a word to say, leisure tourism grew fast, mainly for recreational and sport fishing activities. In direct relation to the flow of tourists, they developed the transport on Golovița lake to the vacation village Gura Portiței, and the number of tourism circuits increased, organized for visiting the Danube Delta.



Source: Tempo-online database, 2019, <http://www.insse.ro/>

Figure 2. Evolution of the net use index of the tourist accommodation capacity, in the investigated rural localities, in the period 2001–2018

The thematic tourism for Dobrugea is complemented by the tourism routes with particular thematics, namely:

- The Macin Stories in the villages from Macin Mountains National Park (the history, fauna and flora of this part of Dobrugea);
- The circuits of Dobrugea's citadels (located on the right bank of the Danube and on the Black Sea shore);
- The circuit of churches and monasteries (located throughout Dobrugea's territory);
- Wine Road (Dobrugea is the most blessed region from Romania in this respect).

In Dobrugea you can find good conditions for growing vineyards anywhere you go, the entire region having excellent soils and climate for vine growing. Plenty of light and warm weather and little rain together with the limestone soils of Dobrugea create the necessary premises for making the best wines in Europe. The quality of wines from this region is proven by numerous golden medals won at prestigious international contests by the winemakers in this region.

An entire collection of archaeological objects and inscriptions speak of the importance of vine growing in the life of the ancient cities along the Romanian seashore of the Black Sea. Some of the main vineyards are *Murfatlar* (certainly one of the most promising in Romania), *Sarica*, *Niculițel*, *Istria*, *Babadag*. Besides the main vineyards, there are many independent small vineyards scattered all over Dobrugea region. The grapes grown here are both old native grapes and new imported grapes. The most important varieties are: Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonay, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Columna, Merlot, Muscat Ottonel, Italian Riesling, Sauvignon, Feteasca Neagra, Feteasca Regala, Aligote and Babeasca Neagra.

Murfatlar Winery, Romania's largest wine producing region, is located 10 miles west from the Black Sea coast. Over 300 days of sunshine, along with cool breezes from the sea, make this area ideal for the production of medium-dry and sweet wines, such as late harvest Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Muscat Ottonel. Red wines are also produced at Murfatlar, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir being the most popular.

Sarica Niculițel Winery, located in the northern part of Dobrudgea, near Tulcea, and surrounded by hills laden with vines, is well-known for the centuries-old winemaking tradition. The wormwood wine of Niculițel has a special local technique: three quarters of the barrel is filled with white and black grapes, on top of which wormwood flowers, quinces and apples are added, after which wine or must is poured in. Other highly appreciated wines produced at Sarica Niculițel include Aligote, Riesling, Feteasca Regala, Sauvignon Blanc, Muscat Ottonel, Merlot and Pinot Noir.

Dobrudgea was one of the most multicultural spaces of the continent, with a rich diversity of languages, religions and customs. Although nowadays the ethnic groups are less numerous, their presence and culture decisively contribute to the cultural charm of Dobrudgea, to the folk and gastronomy traditions, etc.

The cuisine of Dobrudgea, mainly based on fish, as the region is close to the Black Sea, the Delta and the Danube River, is a mix of Romanian, Greek, Turkish, Tatar and Bulgarian flavors and recipes. One of the traditional dishes of the region is the *Tripe Soup*. To make this delicious soup, beef tripe is mixed with carrots, onions, pepper and garlic. It is flavored with vinegar or sour cream afterwards. The delicious local salad, called *salata dobrogeana* (Dobrudgean salad), is made of fresh vegetables, pepper, cucumbers, tomatoes, onion, to which boiled eggs, grated cheese, minced dill or parsley are added. The *sarailie* cake, with walnuts or almonds dipped in syrup, makes an excellent dessert. The most popular dish in the Danube Delta is the Fisherman's Soup. In a big cast-iron pot, water is brought to a boil with vegetables and some 10 to 15 species of small fish. The liquid is then strained, and the small fish removed. Big chunks of sturgeon, carp or pike are then boiled in the broth. The fish soup makes two dishes: first, the broth is served with a wooden spoon and then the big chunks of fish are sprinkled with chili pepper or garlic. Afterwards, *saramura*, prepared from big chunks of carp broiled on the stove or on a spit, is served with polenta and garlic sauce. Other local specialties: *ciorba de burta* (beef tripe soup) seasoned with vinegar or sour cream, *plachie de crap* (carp stew with onions and oil).

