
**RESEARCH REGARDING THE ANALYSIS OF AGRITOURISM POTENTIAL
OF GORJ COUNTY**

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***Abstract:** With a diversified tourist potential, Gorj County is represented by a picturesque natural setting, monuments of art and architecture of great artistic value (many works being of international interest), representing an important folklore and ethnographic heritage, these settlements and places presenting their history from ancient times until today. Agritourism, a well-defined form of rural tourism, aims to spend free time in rural areas, in agritourism guesthouses or even on a farm. Gorj County is recognized at the regional level for the practice of this form of tourism. The agritourism areas are mainly found at the base of the mountain range, located in the northern part of the county. Here we meet rural communities that still keep alive the tradition and popular culture specific to the area: Barbasti, Borascu, Vladimir considered village ethnographic museums, Tismana recognized for fabrics, Galesoaia and Glogova for pottery and Telesti for the processing of wooden household objects.*

Key words: *sustainable development, agritourism, tourism resources, Gorj County*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the rural area is a relevant and important activity, the statement being justified first of all by the surface area of the rural area, and then by the rather large percentage of the population that lives and is occupied in various activities. [2] A sustainable community is one that retains control over development activity, through the decisions it creates and implements, supporting local sustainability. This sustainable community must possess various actors and institutions with the ability to mobilize resources and support some common actions that support the continuous development process. [6,8]

A high percentage of rural localities are considered to be good custodians of traditions, customs, and to create a tourist product "brand of rural areas" natural and human resources are added to these, but requiring careful coordination, so that they are capitalized emblematic elements such as:

- representative natural resources;
- the actual agricultural farm;
- the various tourist resources, known as "curiosities";
- the way of life specific to the rural environment, manifested through: existing traditions and customs, traditional crafts, architecture with rural characteristics and local gastronomic products. [9,12]

The place of agritourism within the forms of sustainable tourism and sustainable development is given by its specificity, as an activity that uses the physical and human environment as a tourist product. On the other hand, agritourism shares certain resources with other users (agriculture, industry, etc.). Approaching tourism from this perspective is required even more than in the case of other forms of tourism, considering the double direct contact of the agritourism activity with the environment [4,13]. Regarding the sustainable development of agritourism, the following major aspects must be taken into account: reduction of environmental degradation; conservation of natural and human resources, provision of additional incomes to people from rural communities with tourism potential.

Agritourism is a form of rural tourism developed as a complementary activity to agriculture, which aims to revitalize unprofitable agricultural activities and involves the full exploitation of all existing tourist resources, but in this case several aspects must be taken into account:

Agritourism should not come as a substitute for traditional agricultural occupations, so first of all the owner of a guesthouse/rural farm should carry out agricultural activities.

Since the essence of this form of tourism is the rural area/rural activities, the emphasis in creating the tourist product must be aimed at activities specific to the rural area (the one of combining tourism with agriculture).

Tourist villages, established on ecological principles, are considered those settlements, which have a rural, sustainable way of life as specific, being both new towns and old but renovated villages. [3,10] These localities as a whole are examples of development that combine representative principles: a representative quality of life, protection of local resources, an integrated approach to life in the countryside, carrying out activities on ecological principles. In the ecological village, education must be based on the creation of a sustainable rural development program, which integrates organic agriculture, renewable energy, treatment and reuse of waste water, waste recycling. [14]

Considering the future of rural communities from a tourist point of view and analyzing them for this purpose, we believe that their rustic and ethnographic specifics could and should be preserved and supported (adequately), otherwise, the current interest from tourists in the village tourism, for the rural environment, will gradually decrease [5]. The development of villages and ecotourism areas must bring direct income to the peasants and all citizens of the locality, and the local public administration must directly use the local budget to protect tourist resources. [8,15]

Gorj County is rich in natural resources and has great tourist potential, thanks to its picturesque landscapes, art and architecture monuments, of great value.

Gorj County is located in the southwestern part of Romania and is part of the SV Oltenia Region, along with 4 other counties: Dolj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea. Oltenia is known for its many touristic, natural and anthropic resources, many of which can also be found on the territory of the Gorj River. The degree of tourist attractiveness of Gorj County is 0.69%, exceeding the average of the region (0.55%) and having the second value at the regional level, after Mehedinți County - 0.72%.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to highlight the way in which the promotion of rural tourism and agritourism ensures the sustainable development of communities and rural areas, we carried out an analysis of the tourist activity carried out in the rural area of Gorj County. For this analysis we used the existing static data at the county level. Information sources are represented by official websites and documents existing at national or regional level.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The rural areas of Gorj County offer tourists a remarkable hospitality in a natural, unpolluted environment, numerous traditional gastronomic products, good quality wines, traditions and cultural-folklore customs from the Oltenia area. Although rural tourism, at the level of Gorj County, is still quite poorly developed, at the regional and local level, there are many houses and guesthouses that have adapted to the specific requirements of this type of tourism.

