

Characteristics of the infrastructure and of the tourist flows in Olt county (Romania)

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Caracteristicile infrastructurii și fluxurilor turistice în județul Olt (România). Lucrarea de față își propune realizarea unui studiu de analiză, care, prin structură, metode, procedee utilizate și conținut, contribuie la clarificarea aspectelor legate de capacitatea sistemelor teritoriale de a se adapta, inclusiv în regiunea analizată. Acest lucru a fost realizat prin analizarea fluxurilor turistice, prin comparație cu anii anteriori totul fiind creionat de perspectivele dezvoltării acestui spațiu. Rezultatele arată o prezență redusă a turiștilor, din cauza slabei modernizări, a neimplicării autorităților locale și a promovării reduse, județul nefiind încadrat în categoria destinațiilor turistice recunoscute. Zona prezintă un potențial turistic ridicat, fiind necesară cunoașterea județului atât la nivel național, cât și internațional.

Cuvinte cheie: cazare, fluxuri turistice, turiști, evoluție.

Characteristics of the infrastructure and of the tourist flows in Olt County (Romania). This study aims to be a detailed analysis, which, through its structure, methods, procedures and content, contributes to the clarification of the issues related to the capacity of the territorial systems to adapt in the analyzed region. The results were achieved by analyzing the tourist flows, compared to the previous years, everything being outlined by the prospects of this area's development. The results show a low number of tourists due to a poor process of modernization, lack of involvement of local authorities and little marketing, as the county is not included in the category of the recognized tourist destinations. This area has a high potential for tourism, so it is necessary for the county to be known both at national and international level.

Keywords: accomodation, touristic inflows, tourists, evolution.

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of adapting the systems is a deep process, a reformation and a rethinking of the tourism system, to harmonize the requirements of the domestic and international market and to develop a quality tourism (Petcu, 2000).

The conservation of fundamental values and their use through tourism are efficient ways to preserve and transmit them, and therefore the development of adequate strategies based on authenticity to stimulate and promote tourism in this county, is an efficient way of building the image of Romania as a unique tourist destination on the international market (Anghelache et al., 2012).

The evaluation of economic and tourism was relevant to demonstrate that the touristic potential it is not enough developed (Anghelache, 2017). All the changes in the Romanian rural environment and the need of an economic and substantial activity, have determined some people to head to tourism (Iorio et al., 2010) and the role of these change is to bring new changes in these areas (Hughes et al., 2016).

The attitude of the population in front of develop of tourism was examined in different stages and years (Latkova et al., 2012) and releved that the planification of tourism should be visible both for local people and visitors (Liu et al., 2006).

2. SCOPE

The objective of this paper is a research in the analysis of the tourism infrastructure in Olt County, between 2012 and 2017. The whole concept regarding the development and diversification of the accommodation capacity was based on the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics Slatina, and its processing and interpretation were supported by the work "Strategic Action Master Plan for the Sustainable Implementation of Tourism in the south -west and north - west of the Lower Danube "(Muzeul Județean Slatina, 2014-2018)

This article highlights the main features of the tourism infrastructure and the way in which the existence, or, on the contrary, the lack of accommodation and of the necessary facilities, influence the tourist flows, in Olt County. As this area does not have national advertising, the tourists do not know enough about the existing units or the touristic activities that can be carried on here, so the study aims to emphasize the existing accommodation capacity in relation to the types of tourism that can be practiced and to analyze the tourism indexes in the area. The results show a low number of tourists, due to a poor process of modernization and lack of involvement of local authorities.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Methods and materials

To create this study I identified the main accommodation units in Olt county and I used the comparison method, by comparing the statistical indicators between 2012-2017.

The data were provided by the website of the National Institute of Statistics and processed according to the information obtained from the local authorities. In the analysis of tourist activity in Olt County, I carried out a monthly analysis, taking into account the touristic seasonality and the types of tourists (Marin, 2004). I have used relevant statistical indicators, such as: net use index of the operative accommodation, average duration of tourist stay; number of arrivals; average overnight stays, and so on.

I also used the observation method, by making observation about the obtained result and I made a map in QGIS where I put in evidence the main settlements and towns with accommodation units.