4.4. FACTORS WITH POTENTIAL IMPACT ON RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN DOBRUDGEA

There is a multitude of actors involved in the development of rural tourism in Romania. Some of them play a more important role than others, but each brings a special contribution to the development of rural tourism.

The first signs of encouraging tourism in rural area were seen in the year 1994, after the creation of the legal framework on the development of mountain areas, of the Danube Delta and the Black Sea Coast, when facilities were created for power supply, edible water and sewerage systems and tax exemption for a 10-year period for the households (with 3–20 rooms) that initiated such an activity, but mainly through the creation of certain organizations to guide and coordinate the network of farms included in the rural tourism system.

The years that have passed since Romania joined the European Union, in the year 2007, represent a time of radical change for the rural areas, with more or less positive effects. Romania received European financial support for the development of rural tourism and recreational activities in the countryside both before and after its accession to the European Union.

In the investigated region, similarly to the national level, the development and promotion of tourism activities in the rural area was intensified through the implementation of various European Union programmes. These programmes were mainly a source of financing and focused on several aspects:

- to increase, improve and diversify the small-scale tourist accommodation facilities and private investments in leisure tourism infrastructure;
- to develop the tourism information and promotion centers and to improve and diversify the tourism services related to rural tourism through promotion and information materials, orientation, counselling and training in the entrepreneurial and non-agricultural sector, provided to the rural area inhabitants.

Similarly to the situation at national level, in Dobrugea, the rural tourism activity is being promoted through the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC) Bucharest, which publishes catalogues, brochures and booklets for international and national use. The edited catalogues comply with the coding by the European Federation of Rural Tourism (EUROGITES) regarding the pictograms for each tourism boarding house. The rural tourism supply is promoted through the Romanian National Tourism Fair, but also through exhibitions, fairs and international tourism stock exchanges, in which ANTREC participates.

For Dobrugea, in strict accordance with EUROGITES strategies, the following are recommended:

- development of local chains for rural tourism;
- introduction and widespread use of information technology (IT) in order to achieve a concentration of rural tourism supply in a particular region or county;
- intensive and extensive development of professional associations in the rural tourism sector;
- increasing the role of marketing and promotion, and actual implementation of the concept of umbrella branding and sub-branding;
- legislative changes in favour of the micro-enterprises in the rural tourism sector;
- stimulating feed-back of tourists' experience;
- establishing public-private partnerships in rural tourism activity.

According to our analysis, the reasons why rural tourism is not considered a representative product for the Dobrugean tourism are the following: insufficient promotion of rural tourism activities, limited collaboration between the most important actors, lack of investments in this sector and absence of tourism policies, repeated blocking of the initiatives of local authorities to develop projects in local tourism, lack of coherence and absence of a strategy at central authorities level, lack of a coherent vision for the development of Romanian tourism, lack of successive governments' interest in the development and promotion of Romanian tourism.

At the same time, this situation also has some other causes that have contributed to this evolution, namely:

- low infrastructural facilities;
- decreasing public resources;
- depopulation trends;
- adverse weather conditions;
- low economic profitability of some agricultural activities;
- lack of transport infrastructure and services in the countryside.

In order to obtain good results in the Dobrugean rural tourism activity, the following are necessary:

- improvement of infrastructure to support the rural tourism business;
- continuing to reduce bureaucracy in setting up and operation of agro-tourist boarding houses;
- a better information of the population on the governmental programmes for private initiative stimulation;
- popularization of the successful business examples of the Romanian entrepreneurs.

