

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF CARAS-SEVERIN COUNTY IN THE PERIOD 2019-2023

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Abstract: *The increased interest of tourists in Banatul Montan had an impact on the tourism development of Caras-Severin county. The large number of tourists coming to the area has determined the increase in accommodation places, which implicitly impacts the number and diversity of accommodation units. The purpose of the article is to analyse how the tourism development of Caras-Severin county has evolved in the last 5 years per locality. In the article, I used the documentary analysis method, structuring the information I obtained from the bibliography at the end of the paper. The result of the research confirms the touristic and economic potential of the Caras-Severin county by maximising the existing cultural and natural heritage.*

Key words: *tourism, development, Caras-Severin, Banatul Montan*

INTRODUCTION

The increased interest of tourists in Banatul Montan had an impact on the tourism development of Caraș-Severin county. The large number of tourists coming to the area has led to an increase in accommodation.

As part of the research, we analysed how the tourism development of Caraș-Severin County has evolved in the last 5 years per locality.

The 2020 pandemic had a very big impact on the diversification of the types of accommodation units. The desire of tourists to stay as far away from the crowd and as isolated as possible from other guests and even from the staff in the accommodation units determined the appearance and classification of the hotel apartments, but also the increase in the number of agropensions.

The paper by Marin and Petre (2021) discusses strategies for promoting sustainable rural tourism in Caraș-Severin County. It outlines the region's unique natural and cultural assets, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to tourism development that benefits local communities and preserves the environment. The authors propose several strategies, including community involvement, the promotion of local traditions and products, and investment in infrastructure. They also highlight the importance of training for local stakeholders to enhance service quality and visitor experience. Overall, the study advocates for a collaborative approach to ensure that rural tourism contributes to sustainable development in the region. [5]

Rădulescu's paper (2020) analyzes the tourism potential and challenges faced by Caraș-Severin County. It highlights the region's rich natural resources, cultural heritage, and various attractions that could enhance tourism. However, the study identifies significant challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing efforts, and a lack of investment. Rădulescu emphasizes the need for strategic planning and collaboration among stakeholders to harness the county's tourism potential effectively. The paper concludes with recommendations for developing sustainable tourism practices to overcome these challenges and promote the region's economic growth. [10]

Manciu and Demyen's paper (2021) explores strategies to capitalize on the tourism potential of Caraș-Severin County to promote regional entrepreneurial development. The

authors identify key attractions and resources that can be leveraged to stimulate local businesses and encourage investment. They propose various strategies, including enhancing marketing efforts, developing tourism-related infrastructure, and fostering partnerships between public and private sectors. The study emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship in creating sustainable tourism opportunities, ultimately contributing to economic growth and community development in the region. [4]

Negruț and Negruț's study (2019) examines tourists' perceptions of the tourism potential in Caraș-Severin County, identifying both strengths and challenges. The research highlights key attractions, such as natural landscapes and cultural heritage, that contribute to the county's appeal. However, it also notes challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing, and seasonal fluctuations in visitor numbers. The authors emphasize the importance of addressing these issues to enhance the overall tourist experience and maximize the region's tourism potential. The study advocates for strategic improvements to foster sustainable tourism development in the county. [6]

This paper focuses on the relationship between tourism growth and sustainable rural development in the county.

Negruț's paper (2022) examines the interplay between tourism growth and sustainable rural development in Caraș-Severin County. It highlights how tourism can serve as a catalyst for economic development while promoting environmental conservation and cultural preservation. The study discusses the benefits of integrating sustainable practices in tourism, such as supporting local businesses and enhancing community engagement. Negruț emphasizes the need for strategic planning and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that tourism development aligns with the principles of sustainability, ultimately benefiting both the economy and local communities. [7]

In the article, We used the documentary analysis method, structuring the information we obtained from the bibliography at the end of the paper.

The result of the research confirms the touristic and economic potential of the Caraș-Severin county by capitalizing on maximising the existing cultural and natural heritage. Caras-Severin County has increased its accommodation capacity by approximately 40% in the last 5 years. The number of tourists is constantly increasing, but has not yet reached the threshold reached in 2019 before the outbreak of the Coronavirus Pandemic. [3,11]

