

THE TOURIST ACCOMMODATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE MOUNTAINOUS AND MARGINAL CONTACT AREA OF MUREȘ COUNTY - THE DECISIVE FACTOR FOR THE ELABORATION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGIES

Andreea-Maria CRĂCIUN¹, Ștefan DEZSI² ,
Florin POP¹, Judith NYULAS¹

ABSTRACT. – **The Tourist Accommodation Infrastructure in the Mountainous and Marginal Contact Area of Mureș County - the Decisive Factor for the Elaboration of Sustainable Tourism Strategies.** The analysis of the tourist accommodation infrastructure of the mountainous and marginal contact area of Mureș County is part of a larger study on tourism in the area. This paper has analyzed statistical data on tourism structures with accommodation functions and their accommodation capacity in 2024 from a triple perspective: based on data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism (MEDAT) and, last but not least, data obtained through our own investigation. The purpose of this work is to provide a clear and close picture of the existing tourist accommodation units in the reference area so that the results obtained can be used to carry out the following sequences of the study and to foreshadow tourism development strategies in the area. As in the case of other economic activities, tourism has had periods of decline, stagnation, and positive evolution over the years, determined either by political, natural, social or economic causes.

Keywords: *Mureș County, mountain and marginal contact area, tourist infrastructure, accommodation units.*

¹ "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Geography, Doctoral School of Geography, 5-7 Clinicilor Street, Cluj-Napoca, e-mails: andreea.craciun@ubbcluj.ro, florin.pop@ubbcluj.ro, judit.nyulas@ubbcluj.ro

² "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Geography, Center for Research on Settlements and Urbanism, 5-7 Clinicilor Street, Cluj-Napoca, e-mail: stefan.dezsi@ubbcluj.ro



1. INTRODUCTION

As a main element in tourism, the accommodation infrastructure holds a significant percentage in terms of revenues from tourism activities, being characterized by some heterogeneity compared to the other components of the technical and material base (Cocean and Dezsi, 2009).

The tourist accommodation infrastructure groups several types of tourist accommodation units, individualized according to certain criteria: size, comfort, period of use, type of tourism, functionality, etc. Thus, no less than 16 types of accommodation units operate in Romania, mentioned by the legislation in force: *hotels, apartment hotels, hostels, motels, tourist villas, tourist chalets, bungalows, holiday villages, campsites, tourist stops, camping-type cottages, apartments and rooms for rent in family homes, river and sea vessels including floating pontoons, tourist guesthouses and agro-tourism guesthouses and other units with tourist accommodation functions* (Romanian Government, 1998). These categories of tourist accommodation units are classified by comfort categories according to certain methodological norms (National Tourism Authority, 2013), as well as tourism licenses (<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/148944>). Thus, the following comfort categories are assigned to each category of tourist accommodation unit: between 1 and 5 stars in the case of hotels and tourist villas, between 1 and 5 stars or 1 to 5 daisies in the case of tourist/agritourism guesthouses; apartment-hotels (between 2 and 5 stars); hostels (between 1 and 3 stars); campsites, camping-type cabins and tourist stops (between 1 and 4 stars); motels, bungalows, cabins, apartments and rooms for rent (classified between 1 and 3 stars); holiday villages (2 or 3 stars).

2. METHODOLOGY, DATA AND MATERIALS

This paper is part of a larger study on tourism in the mountainous and marginal contact areas of Mureș County, which targets all components of the tourism sector. To prepare this paper, the relevant specialized literature for the topic has been assessed, primarily theoretical studies (Dezsi, 2006a, Ciangă, 2007; Ciangă and Dezsi, 2007; Cocean and Dezsi, 2009), as well as applied studies that treated the study area (Crăciun, Dezsi, Pop, 2022) or nearby areas (Dezsi, 2006b, Gherman-Henning, 2017). Taking into account the relevant legislation that had an impact on the development of tourism in the mountainous and marginal contact areas (Vasloban, 2008, Dezsi *et al*, 2014, Oltean and Gabor, 2016, Răcășan, 2018, Rusu, 2022), existing development strategies at the level of

the municipalities of the study area for the period 2021-2027 have been analysed (Consiliul Județean Mureș, 2021, Primăria Sovata, 2021). The next step was to collect statistical data on the existing accommodation infrastructure, thus using the online database made available by the National Institute of Statistics (<http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>), the database made available by the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism (<https://turism.gov.ro/web/autorizare-turism/>), as well as those obtained following our own field investigations.