3.2. Study area

The tourism occupies a lower place in the Olt's services. There is a small percent of tourists who choose Olt County as a tourist destination. However, this county has a valuable natural environment, due to its geographic location, accessibility and favorable connections to most of the transport routes-by road, railway and by river (Lupu, 2002). Also, nearby it has an airport in Craiova, at 40 km away. The cultural, historical and archaeological heritage is particularly valuable, with international valences; the immaterial patrimony is represented by "Călușul", included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. (Minciu, 2004)

The area belongs to a valuable ethnographic and folkloric space with relevant customs and traditions, which gives the image of some tourist attractions, and makes an offer with affordable prices (Glavan, 2000). On the other hand, the weaknesses in the county are those that dominate tourism in Olt, and those are: an insufficiently modernized infrastructure-inadequate to tourism, a low capacity to access European projects (Deeke et al, 2011) and funds on sustainable tourism, lack of proper marking the tourist objectives and the lack of a sustainable partnership between service providers on the tourism market (Lester, 2004).

Another risk in the County's tourism are the unsatisfied wages, which leads to a great fluctuation of specialized personnel and therefore to a very low diversification of tourism products. (Minciu, 2000). Staff are under no further training, of what it would mean continuous training in professional and authorized organizations in the field of tourism (Cristureanu et al, 1982). The main tourist owners adopt individual work (Gheorghilas, 2004). Another demotivational factor regarding the tourism in this county is the degradation of the historical, archaeological and cultural heritage

elements(Cocean et al, 2002), all due to the insufficient financial resources and the lack of interest of the local authorities for sustainable investments in this sector(Popescu, 2018).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Characteristics of the main accommodation units

1. Hotels

The number of the hotels raised beginning with 2012 from 10 units to 25 units. The number of the seats has met ups and downs. In 2012, there were 642 seats, a number which dropped to 564 seats until 2016, following in 2017, due to a new unit foundation, a number of 634.

Most of the hotels are placed in Slatina city (7 until 2016 and 8 in 2017), and the rest of them in Caracal city (2 units from 2014 up to none). In Corabia city, in 2012 worked 2 hotels, in 2013 only one hotel and after this year was closed and there has not been any hotel up to now.(Figure 1)

A famous hotel due to its services but most to the mark that history left is President Hotel, situated near the European road which makes connection between Pitesti city and Craiova city and it belongs to Scornicesti city(Negut, 2003). Here one can find the suite in which Ceausescu and his wife lived, and today has a remarkable resonance for tourists who come especially to spend a night here. Most of the hotels are estimated at 2 or 3 stars, the only one with 4 stars being President Hotel.

2. Touristic guest houses

Starting with 2012, there were 6 guest houses and in 2017-7. These are situated in big cities – Slatina, Caracal, Bals, Corabia, Scornicesti and these are estimated at 2 or 3 stars. The number of seats raised from 88 in 2012 to 100 in 2015 and 2017 to 130.

3. Hostels

The only hostel is found in Balş city, a city near the European road, and therefore, here is practiced a transition tourism. There were 29 accommodation seats in 2012, following a slight raise – 36 seats in 2014 and in 2016 and 2017 dropped to 33 seats. The hotel is estimated at 3 stars.

4. Motels

There is only one motel in Olt county in Scornicesti city which was founded in 2017 with 48 accommodation seats. This motel serves for tourists who come here to practice sportive tourism – hunting and fishing, but also, the tourism for events. It is estimated at 3 stars.

5. Bungalows

Noteworthy for Scornicesti city is Rusciori bungalow, the only one of this kind in the county. It is estimated at 3 stars and the number of seats raised beginning with 2012, from 108 to 120 seats up to now. This one serves for tourists who wish to discover the beauty and the quiet of the remote areas, wanting to enjoy hunting or fishing.

In the especially designed lake from the back of the restaurant, one can go fishing for many species: carp, zander, crucian, fitofagus, rapacious fish etc. The restaurant with hunting and fishing specific waits for you to come and serve a fresh fine dining or to organize a special event like weddings, baptisms, birthdays, etc.

6. Agrotourism guest houses

Agrotouristic guest houses have been developing since 2016, first in Brebeni then, in 2017, in Scarișoara and Șerbănești locality. This was possible due to European funds, having as an overall objective the development of the touristic activities in villages, which may help job growth and alternative income and also, the development of the village in general.