Promotion of tourist attractions is vital for the HORECA industry to be one of the main income-generating sectors among the population of Banat de Munte. This is the main form of tourism in Caras-Severin County for those who love hiking, seek rest and recreation (relaxation), prefer fishing and hunting, try mountaineering and, above all, are passionate about recreational or sports skiing in the Valiug mountain resorts—Semenic—Garana and Muntele Mic—Nedeia (Tarcu). Mountain tourism is increasingly assimilated to winter sports tourism. If, in the past, the motivation “to climb the mountain” was to benefit from the climatic conditions beneficial for rest and treatment, hiking and climatic cure, today the number of tourists seeking out the mountain to ski has increased exponentially, so that the practice of winter sports tends to become the main motivation for mountain tourism. [1,8]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the article, the authors employed the documentary analysis method, systematically organizing and analyzing information sourced from the bibliography appended at the conclusion of the paper. This methodological approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of pertinent literature, enriching the study's theoretical framework and enhancing the depth of analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The research findings affirm the considerable touristic and economic potential inherent within Caras-Severin county, emphasizing the optimization of its rich cultural and natural heritage as a pivotal strategy. This underscores the significance of leveraging the region's diverse attractions to foster sustainable tourism development and stimulate economic growth, thereby positioning Caras-Severin as a prominent destination within the broader tourism landscape.

Through sustainable development is understood the satisfaction of existent tourists' needs, by taking care of the environment and the tourist resources so that they could be useful in the future. [13]

1. Evolution of the number of accommodation structures at the national level

Romania has seen continuous development in its tourism sector, particularly over the past decade. Despite not yet being a top destination for international visitors, it offers residents an excellent opportunity to explore their own country and uncover its natural, historical, and cultural treasures. The demand for tourism, measured in terms of arrivals and overnight stays, has grown in tandem with the expansion of accommodation options and facilities. Tourism in Romania has increasingly become a vital contributor to job creation and GDP. In 2019, its turnover reached approximately 5 billion Euros, underscoring its economic significance. However, like many other countries, Romania's tourism industry faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. [9]

Gheorghescu's paper (2020) explores the impact of tourism investments and infrastructure development in the Banat region, with a focus on Caraș-Severin County. The study highlights how EU funding has played a crucial role in enhancing tourism infrastructure, such as transportation, accommodations, and public amenities. By analyzing various projects and their outcomes, the research demonstrates that improved infrastructure has facilitated greater tourist access and satisfaction. Gheorghescu concludes that strategic investments are essential for sustainable tourism growth in the region, ultimately contributing to economic development and regional competitiveness. [2]

The change in people's behaviour and the increasingly important desire to travel have led to changes in accommodation offers. The hotel industry had to adapt to the increasingly complex and diverse needs of tourists.

The period of the pandemic changed people's habits even more, making them choose accommodation units where they can feel safe. This fact led to the development of the most isolated accommodation units. This research also covers the years of pandemics. The period when tourist activities were limited or closed. [12]

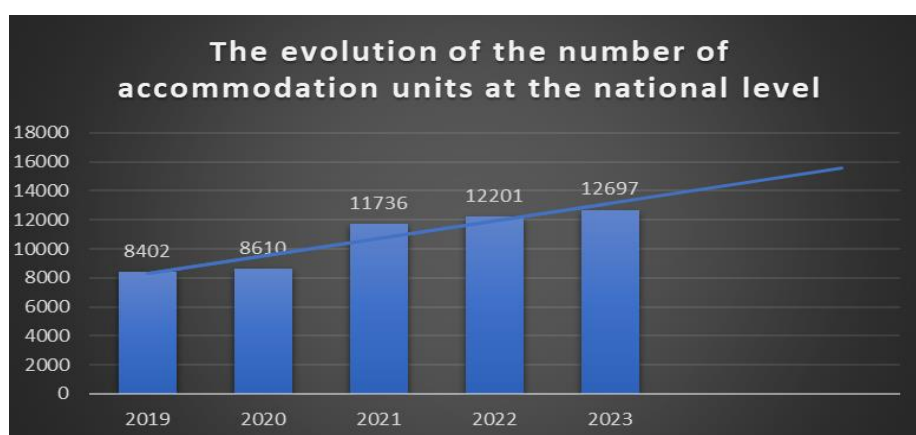


Figure 1. Evolution of the number of accommodation units at the national level

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

The pandemic had a positive effect on the development of accommodation units at the national level. At the level of Romania, the number of accommodation units was constantly increasing, although tourist activity was limited or even prohibited.