The analysis has focused on identifying the differences in the structure and typology of tourist accommodation units, as well as their accommodation capacity. The distribution of accommodation units at the level of the municipalities in the study area has also been analysed in order to identify possible inconsistencies between the three sources mentioned above and to establish the level of the size of the tourist accommodation infrastructure and its accommodation capacity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Regarding the study area, after reviewing the list of tourist accommodation units existing in 2024, 15 categories of tourist accommodation units have been identified according to both the INS and MEDAT. However, there is a difference between the two data sources, in the sense that, according to the INS, some of them are *tourist cottages*, while on the MEDAT, they are *camping cottages* (in the analysis, we considered them as a single type of structure). Another difference is related to *rental apartments*, respectively *rental rooms*, which appear on the INS only as *rental apartments*, and within MEDAT these represent two different categories of tourist accommodation units. Finally, MEDAT does not register accommodation structures such as *student camps* and *bungalows*, and they are found only on the INS list.

The graph below (Fig. 1) shows the number of tourist accommodation units related to each category mentioned above, made from the triple perspective. Following the analysis, one notices that the highest number of tourist accommodation units belongs to *rooms for rent*, followed by *tourist guesthouses* and *apartments for rent*. At the opposite end are the tourist accommodation units from the category of *holiday villages*, *camps* and *campsites* which comprise between 1 and 3 structures.

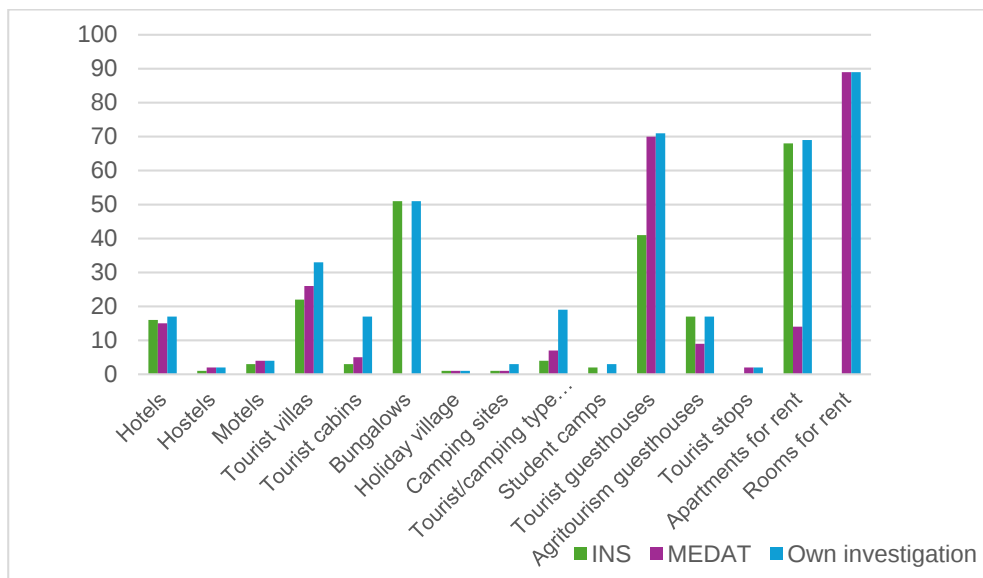


Fig. 1. Number of tourist accommodation units in the study area
Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

Table 1. Numerical distribution of types of tourist accommodation units in 2024
 according to different sources