There were 20 seats in 2016 and in 2017 – 35, being estimated at 3 stars.

7. Touristic villas

There is only one touristic villa founded in 2013, in Caracal city, with 14 seats, that raised to 16 up to now. A temporary activity had taken place there and since 2016 it has not been functional.

4.2. Evolution of accommodation capacity between 2012-2017

In order to capture the accommodation infrastructure dynamic between 2012 and 2017, I used the statistical data from the National Institute of Statistics.

At the level of the reviewed county one can notice 25 accommodation units in 2017, among most of them, precisely 9, are hotels. Concerning the number of the hotels, it is constant from 2012 until 2016 (9 units) and in 2017 it increased with 2 units (*Figure 2*).

The rest of the touristic units are found either in the cities or along the European highway and among these agrotouristic guest houses are found in the rural areas and near the landmarks. The lack of the accommodation spaces being raised, most of them are concentrated in cities like Slatina, Corabia, Scornicesti and along the communication axes.

Prevalent, as units, are hotels and guest houses in cities and agrotouristic guest houses and bungalows in rural areas.

One can notice that during this reviewed period the accommodation capacity did not record substantial increases, concluding that they do not do any investment, neither from the local or county councils, nor from the foreign investors.

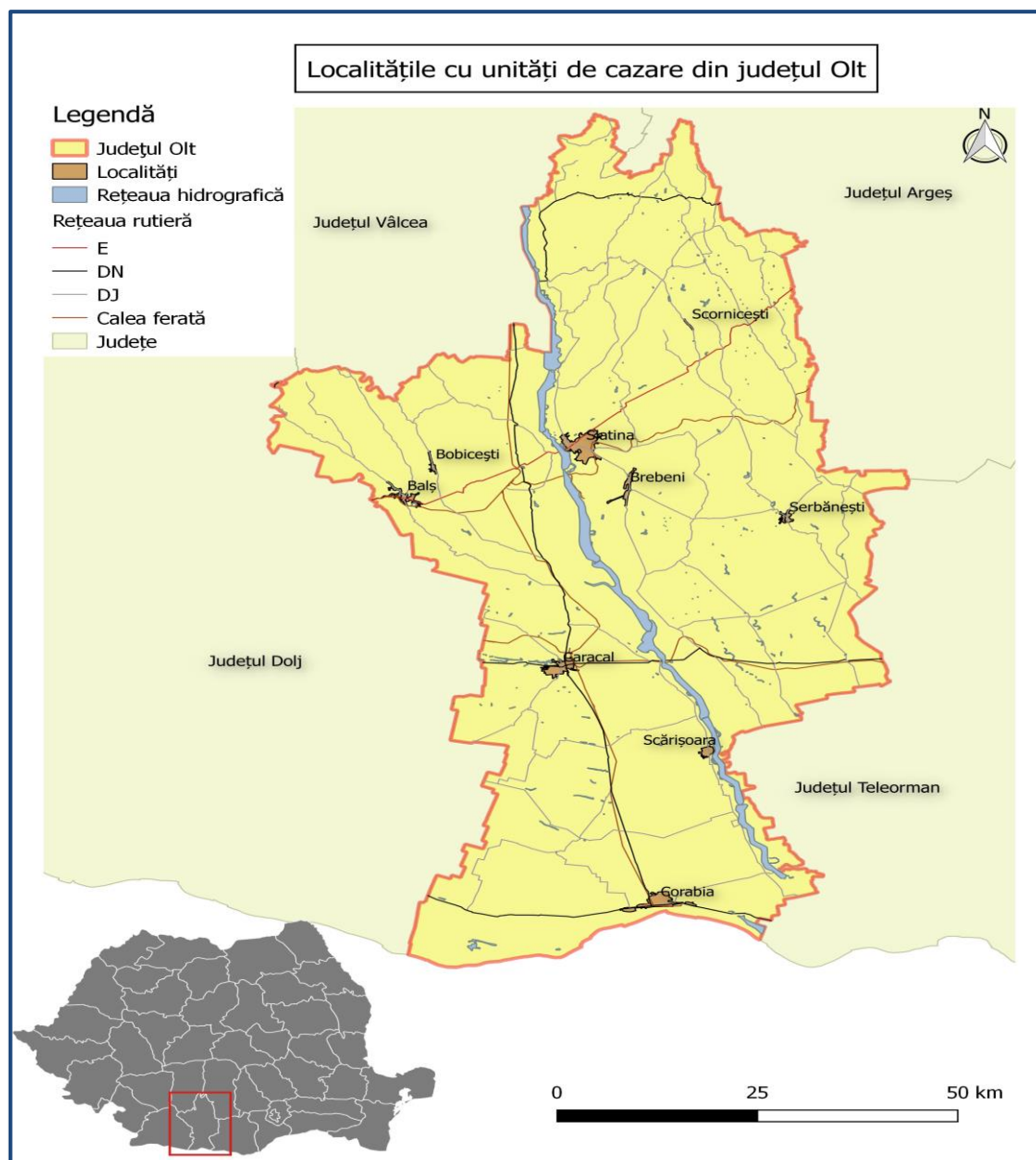


Figure 1. Map with the main settlements with accommodation units, realized in QGIS

Aspects regarding touristic circulation

In all accommodation units, the number of tourists meets ups and downs from year to year. One can notice that since 2013 these units encountered a decrease with slightly fluctuations. Most of the tourists who have lodged in this county were Romanians, foreign tourists were fewer (Albu, 2001).

The statistics show that foreign tourists have lodged in Olt county mostly for business tourism. Overall, the number of the arrivals highlights that lodging in Olt county has been decreasing since 2012 until 2017 (Figure 3) and the most of the tourists preferred accommodation in the hotel units.

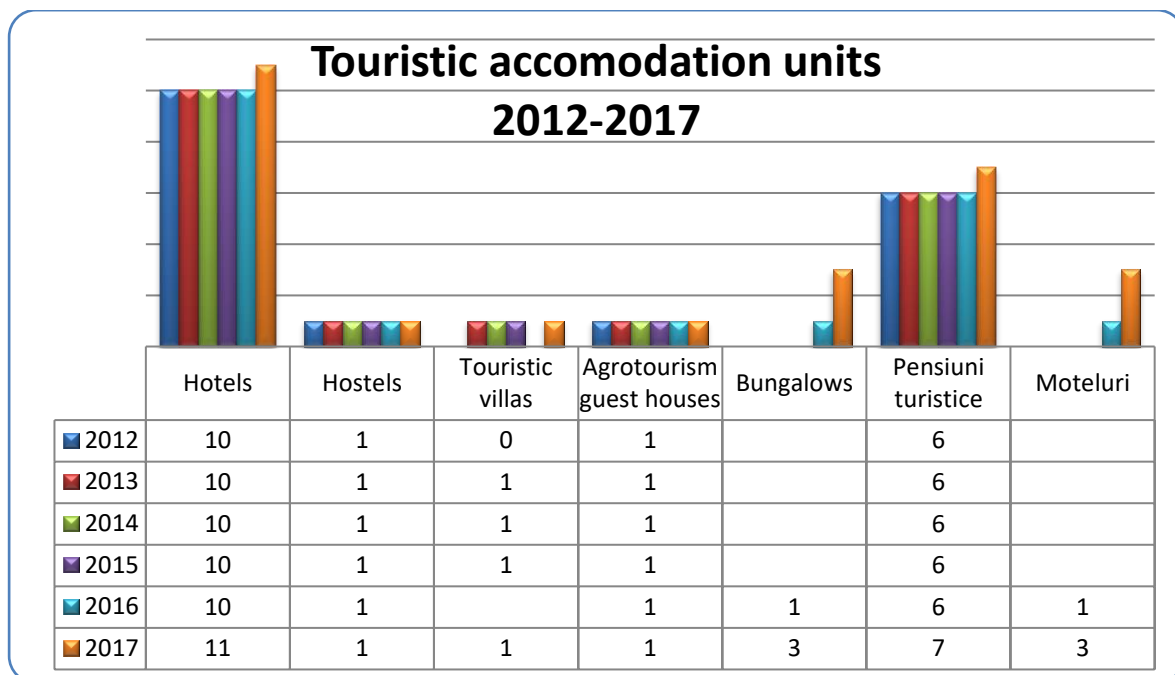


Figure 2. Touristic accomodation units 2012-2017 (Data source: Ministry of Tourism, processed)

Most of the tourists get accomodation in easily accessible hotels form the city outskirts or near European highways and that the foreigners have preffered the hotels nearby Slatina city. This fact is due to all the headquarters of the factories such as: Alro, Artrom, Alprom and Pirelli wich brings foreign investors in this city.