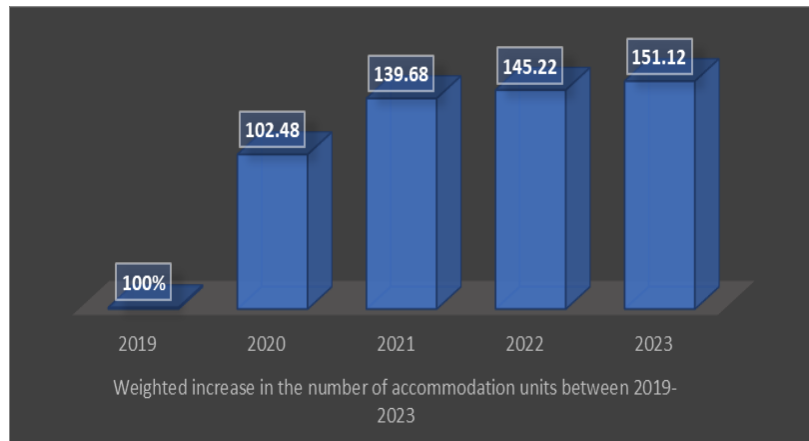


Figure 2. Weighted increase in the number of accommodation units, 2019 - 2023

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

According to the data, the pandemic created the necessary framework for accommodation structures to be built and their legalisation.

Conclusively, the period spanning from 2020 to 2021 witnessed a notable surge, with a statistically significant 37.12% augmentation observed in the count of accommodation units at the national level. This increase stands as the most substantial escalation documented within the preceding five-year timeframe, indicative of dynamic shifts within the accommodation sector.

2. Evolution of the number of accommodation structures by macroregion

Romania is delineated into four distinct macroregions, with each macroregion comprising two individual regions. This hierarchical organization serves as a fundamental framework for administrative and developmental purposes, facilitating efficient governance and strategic planning across the diverse geographical and socio-economic landscapes of the country.

Table 1.

The Evolution of the Number of accommodation structures by Macroregion

	The Evolution of the Number of accommodation structures by macroregion				
	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021	Year 2022	Year 2023
	8402	8610	11736	12201	12697
MACROREGION ONE	3373	3558	4705	5006	5288
MACROREGION TWO	2533	2562	3822	3896	4007
MACROREGION THREE	1021	967	1390	1404	1418
MACROREGION FOUR	1475	1523	1819	1895	1984

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

Based on the available data, it is evident that macroregion three stands out as the sole macroregion to experience a decline in accommodation units between 2019 and 2023, coinciding with the onset of the pandemic. This decline, amounting to 5.3%, underscores the immediate impact of the pandemic-induced disruptions on the hospitality sector within this specific geographical area. However, subsequent years witnessed a reversal of this trend, with macroregion three, alongside others, demonstrating a resumption of growth in

accommodation units, indicative of a gradual recovery and adaptation to prevailing circumstances.

Caras-Severin County is located in the fourth macroregion, the west region, along with the counties of Arad, Hunedoara, and Timis.

Table 2.

Structure of macroregion four

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
MACROREGION FOUR	1475	1523	1819	1895	1984
SOUTH-WEST OLTENIA Region	631	635	807	836	911
Dolj	68	62	62	59	61
Gorj	160	176	207	202	233
Mehedinti	83	96	146	165	170
Olt	25	26	28	32	33
Valcea	295	275	364	378	414
Region WEST	844	888	1012	1059	1073
Arad	157	156	162	172	167
Caras-Severin	244	258	316	334	337
Hunedoara	274	313	371	403	424
Timis	169	161	163	150	145

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

According to the table, Macroregion Four had a steady growth. The growth of the macroregion is exemplified in the chart below.

Caras-Severin County is the second in terms of degree of development of the tourist infrastructure in the west region after Hunedoara, and in the Patru Macroregion it ranks third after Hunedoara and Valcea.

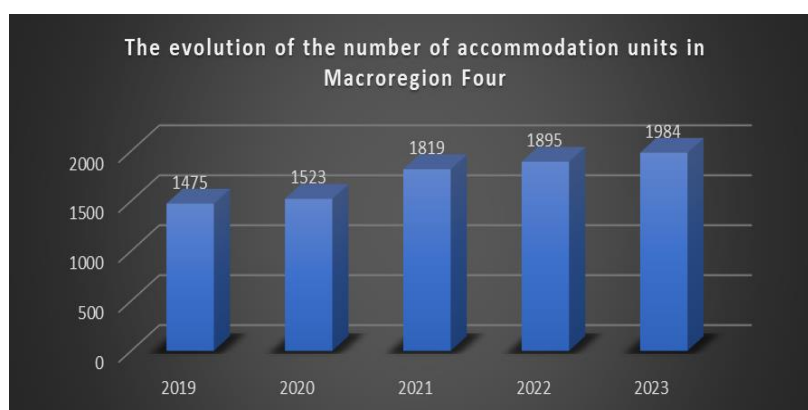


Figure 3. Evolution of the number of accommodation units in Macroregion Four

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

In conclusion, the Patru Macroregion has exhibited a substantial growth trajectory over the past five years, registering a noteworthy expansion of 34.51%. This robust growth underscores the region's resilience and dynamism, positioning it as a key player in the broader socio-economic landscape.

