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Diana Necula and Raluca Necula

ICEADR- Bucharest, USAMV-Bucharest

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ANALYSIS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEREI PARISH IN THE TOURISM AND AGROTOURISM IN BUZAU COUNTY

Necula Diana¹, Necula Raluca²

Summary: *The paper is analysing the evolution of the main indicators that characterize tourism and agrotourism in Buzau County, emphasizing the contribution that the Merei Parish has in attracting tourists in this area, by calculating the weight held by the number of the touristic structures, of the housing capacity, the arrivals and overnights of the tourists from the registered total in Buzau County. The Merei Parish represents one of the key points of attraction for both Romanian and foreign tourists, benefiting from many views, a treatment resort, an area that is favorable to the development of the majority of types of tourism, including agrotourism, also being an area where agrotouristical activities can take place and high quality products can be produced in order to trade them in boarding houses.*

Key words: *tourism, agrotourism, Buzău Parish, Merei County.*

INTRODUCTION

For its historical significance and especially for the very beautiful mountain and hill areas, Buzau County is a special attraction for the tourists who come to spend their spare time here.

Regarding tourism potential, Buzau County stands out because of some landscapes of a beauty that is rarely seen in Romania. When you say Buzau, you think, first of all about the Mud Volcanoes, about the cave settlements and about Sarata Monteoru resort from Merei Parish.

The Merei Parish has a special sightseeing potential, due to the existence of the Sarata Monteoru balneary resort, of the oil mine, unique in Europe, of the arboretum set in the Monteoru mansion's yard.

Sarata Monteoru was chosen to be the representative headquarters in Buzau County, because of the fact that it is one of the main tourism attractions in the County, this destination having an enormous potential in attracting foreign tourists, but it's conditioned by the service offerings which has to be adapted to the international demands and standards.

The resort is famous for its salted, iodided, brominated, magnesian, sulphurous, calcic mineral water springs and for the submission mineral mire from the natural sulphurous springs. These are indicated in the treatment of the locomotor apparatus conditions, in the gastrointestinal conditions, hepatobiliary.

Another point of attraction for the extreme sport lovers, is the biggest zip line in the country, 200 meters and another of 40 meters for children. Also, a climbing wall, as well as a bike renting center in order to be able to visit all the attractions in the area.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The indicators that were used emphasize the evolution of the studied data studied by analysing the period's averages and growths throughout each year.

Dynamic analysis (housing capacity-CC)

Abnormalities in absolute measures: with a fix base: $\Delta CC = CC_n - CC_0$,

Fix base indexes : $I_{CC} = (CC_n / CC_0) * 100$

For this one, it is considered one of the variables as an independent variable or a predictor variable (t), and the other variable as a dependent variable or response variable (nr/an).

The formulas that are used to calculate these indexes are:

For the arithmetic mean = $\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x_i}{n}$; in which : x_i = average values on a number of years;

n = the number of years taken under consideration

¹ Scientific Researcher, Necula Diana, ICEADR, necula.diana@iceadr.ro

² Assistant Dr. Necula Raluca, USAMV-Bucharest

The annual rate of growth = $r_{2003-2013} = \sqrt[10]{\prod (p1/p0)} - 1$; where :
 $r_{2003-2013}$ = annual rate; $\prod p1/p0$ = growth linked indexes.

OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The evolution of the tourist accomodation structures

The tourist accomodation structures are defined as: Any constructions and appliances intended, by design and execution, for accomodation or for serving meals for tourists, together with the associated specific services.

The tourist accomodation structures include, apartment hotels, motels, youth hostels, hostels, villas, cottages, bungalows, holiday villages, trailer camps, apartments or rooms for rent in family homes or in buildings with another destination, river and sea ships, touristic boardings and agrotouristic boardings, other units with tourist accomodation functions.

By analysing the evolution of the tourist accomodation structure types in Merei Parish from Buzau County (table nr.1) it's found that that from the referance year 2003 until 2013 their number increased by 37,5%.

Table nr. 1 The dynamic of the structures types of tourist accomodation and of agrotouristic boardings in Buzau County and Merei Parish during 2003-2013

Structure types of tourist accomodation	County/ Locality	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Medium rate	Annual rate
		Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	%	%
Total	Buzau County	38	49	57	66	71	71	85	88	160.3	8.76
	Merei Parish	16	21	16	18	18	18	22	22	108	3.24
	% from County total	42.1	42.8	28.0	27.2	25.3	25.3	25.8	25	X	X
Agrotouristic boardings	Buzau County	8	18	26	31	33	30	42	44	337.5	18.59
	% from the County total structure	21.05	36.73	45.61	46.97	46.48	42.25	49.41	50	X	X
	Merei Parish	4	8	9	9	9	8	13	13	215.9	12.51
	% from County total	50	44.4	34.6	29.0	27.3	26.6	30.9	29.5	X	X
	% from the County total structure	25	38.1	56.2	50.0	50.0	44.4	59.1	59.1	X	X

Source: Own calculations after data taken from the Romania Statistical Yearbook, data series 2003-2013, NSI

By analysing the data from table nr.1 regarding the tourist accomodation structure from Merei Parish, we consider that thier development trend has been sinously increasing.