Table 1 shows the evolution over time of the number of accommodation units, at regional and county level. Regarding the situation of accommodation units, at the national

level, the SV Oltenia Region owns, in 2021, 7.3% of the total accommodation structures, most of them being concentrated in Valcea County: 43.24% and Gorj County – 27.03%. [16]

In the case of agritourism guesthouses, the SV Oltenia Region concentrates, at the level of 2021, 7.34% from the total of this category of accommodation units, existing at the national level. The distribution of agritourism guesthouses, at the regional level, is as follows: 38.19% are found from the territory of Gorj County, 32.68% from the territory of Valcea County and 24.01% in the territory of Mehedinți County (figure 1.), [1,16].

Table 1.

The evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, SV Oltenia Region, 2000-2021

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TOTAL	400	956	1354	1918	2028	2556	2821	2800	3022	3460
SV Oltenia Region	4	38	60	105	120	150	185	209	238	254
Dolj	:	1	:	7	8	12	11	10	9	9
Gorj	2	18	19	26	30	38	62	76	97	97
Mehedinți	:	1	9	19	22	31	31	41	50	61
Olt	:	:	:	:	1	3	4	4	3	4
Valcea	2	18	32	53	59	66	77	78	79	83

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

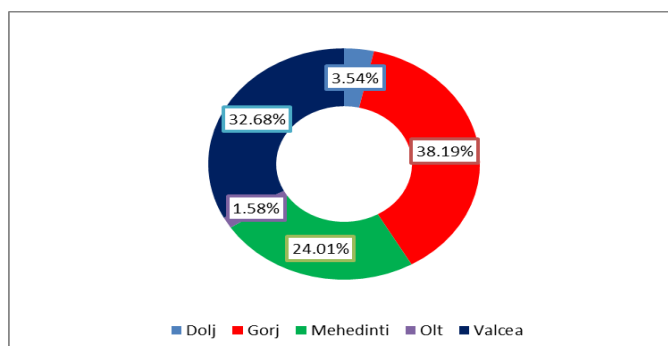


Figure 1. Distribution of agritourism guesthouses, by County, at regional level, 2021

Figure 2 shows the evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses at the level of the SV Oltenia Region and Gorj County, in the period 2000-2021.

During the analyzed period, at the regional level, the number of agritourism guesthouses increased 63.5 times, a fact due to the intensification of tourist activity in the rural areas of the region.

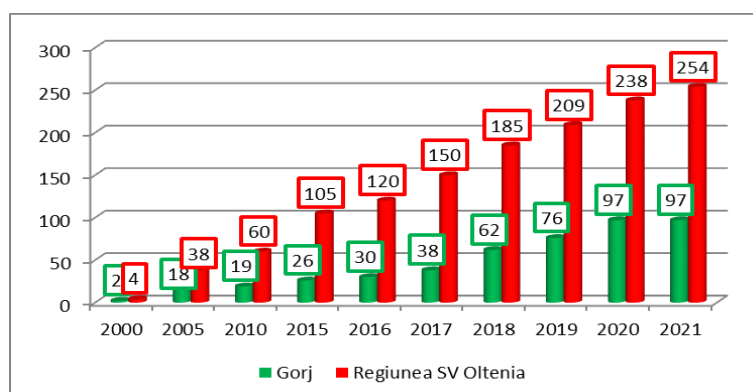


Figure 2. Evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, in the SV Oltenia Region, 200-2021, [16]

The development of agritourism activity and the intensification of the promotion of tourism resources specific to rural areas, determined the increase in the number of agritourism guesthouses at the level of Gorj County. In the period 2000-2021, this index experienced an increase of almost 50 times (48.5 times).

Table 2.