3. The evolution of accommodation units in the period 2019-2023 in Caras-Severin

In Caras-Severin county, there has been a consistent upward trend in the number of accommodation units, reflecting the region's burgeoning hospitality sector. Over the past five years, this growth has been particularly pronounced, with a remarkable increase of

38.1%. Such sustained expansion underscores the county's attractiveness as a destination and its evolving role within the tourism industry.

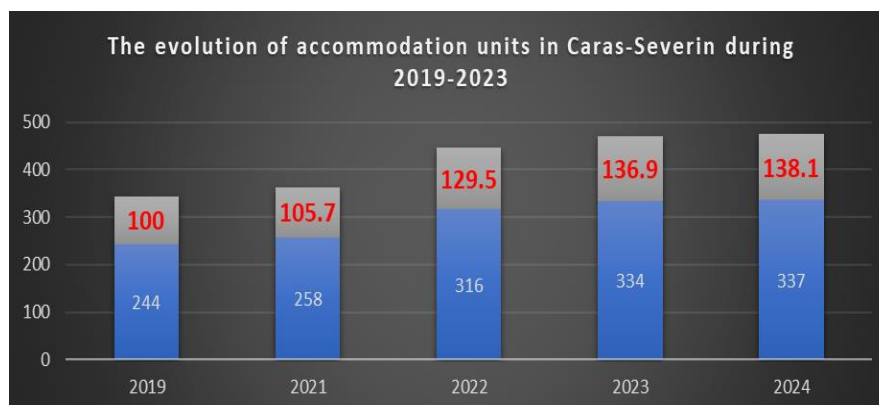


Figure 4. The evolution of accommodation units in Caras-Severin during 2019-2023

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

The apex of growth occurred amidst the pandemic, with a notable 23.8% surge observed during this period. This upswing underscores the resilience and adaptability of the accommodation sector in Caras-Severin county, showcasing its capacity to thrive even in challenging circumstances.

Table 3.

The Evolution of Accommodation Units in urban and Rural Environments

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total units	244	258	316	334	337
Urban environment	127	131	152	158	160
Country side	117	127	164	176	177
Urban environment %	52,05	50,78	48,10	47,31	47,48
Country side %	47,95	49,22	51,90	52,69	52,52

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

Although the number of accommodation units registers a constant increase, the number of accommodation units in the rural environment has exceeded the number of units in the urban environment in the last 3 years.

Table 4.

Types of tourist reception structures

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	244	258	316	334	337
Hotels	32	34	35	35	35
Hostels	11	12	13	10	9
Apartments and rooms for rent	-	-	48	67	69
Motels	4	4	4	4	5
Tourist villas	4	4	4	3	4
Tourist cabins	19	19	21	19	20
Bungalows	4	3	4	3	4
campgrounds	2	3	4	4	4
Tourist stops	6	5	4	5	4
Tourist cottages	4	5	6	6	7
Camps for students and preschoolers	2	3	3	2	2
Tourist guesthouses	70	73	73	71	71
Agrotourism pensions	86	93	97	105	103

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

The increase in the number of accommodation units was largely influenced by the appearance of apartments and rooms for rent and the growth of agritourism guesthouses. The legalisation of this type of accommodation has further diversified the offer.

In summary, the data indicates a noteworthy uptick of 16.5% in agrotourism lodgings, alongside a substantial 20.5% rise in the utilization of apartments and rented rooms. Remarkably, over the preceding five-year period, apartments and rented rooms contributed 20.5% to the total 38.1% escalation in lodging facilities.

4. Evolution of the number of overnight stays in the Caras-Severin county in the period 2019 – 2023

The graph unveils a fluctuating trend in the number of overnight stays over the past five years, showcasing an intriguing narrative of ups and downs. While the figures didn't quite surpass the overnight stays recorded in 2019, there's been a notable shift following a sharp decline in 2020, indicating a gradual resurgence.