Their share in the tourist accomodation structures total in Buzau County represents only 25%, due to the significantly increasing number of structures at County level by 131,58.% in 2013 compared to reference year 2003.

Agrotouristic boardings represent 25% from the total tourist accomodation strucures in 2003 reaching to represent more than a half, meaning 59,09% in 2013.

Even though the number of boardings increased in the analysed period from 4 boardings in 2003 to 13 agrotouristic boardings in 2012, with an annual growth rate of 12,51%, their share in the total amount of agrotouristic boardings in Buzau County has decreased from 2003 (50%) until 2013 when it registered a share of 29,55% from the total of agrotouristic boardings in the County.

2. Housing capacity

Tourist housing capacity represents the number of accomodations of tourism pupose registered in the last document of reception, ratification, classification of the tourist accomodation with housing fractions, excluding the extra beds that can be installed if necessary.

Table nr. 2. The dynamic of the housing capacity in the Merei Parish compared to Buzau County on tourist accomodation structure types between 2003-2012

Specification	Localities	2003	2005	2007	2011	2012	2013	Medium rate	Annual rate
		nr acc	nr acc	nr acc	nr acc	nr acc	nr acc	%	%
Total	Buzau County	2653	2382	2181	2748	3097	3158	94.4	1.76
	Merei Parish	1074	965	653	889	889	889	73.3	-1.87
	% Buzau County total structure	40.48	40.51	29.94	32.35	28.71	28.15	X	X
Agrotouristic boardings	Buzau County	117	262	365	496	809	853	375.7	21.98
	Merei Parish	42	107	123	142	272	272	331.6	20.54
	% total boardings in Buzau County	35.9	40.84	33.7	28.63	33.62	31.89	X	X
	% from the total structure in the County	3.91	11.09	18.84	15.97	30.6	30.6	X	X

Source: Own calculations after data taken from the Romania Statistical Yearbook, data series 2003-2013, NSI

Buzau County's housing capacity had a continuous growth in the accomodation structures, except for the year 2004 when a decrease of almost 33% from the previous year was registered. In 2013 it reaches a growth of 19,04% compared to the same year. In the Merei Parish, where in 2003, 1074 housings were registered, in 2004 this number decreases by 60,71%, the trend being an increasing one in the next period, reaching, 889 housings in 2011, 17,23% less than the year of reference. This situation stayed the same until 2013.

The share of available housing in the Merei Parish's from the total housing capacity per County, decreased from 40,48% in 2003, to 28.71% in 2012 and 28,15% in 2013.

Regarding the housing capacity in the agrotouristic boardings from the Merei Parish, this has a significant growth. If in the year 2003 there were 42 accomodations available, in 2008 it reaches a housing capacity of 132 accomodations and at the end of the analysed period, it registers 272 available accomodations, representing a growth of 547,62 % compared to 2003.

If in 2003 the number of available accomodations in the agrotouristic boardings had a share of 3,91% from the total County accomodation capacity, in 2013 things stand very differently, this share reaching 30%. It appears that a third of the County housing capacity comes from the Merei Parish.

3. Tourist Circulation

Table nr. 3 The analysis of the evolution of the number of arrivals in the tourist accomodation structures in Buzau County and Merei Parish, between 2003-2013

Specification	Localities	2003	2005	2007	2011	2012	2013	Medium rate	Annual rate
		nr of peop.	nr of peop.	nr of peop.	nr of peop.	nr of peop.	nr of peop.	%	%
Total	Buzau County	61304	63226	64584	48128	56991	63593	100.7	0.37
	Merei Parish	6944	9127	12586	12418	11997	11087	163.8	4.79
	% County total structure	11.33	14.44	19.49	25.8	21.05	17.43	X	X
Agrotouristic boardings	Buzau County	2322	5462	9458	9809	12717	12273	373.1	18.12
	Merei Parish	572	2632	3480	3180	3168	3020	502.2	18.1
	% from County total	24.63	48.19	36.79	32.42	24.91	24.6	X	X
	% Merei Parish total structure	8.24	28.84	27.65	25.61	26.41	27.23	X	X

Source: Own calculations after data taken from the Romania Statistical Yearbook, data series 2003-2013, NSI

As seen in the data included in table nr.3, in 2003 were registered the arrivals of 61304 people. In 2004 their number grew by 11,29%, showing then a decrease until 2007. The biggest growth is registered in 2008, of 16,36% compared to 2003. At the opposite, the year 2011, registers the biggest decrease from the analysed period of 21,49% compared to the year of reference. In 2013 the number of arrivals in the accomodation structures in the County increases by 12% compared to previous year.