The evolution of the number of agritourism guesthouses, by localities, Gorj County, 2000-2021

	2005	2010	2015	2018	2019	2022	2021
Novaci	3	2	:	7	7	9	9
Arcani	1	1	1	3	4	5	5
Baia de Fier	1	7	9	18	18	26	24
Bumbesti-Pitic	:	:	:	:	1	2	2
Catunele	:	:	1	1	2	2	2
Crasna	:	1	1	2	4	6	6
Musetesti	:	:	2	5	5	5	5
Pades	:	1	2	1	1	2	2
Pestișani	2	1	3	4	3	6	5
Polovragi	3	1	2	3	6	6	8
Runcu	1	3	3	10	10	8	9
Scoarta	:	:	:	1	2	2	3
Stanesi	:	:	:	1	4	5	5
Turcinesti	:	:	:	1	1	4	4

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

At the county level, the agotourist guesthouses are unevenly distributed among the localities. The main localities that offer tourists, lovers of nature and popular traditions, the opportunity to stay in guesthouses or farms, at the level of Gorj County, are: Baia de Fier, which owns almost a quarter of these accommodation units - 24.74%, Novaci and Runcu – 9.28%, Polovragi – 8.25%, Crasna – 6.8% and Arcani, Musetesti, Stanesi and Pestisani – 5.15%. [16]

An important indicator in the analysis of the agritourism offer is the accommodation capacity. This is analyzed both in terms of existing and operational capacity.

Table 3.

The evolution of accommodation capacity, SV Oltenia Region, 2000-2021

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021
Existing accommodation capacity								
Dolj	:	20	:	159	201	169	147	156
Gorj	20	185	371	494	1038	1176	1493	1540
Mehedinti	:	13	176	390	548	716	830	928
Olt	:	:	:	:	45	45	39	45
Vâlcea	18	170	470	799	1174	1224	1211	1265
SV Region	38	388	1017	1842	3006	3330	3720	3934
Accommodation capacity in operation								
Dolj	:	7300	2907	56526	69088	59790	41109	48908
Gorj	4008	18806	86009	107385	262135	280522	263447	352133
Mehedinti	:	2782	44876	79655	126518	157775	139469	209743
Olt	:	:	:	:	12755	13505	12305	9490
Valcea	6210	26379	60301	280718	361844	381505	286233	380926
SV Region	10218	55267	194093	524284	832340	893097	742563	1001200

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

The existing accommodation capacity expresses the sum of the accommodation places made available to tourists by the accommodation units. The accommodation capacity in operation is expressed in the number of places-days, and indicates the total number of accommodation places, in relation to the duration of operation of each tourist unit, during a year.

Table 3 presents the existing and operational accommodation capacity for agritourism guesthouses registered at the level of the SV Oltenia Region.

In the period 2000-2021, at the regional level, there are increases in the indicator - accommodation capacity, both for the existing capacity (102.52%) and for the capacity in operation (96.98%). Gorj County owns 39.15% of the existing capacity in the SV Oltenia region and 35.17% of the capacity in operation.

The degree of intensive use of the accommodation capacity is a revealed indicator for the activity of any accommodation unit, indicating the efficiency of the use of accommodation spaces and existing facilities [3]. In the period 2000-2021, for the existing agritourism guesthouses at the level of the region, increases in this indicator are recorded, the highest values being recorded in the period 2019-2020. The highest degree of use of accommodation units is registered in Mehedinți County, in 2021, which is 32.37%, a value clearly higher than the regional average. In the 2020-2021 period, a period marked by the Covid-19 pandemic, there are reductions in the degree of utilization of the capacity of accommodation units, such as agritourism guesthouses, for all the counties of the region, but in smaller proportions, compared to other types of accommodation units accommodation. [14,16] This is due to the reduced capacity of the agritourism guesthouses, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the possibility of outdoor tourist activities, which reduced the possibility of the spread of the SARSCov 2 infection.

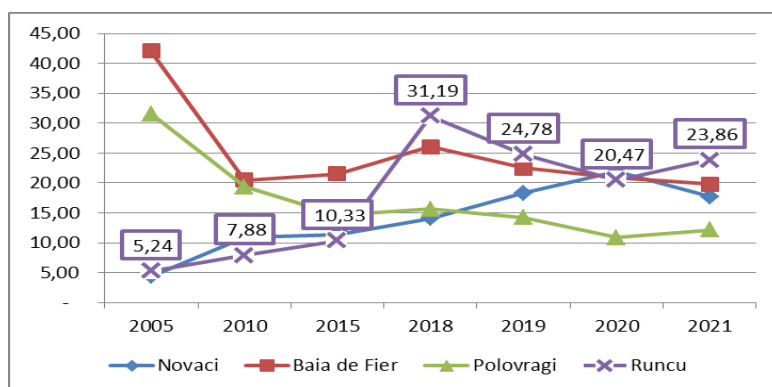


Figure 3. Evolution of the index of net use of the accommodation capacity, in the agritourism guesthouses in Gorj County, 2005-2021, [16]