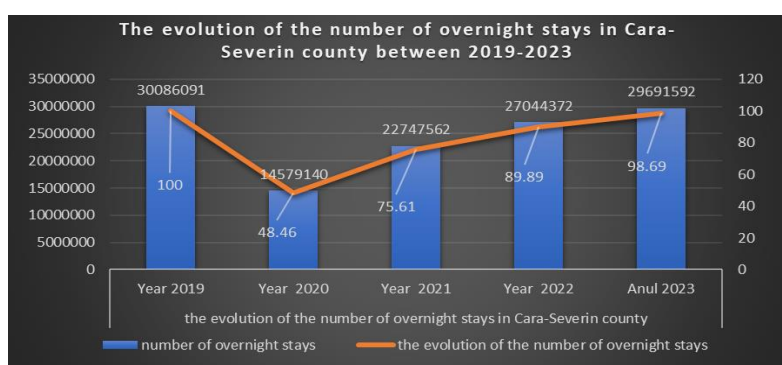


Figure 5. Evolution of the number of overnight stays in Caras-Severin county between 2019-2023

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

In 2019, the overnight stays marked a peak, akin to a crescendo in a symphony, where the hospitality industry reached a pinnacle. However, the harmony was disrupted in 2020, akin to an unexpected discordant note, precipitating a significant downturn due to external factors such as the global pandemic.

Despite the setback, the subsequent years witnessed a steady rebound akin to a phoenix rising from the ashes, symbolizing resilience and adaptability within the industry. This steady incline in overnight stays mirrors a gradual convalescence, akin to the convalescence of a patient recovering from an ailment, as confidence in travel and hospitality slowly but steadily returns.

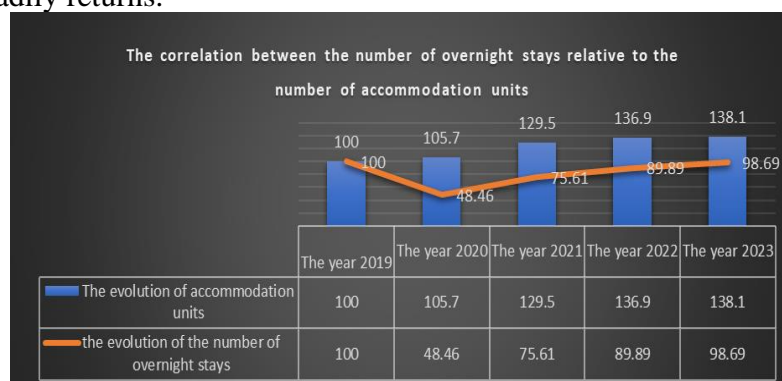


Figure 6. The correlation between the number of overnight stays relative to the number of accommodation units

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2024, [15]

The data reflects not just numbers but a story of perseverance and adaptation, illustrating how industries navigate through challenges and evolve over time. It's akin to a rollercoaster ride, with its twists and turns, yet ultimately showing an upward trajectory toward recovery and growth.

One of the most important roles in promoting Banat's cultural values belongs to the rural communities that still keep their customs and traditions unchanged. [14]

CONCLUSIONS

Between 2020 and 2021, national accommodation units surged by 37.12%, marking the steepest increase in five years. Caras-Severin county saw a remarkable 38.1% rise in accommodation units during the same period. Agrotourism pensions experienced a notable uptick of 16.5%, while apartments and rooms for rent claimed a 20.5% share. By 2021, rural accommodation units surpassed urban ones, catering to tourists eager to explore the scenic wonders of Caras-Severin County. [15]

The pandemic spurred the greatest increase, with a notable 23.8% surge in accommodation capacity. This rise mirrored the national trend, indicating a synchronized response across regions. Caras-Severin County emerged as a significant player, ranking second in tourist infrastructure development within the West Region, showcasing its commitment to bolstering hospitality services. Despite its commendable position, it trailed behind Hunedoara, signaling room for further growth and competition. Within the broader Patru Macroregion, encompassing Hunedoara and Valcea, Caras-Severin County secured a respectable third position, highlighting its regional prominence.

In the face of adversity, tourism faced a steep decline, with a staggering 51.54% drop in tourist numbers recorded in 2020. Recovery proved to be a gradual process, with pre-pandemic levels not regained until the conclusion of 2023, underscoring the industry's resilience amidst unprecedented challenges.

Interestingly, despite the expansion of accommodation units, there seemed to be no discernible correlation between the growth of overnight stays and the increase in accommodation capacity over the past five years. This finding suggests that factors beyond sheer availability of lodging play a role in shaping tourist behavior and preferences.

Furthermore, despite the substantial investment in accommodation infrastructure, Caras-Severin County's capacity utilization remained modest, reaching only 60% by 2023. This underlines the need for targeted efforts to enhance promotion and attract tourists, ensuring optimal utilization of existing resources.

In light of these insights, intensified promotion of tourist attractions emerges as a critical imperative for Caras-Severin County. Such efforts are indispensable for transforming the HORECA sector into a robust source of income for local residents, thereby fostering economic growth and sustainability within the region.

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