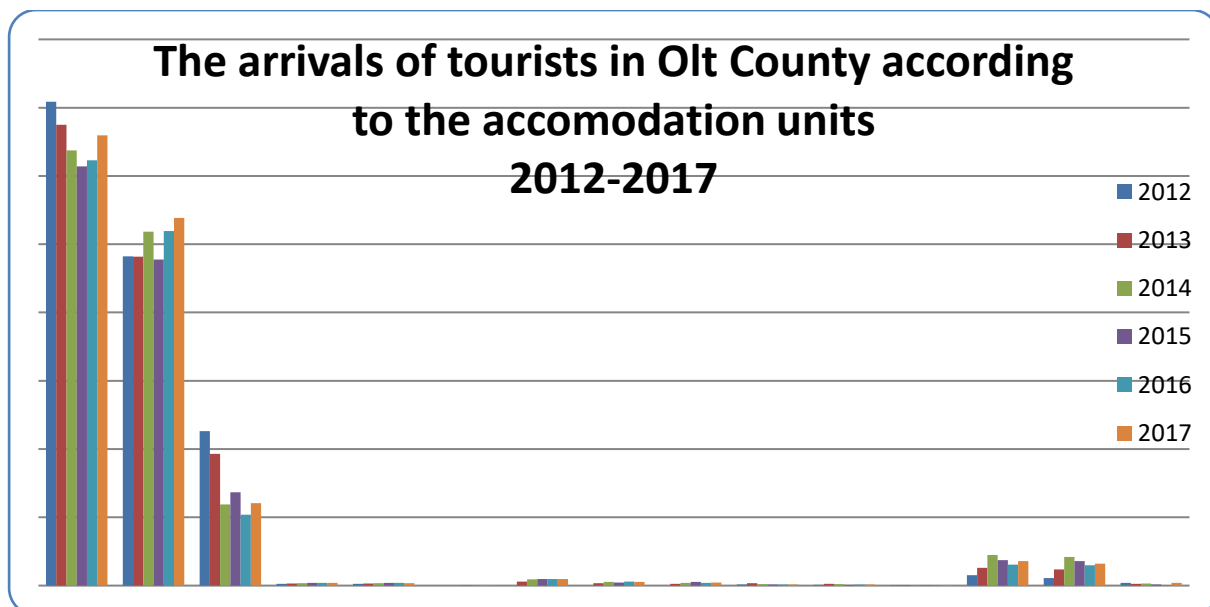


Figure 3. The arrivals of tourists in Olt County according to the accomodation units 2012-2017 (Data source: Ministry of Tourism, processed)

Concerning all the other accommodation units, the touristic guest houses have recorded the most arrivals, both in Romanian and also in foreign tourists, meanwhile the other units have got a low arrivals number, during summer and autumn months.

Concerning overnight accommodation (*Figure 4*) these seem to be equal with the arrivals number (Baker, S. et al, 2001).