The analysis of the indicator on the main localities of Gorj County (figure 3.3.), which have agritourism guesthouses, indicates that the highest degree of use of the accommodation capacity is recorded in Rucu locality (23.86% in 2021) and the lowest in the town of Polovragi (12.14%, in 2021). During the Covid 19 pandemic, decreases in the values of this indicator were recorded, for all localities that own agritourism guesthouses.[16]

Recently, there have been significant increases in the population's demand for tourism activities from countryside. The reasons underlying this situation are multiple, however, the main aspects are represented by the desire to spend a day in the countryside, the clean air and tranquility existing in the countryside, the preservation and conservation of ancestral traditions and customs, etc.

Regarding tourist arrivals in agritourism guesthouses in the SV Oltenia Region, we present table 4.

In the period 2000-2021, at the level of the SV Oltenia Region, there is a tendency to increase the number of tourists who opted for accommodation in agritourism guesthouses, growth supported by the intensification of rural tourism activities. However, in 2020, due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic, decreases in this indicator were recorded, compared to 2019 (-20.57%). In 2021, a slight increase is observed compared to 2020, [16].

The growing trend of tourist arrivals, at the regional level, can be observed both in the case of Romanian and foreign tourists. In 2020, there were decreases in the arrivals of tourists, from agritourism guesthouses, at the regional level, for both categories of tourists, with a greater amplitude, in the case of foreign tourists (- 615.90% in 2020, compared to 2019). The year 2021 determines an increase in foreign tourist arrivals, however, still at a lower value than in 2019.

Table 4.

The evolution of tourist arrivals in agritourism guesthouses, SV Oltenia Region, 2000-2021

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total								
Dolj	:	477	116	7822	7410	6830	2898	6750
Gorj	45	2095	5210	7389	25550	24472	22951	32869
Mehedinti	:	63	3888	12726	23866	33323	27997	32262
Olt	:	:	:	:	2090	1675	537	596
Valcea	691	2206	2590	13525	23476	26536	19087	29537
SV Region	736	4841	11804	41462	82392	92836	73470	102014
Total	28152	170164	289923	672756	1173455	1272878	755436	1087327
Romanians								
Dolj	:	285	116	7314	6519	6505	2733	6693
Gorj	37	1975	5146	7341	24911	23656	22789	32049
Mehedinti	:	53	3745	11840	22506	32004	27974	32199
Olt	:	:	:	:	2051	1659	528	581
Valcea	691	2163	2516	13017	23074	26356	19075	29324
SV Region	728	4476	11523	39512	79061	90180	73099	100846
Total	24962	152521	270246	622187	1083662	1171790	745535	1061917
Foreigners								
Dolj	:	:	:	508	891	325	165	57
Gorj	:	:	64	48	639	816	162	820
Mehedinti	:	:	143	886	1360	1319	23	63
Olt	:	:	:	:	39	16	9	15
Valcea	:	:	74	508	402	180	12	213
SV Region	:	:	281	1950	3331	2656	371	1168
Total	:	:	19677	50569	89793	101088	9901	25410

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

At the level of Gorj County, a situation similar to the one existing at the regional level is recorded. If, as a whole, tourist arrivals increased more than 730 times, in the period 2000-2021, in 2020, a decrease of 6.21% was recorded compared to 2019, and in 2021, an increase of 25.54% compared to the same year 2019.

In the case of Romanian tourists who chose the agritourism guesthouses of Gorj County, the decrease related to 2020 is much lower (-3.80%), compared to the one recorded in the case of foreign tourists (-403.70%). This was determined by the restrictions imposed during the pandemic. The year 2021 indicates important increases in the arrivals

of both Romanian and foreign tourists, in both cases being exceeded the number of tourist arrivals, registered at the level of 2019.

The distribution of tourist arrivals in existing agritourist guesthouses at the level of Gorj County indicates a greater concentration in the summer, between June and September, and in the winter, between December and January [1,11].

In the first part of the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, March - May 2020, a large reduction in tourist arrivals is observed. During this period, with the exception of the Turcinești locality, where tourist arrivals were recorded, all other agritourism guesthouses did not register tourist arrivals.