In the future, in order to improve the living standard in the rural areas, it is of utmost importance to create and maintain sustainable jobs, to initiate and consolidate businesses, to develop products, services and activities based on the existing potential.

The institutions responsible for the evaluation of NRDP implementation consider that the actions in accessing and implementing European projects represent an important stage for both applicants and beneficiaries, who have learnt lessons and gained experience that will be used for the next programming periods, too.

The clear and unequivocally inflow of EU funds contributed to the development of services related to rural tourism and to the increase of the living standard of the rural people, through the development of the rural economy and of the entire rural space.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The rural tourism is an opportunity in many regions, where it begins to take its rightful place in the context of pollution increase and of a stressful life. In this context, modern people need revival through direct contact with nature and active involvement in the development of tourism activities, and this requirement can be satisfied much easier by rural tourism than by any other form of tourism.

Dobruđea's tourism vocation is conferred by its geographic position, as well as by the cultural and historical profile. Taking this into consideration, Dobruđea can easily develop many types and forms of tourism, namely: summer tourism, business tourism, cultural-historical tourism, religious tourism, rural tourism, agro-tourism and ecotourism. The existence of the Black Sea shore and of the Danube Delta on the territory of the South-East region confers a unique status of this region, which is also similar to the development of its particular form of tourism, namely summer tourism.

With Romania's accession to the EU, the competitiveness of the tourism activity of the investigated rural localities located in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and on the Black Sea shore increased. A first finding reveals that the rural tourism accommodation structures are more characteristic for Tulcea county than for Constanța county, where there is a large number of urban tourism accommodation structures.

The statistical data show us that the main types of establishments with accommodation functions, where the tourism activity of the rural settlements is developed, are the following: hotels, villas and agro-tourism boarding houses. Their number, the degree of comfort and their endowments have fluctuated from year to year and from one locality to other. However, the number of tourist accommodation structures decreased in the last years, yet the tourist accommodation capacity in operation and the comfort degree followed an increasing trend in both counties.

In the investigated period, in the rural area, the number of tourists who arrived and stayed overnight had a fluctuating trend in both counties, a similar trend to that at national level. The two indices that were calculated on the basis of statistical data revealed the following: i) the net use index of accommodation capacity in Constanța county was higher than that in Tulcea county; in dynamics, this index fluctuated in the two counties in the investigated period; ii) the average length of stay had higher values in Constanța county, yet in dynamics, this index also fluctuated.

Investigating Dobruđea's rural area, we can find out that this is the depository and preserver of an inestimable thesaurus of architecture and art with historical monuments and relics, as well as of a high value ethnical and folkloric heritage. In this context, the rural tourism, as alternative to the seasonal seashore tourism, does not depend to the same extent on the seasonality that characterizes the classical tourism from Dobruđea and can contribute to the socio-economic development of the rural area.

The development of the entrepreneurial initiatives in rural tourism takes place in the context marked by the significant increase, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, of the accommodation units in the rural area in recent years, due to individual investors and finance from the governmental pre-accession and post-accession programs (SAPARD, NRDP 2007–2013 and NRDP 2014–2020), as well

as to the activities of organizations following the ANTREC model, which support the rural suppliers of tourism services to penetrate the market and help the rural communities to appreciate the importance of tourism and understand what advantages they can get from tourism.

However, according to our analysis, the reasons why the rural tourism is not considered a representative product for the Dobrudgean tourism are the following: insufficient promotion of rural tourism activities, limited collaboration between the most important actors, lack of investments in this sector and absence of tourism policies, repeated blocking of local authorities' projects in local tourism, lack of coherence and absence of a strategy at central authorities level, lack of a coherent vision for the development of Romanian tourism, lack of successive governments' interest in the development and promotion of Romanian tourism.

To sum up, following the analysis, it results that there is a great number of opportunities provided to rural entrepreneurs by Dobrudgea's tourism potential, yet these are not sufficiently valorized. In the future, in order to improve that, it is of utmost importance to initiate and consolidate businesses, to develop products, services and activities based on the existing potential.

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