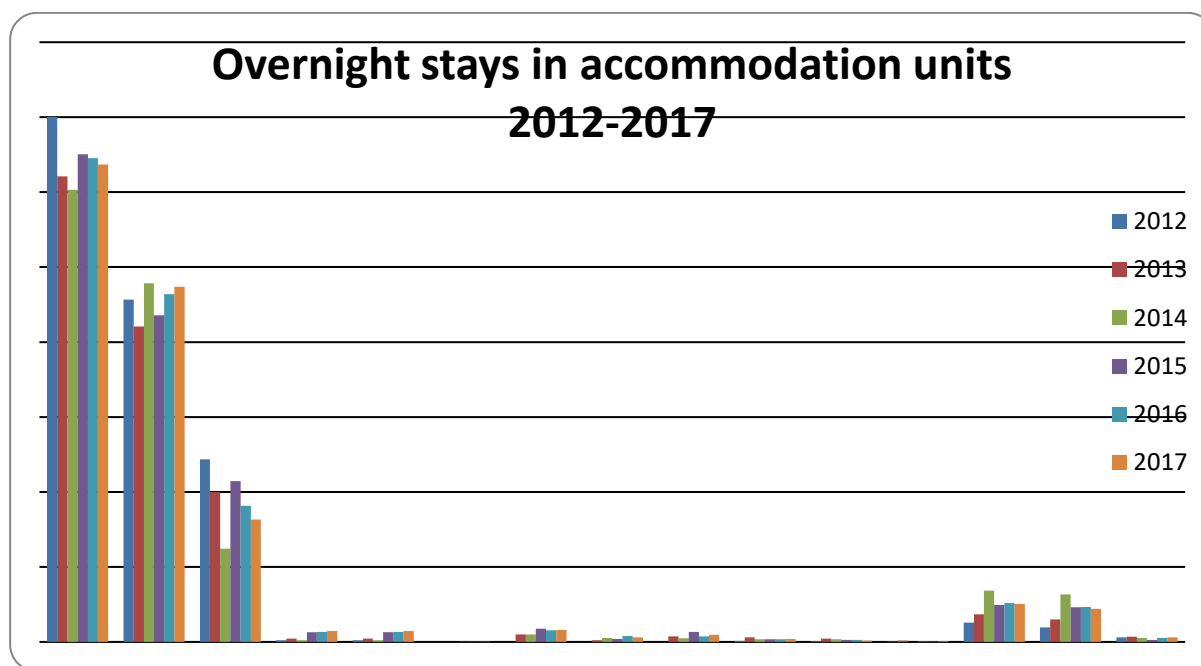


Figure 4. Overnight stays in accommodation units - 2012-2017
(Data source: Ministry of Tourism, processed)

Olt county lay out a large number of tourists in June and November due to business and events tourism. There is no fluctuation during winter in this county due to landforms which do not align with the development of the mountains tourism. (Popescu, 2018)

The overnight accommodation may increase only if the enabled authorities improve the accommodation services, feeding services and real promotion of the touristic objectives. This development can be realized only by the region image, by raising the levels of the technical – material base quality and of the offered services.

One of the indicators that establishes the efficiency of tourist accommodation is the net use index of the operative accommodation (*Figure 5*), which shows the connection between the accommodation capacity (*Figure 6*) and the actual use of it in a certain period of time. (Lester, 2001)

This is calculated by dividing the total number of overnight stays in the tourist operative accommodation capacity. Between 2012 and October 2017, there is an oscillating evolution, decreasing in 2013 and 2014, then increasing, until 2016, when there was another decrease.

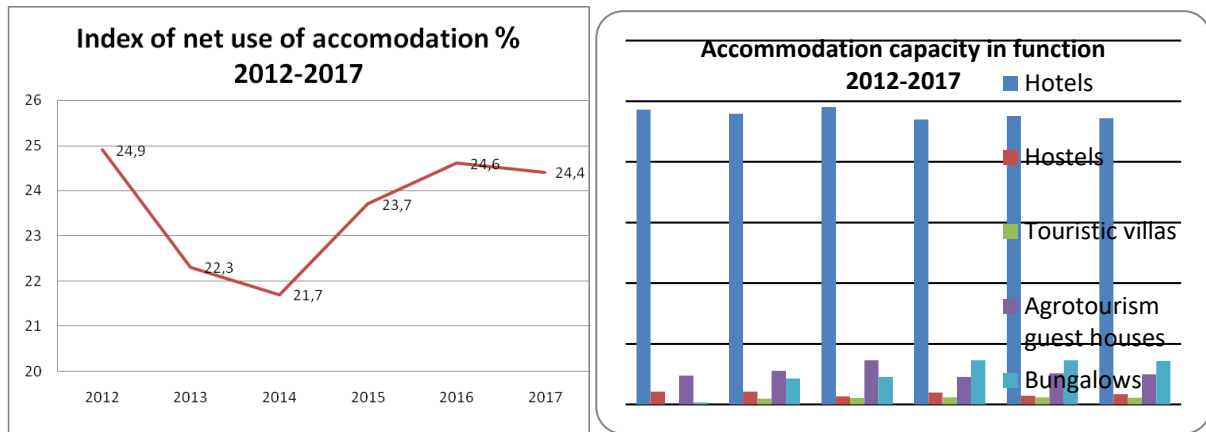


Figure 5 and 6. Index of net use of accommodation and Accommodation capacity in function - 2012-2017
(Data source: Ministry of Tourism, processed)