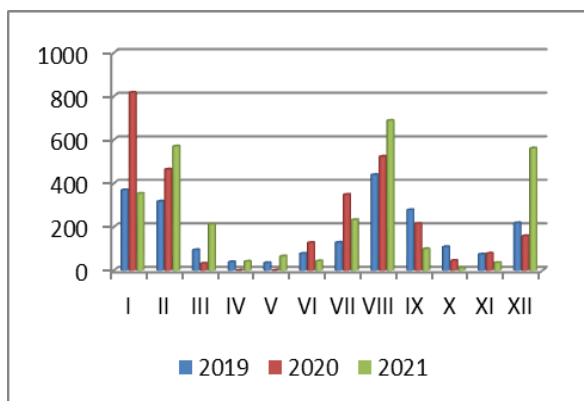


Figure 4. Evolution of tourist arrivals, per month, Novaci, 2019-2021, [16]

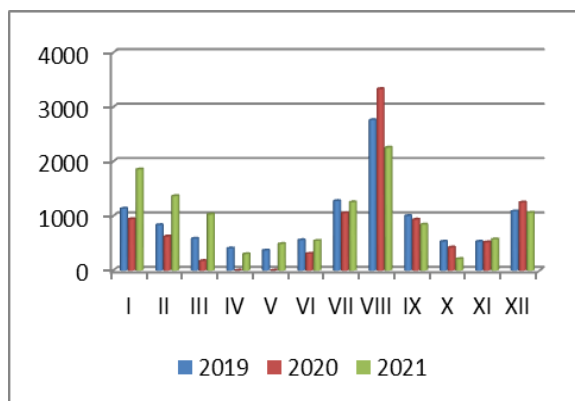


Figure 5. Evolution of tourist arrivals, per month, Baia de Fier, 2019-2021, [16]

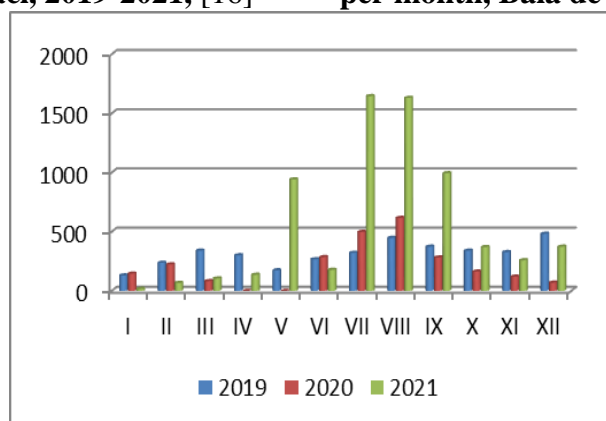


Figure 6. Evolution of tourist arrivals, per month, Rucu, 2019-2021, [16]

In the presented figures, it can be seen the decrease in tourist arrivals during the Covid-19 pandemic. As in the case of the recorded situation, at the county level, there is a lack of tourist arrivals between March and May 2020, a fact due to the limitation of activities in the HoReCa system during this period.

An important indicator used in the analysis of tourist demand is the overnight stays of tourists in reception structures with accommodation function. In table 5, we present the situation of overnight stays by tourists, in agro-tourist guesthouses in Gorj County, for the period 2010-2021.

Table 5.
The evolution of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses, SV Oltenia Region, 2000-2021

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021
SV Region	1150	12144	31201	79638	164925	192636	149348	191541
Dolj	:	663	249	10669	12422	10869	5126	8019
Gorj	150	5313	15103	19498	53493	50613	44401	58159
Mehedinti	:	63	10091	23894	47466	67477	61463	67901
Olt	:	:	:	:	4010	4311	1141	1965
Valcea	1000	6105	5758	25577	47534	59366	37217	55497

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

In the period 2000-2021, the value of the indicator - number of overnight stays, increased by 93.99%, a fact due to the intensification of rural tourism activity and the increase in the number of agritourism guesthouses, at the regional level. In 2020, there was a decrease in the number of overnight stays, a fact due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, even if the pandemic continued, the lifting of restrictions favored the intensification of agritourism activity. [16] The reduced accommodation capacity of agritourism guesthouses and the possibility of outdoor tourist activities allowed the revival of this type of tourism, a fact highlighted by the increase in the value of this indicator.