Compared to the arrivals in the County, the number of arrivals in the Merei Parish, has a significant growth. In 2012 the number of arrivals increases in a very large percent, 72,77% compared to 2003, but the most important growth in registered in 2010 when the growth percent exceeds 150%. In 2013 there is a small decrease in the number of arrivals by 5% compared to last year.

The agrotourist boardings from the Parish had a number of tourist arrivals of 572 people in 2003, reaching 3168 people in 2012, which means a growth of 453,85% compared to 2003, but, in this case also, in 2013 the number of arrivals decreases by 5% compared to last year.

The share of tourist arrivals in the agrotourist boardings from the Parish has a 24,61% percent from the County's total in 2013, which means a quarter of the total arrivals at the agrotouristic boardings in the entire Buzau County.

In 2003 the share of arrivals at the agrotouristic boardings represented 8,24% from the total of arrivals in the Merei Parish and 0,93% from the total of tourist arrivals from the accomodation structures total in Buzau County. In 2013 the arrivals at the agrotouristic boardings represented 27,24% of the total tourist arrivals in the Parish and 4,75% from the total of arrivals throughout the County in all the accomodation structures.

Table nr. 4 The analysis of the evolution of the number of overnights in the accomodation structures in Buzau County and Merei Parish, between 2003-2013

Specification	Localities	2003	2005	2007	2011	2012	2013	Medium rate	Annual rate
		Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	Nr.	%	%
Total	Buzau County	169686	158998	182862	153856	166716	182934	100.3	0.75
	Merei Parish	65370	64086	71577	79377	76070	65739	103.7	0.06
	% County total structure	38.52	40.31	39.14	51.59	45.63	35.94	X	X
Agrotouristic boardings	Buzau County	3454	8464	16259	17419	21262	20043	419.7	19.22
	Merei Parish	681	3234	4321	5996	5874	5041	664.8	22.16
	% County boardings total	19.72	38.21	26.58	34.42	27.63	25.15	X	X
	% Parish total structure	1.04	5.05	6.04	7.55	7.72	7.66	X	X

Source: Own calculations after data taken from the Romania Statistical Yearbook, data series 2003-2013, NSI

Overnights have a growth rate of 0,75% in Buzau County's accomodation structures in the analysed period.

In Merei Parish overnights in the accomodation structures increase from 2003 until 2012 by 11,37%, but in 2013 there is a decrease of 10% compared to last year. The overnight share in the tourist accomodation structures from the Merei Parish represented, in 2012, 45,63% from the overnight total in Buzau County and in 2013, 35,94% percents.

Regarding the overnights in the agrotouristic boardings in Buzau County, they increased in 2012 by 515,58% compared to the reference year 2003. The year 2013 registeres, however, a 28% decrease compared to last year. In the Merei Parish, a spectacular increase of 762,56% is observed in 2012, followed in 2013 by a small decrease of 12% compared to last year. The annual growth rate is 19,22% in Buzau County and 27,17% in the Parish.

If in 2003 the overnights agrotourist boardings share in the Merei County represented 19,72% from the overnights total, in 2012 it owned 27,63% percents, and in 2013 it registers a share of 25,15%.

Even though boardings have more than 59% from the accomodation structures in the Parish, the hotels in the Parish have the biggest percent with a share of 88,66%, which shows that tourists prefer hotels as accomodation structure in a bigger percent, even though the area has a high agrotouristic potential.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Buzau County represents an attraction for all types of tourists, due to the fact that along the County one can find areas where to engage in different activities of recreation, relaxation, treatment, etc. The analysis on the data shows the fact that, even though the potential is high, there is still the need to develop the accomodation structure basis, to improve the infrastructure considerably and to find new ways of increasing the number of visitors.

2. It also requires working on the development of the tourism offer and of the modern and inovative services in order to maintain and attract new tourists to Buzau County and also Merei Parish's interest areas. Also, the focused on activities, according to the EU standards are the increase of competitiveness by optimising the values chain in the local tourism industry, improving the quality of the touristic services (services that reach the european standards).

3. The analysed data show the special importance that the Merei Parish has in the Buzau tourism and agrotourism, the shares that it had on the analysed indexes evolutions are big enough, reaching even a quarter of the recordings that were made.

4. Agrotourism is still an underdeveloped part, it's shortcomings are being felt on an accomodation structures level, housing capacity as well as on the people who prefer hotels to agrotouristic boardings.

5. An increase of the provided service's quality is necessary, as well as the diversification of entertainment. The promotion of the touristic area, and of the Merei Parish especially, should be done better, so that it would bring a change in the tourist preferences, by orienting them toards agrotourism.

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