The main reasons for a low index of net use of accommodation are: a poor infrastructure towards the important tourist attractions and the unmodernized accommodation and foodservice (Murgoci, 2009). Following the increasing evolution in the net usable index, it can be noticed that during the analyzed period, not even 30% was reached of its total operational capacity. The county's infrastructure is closely linked to the presence of tourists in this area. As long as the infrastructure is poor, there are problems in attracting a reasonable number of tourists. This is especially noticeable in cities and villages that are not close to the main roads. Tourism infrastructure is not relevant only to the attractiveness of the region (Hochstrasser, 2002), but also to the development of other sectors such as commerce, services, and it provides visibility and work places, it stimulates the development of culture and handicrafts. That's why, due to the poorly development of the infrastructure, arrivals and overnight stays of tourists at the county's level show a low number and constant values in the analyzed period. These are the consequences of the local authorities lack of involvement, (Caracotă et al, 2002), the limited funds allocated to tourism development and the failure to promote the true value of the objectives.

The limits of this study are given firstly by the small number of professional studies on this area, then by the difficulty in obtaining statistical data and other touristic information that are necessary in elaborating this paper. In the future will be helpful if local authorities be more involved in communication with external people, make material project and involve all the community.

5. DISCUSSION

Currently, there is a moderate volume of tourist flows, although there are many natural and anthropic resources, extremely valuable and worthwhile. The causes that explain this phenomenon are mostly domestic, because of local authorities. These include lack of advertising at regional and national level, poor infrastructure with unmodernized, improperly marked roads and unconsciousness of the tourist value of natural and anthropic elements, both of the locals and of the local communities.

Another big issue is that are insufficient financial resources regarding tourism development and its necessities, lack at the county level of organization units, to ensure the management of the tourism and low absorption of non-repayable funds for the development of tourism, and low implementation capacity in rural areas and small institutions like memorial houses, museums, administration of protected areas (Lester, 2001).

Regarding high share of the old-aged population it is present especially in rural areas. This part of the population depends on agriculture, and their incomes are relatively low, while the local population is still very reluctant to develop tourism.

Technical inability to restore the existing monuments and the lack of a concrete approach and strategic programs and actions that will bring a complex tourist product, because currently all the tourist objectives are poorly advertised or promoted individually, without a tourist circuit and the specialized staff with a level of training and unconventional skills for the hospitality industry make the tourism of this county to be more inaccessible.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Romania it's developed into a space where the nature has proved to be generous. On the territory of the country, all landforms are interfering, revealing an area where all types of tourism can be practiced for each category of tourists. Having these important resources, makes Romania a propitious destination, included in the major tourist destinations of the world.

The results of the analysis during this study highlights the fact that the Olt County has a great potential for tourism (Ionica, 2004). Here, variate forms of tourism can be combined, such as cultural tourism, religious tourism, urban tourism, transit tourism, which gives the reputation of the area.

The problems that I have encountered in elaborating the study were the lack of scientific information in specialized studies, which means lack of updated data, mainly the data on the tourism indicators. Regarding this, of a great benefit were the data from the statistical websites, with more recent information (Muzeul Județean Olt, 2018)

In the process of elaborating the study, besides the general features of the city, I pointed out the role played by the tourism functionality in the economic development. (Consiliul Județean Olt, 2012). Also, the valorification of tourism was made by highlighting that each complex system is capable of adapting at an economic level, in order to increase its efficiency.

The promotion of the county's tourism emphasizes the necessity of a good valorification of tourism and, implicitly, of the Romanian cultural heritage, so on the one hand is an activity aimed to attract tourists, and on the other hand, maintaining a close contact with the existing customers by constantly anticipating the changes that appear in their preferences.

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