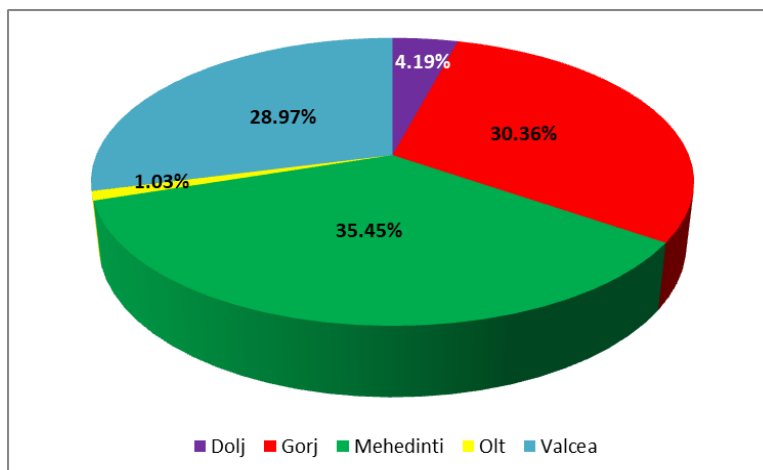


Figure 7. The situation of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses in the counties of the SV Oltenia Region, 2021, [16]

The distribution of overnight stays among the component counties of the SV Oltenia Region indicates the highest concentration of overnight stays in Mehedinti County - 35.45%, followed by Gorj County - 30.36% and Valcea County - 28.97%.

Figure 8 shows the average length of stay in agritourist guesthouses from the SV Oltenia Region, in the period 2000-2021.

For the calculation of this indicator, the number of overnight stays is reported to the number of arrived tourists, at the level of the accommodation unit.

At the regional level, the evolution of the indicator is fluctuating, marked by both increases and decreases. In 2021, the average length of stay was 1.88 days/tourist, down from previous years.

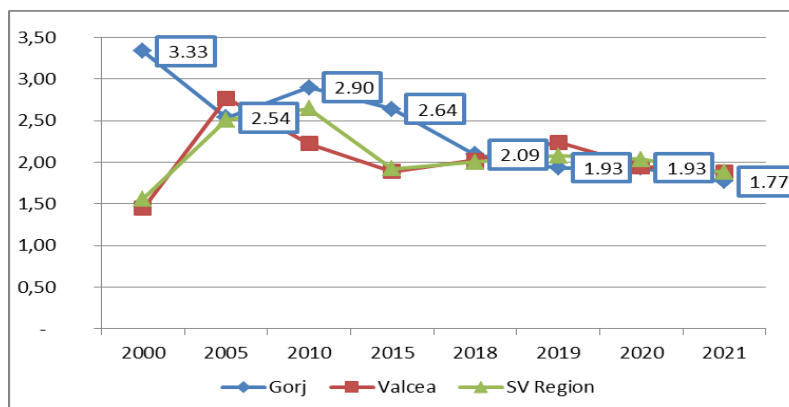


Figure 8. Average length of stay, SV Oltenia Region, 2021, [16]

At the level of Gorj County, there is a constant decrease in the average length of stay. In 2021, the value of this indicator was 1.77 days/tourist, a value lower than the regional average.

CONCLUSIONS

The tourist potential of Gorj County is very varied, being determined by the multitude of natural resources, represented by alpine areas with glacial lakes, great ridges, caves, gorges and gorges, as well as the skiing areas from Ranca. Human resources must also be mentioned: Brancusi's works, places of worship, monasteries and churches, etc.

Local gastronomy is another very well-utilized tourist resource through agritourism. On the territory of Gorj County, we meet numerous tourist destinations which offer to tourists the opportunity to taste traditional products specific to the area. Traditional gastronomic products can be served both in specialty restaurants, located in urban centers, but especially in agritourism guesthouses in rural areas: Baia de Fier, Novaci, Ranca, Polovragi.

The cultural-folkloric events organized in Gorj County represent real motivations for the practice of agritourism in the areas where they are organized: the International Folklore Festival and the Fair of folk craftsmen from Romania, Targu-Jiu; The Intercounty Festival of Pastoral Folklore and the "Capture of the Mountain/Sheep's Climb to the Mountain" Festival; The Tismana folk song and port festival; Nedeia and Balciul of "St. Iliia" Polovragi; Baia de Fier Intercounty Festival of Pastoral Folklore "The descent of the sheep from the mountain".

In recent years, agritourism has developed a lot, in response to the desire of the inhabitants of the urban environment to spend their free time, in rural space, either for recreation, in a quiet and unpolluted environment, or because of the desire to participate in protection actions and environmental conservation or agricultural activities. In this sense, the development and promotion of tourist products is required, which will increase the number of tourist attractions and activities available to tourists. Also, a stronger promotion of traditional rural events is required, which will facilitate the planning of tourist stays and the sustainable development of nature reserves.

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