Category of tourist accommodation units	INS	MEDAT	Own investigation
Hotels	16	15	17
Hostels	1	2	2
Motels	3	4	4
Tourist villas	22	26	33
Tourist cabins	3	5	17
Bungalows	51		51
Holiday villages	1	1	1
Camping sites	1	1	3
Tourist/camping type cabins	4	7	19
Student camps	2		3
Tourist guesthouses	41	70	71
Agritourism guesthouses	17	9	17
Tourist stops		2	2
Apartments for rent	68	14	69
Rooms for rent		89	89
Total	230	245	398

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

Thus, it is noticeable that, although two official sources have been reviewed, there are still quite obvious differences that are not only found in the case of the types of tourist accommodation units, but also in terms of their total number in 2024 (238 units - INS, and 257 units – MEDAT respectively), as well as the number of existing accommodation beds (5401 beds - INS, and 6111 – MEDAT respectively). In addition to these two sources that have been taken into account, information has been obtained from our own investigations that have also identified other tourist accommodation structures that are not on the list of any official source mentioned above, namely 49 units identified within 12 municipalities. In the case of the existing accommodation capacity in the mountainous and marginal contact area of Mureş County, our own investigation was used, as a result of which a large difference was found between the number of beds provided by INS (5401 beds) and MEDAT, 6111 beds respectively), as we have identified 787 accommodation beds in addition to the two sources. Regarding our own investigation, one must mention that tourist accommodation units have been identified that appear registered within MEDAT with a lower number of places than in reality (e.g. Cabana Şestina - 22 beds according to MEDAT, 51 beds - our own investigation; Valea Regilor Happy Camp - 6 places MEDAT, 12 places, our own investigation).

Table 2. Number of tourist accommodation units and tourist accommodation capacity (accommodation beds) in 2024

Category	Information source	Study area
Tourist accommodation units	MEDAT	257
	INS	238
	Own investigation	306
Accommodation beds	MEDAT	6111
	INS	5401
	Own investigation	6898

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

The analysis of the capacity of tourist accommodation units shows that although hotels are not found in a high number within the study area (16 according to INS), this category of tourist accommodation units has the highest number of accommodation beds (1866 beds according to INS), followed by rooms for rent, and apartments for rent respectively. The high number of accommodation beds in hotels is explained by the fact that most hotels are located in the city - spa resort of Sovata.

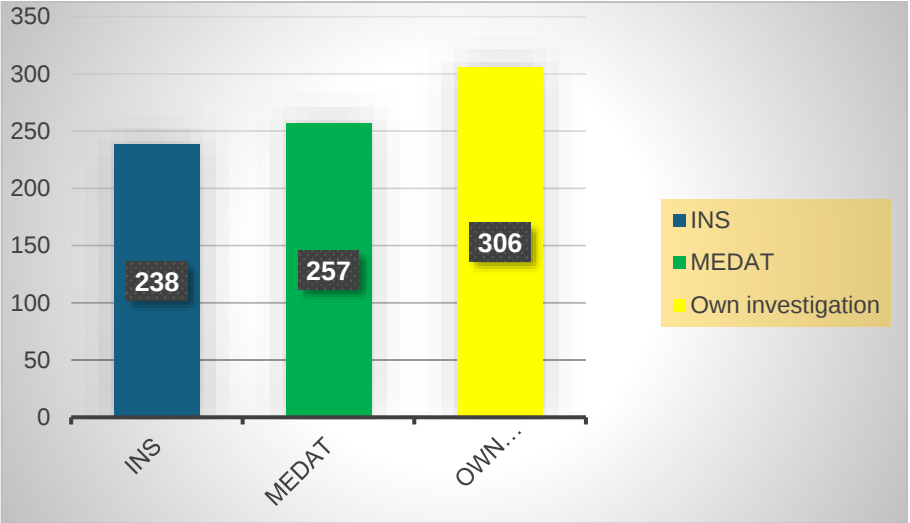


Fig. 2. Distribution of the number of tourist accommodation units (triple perspective) in 2024

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

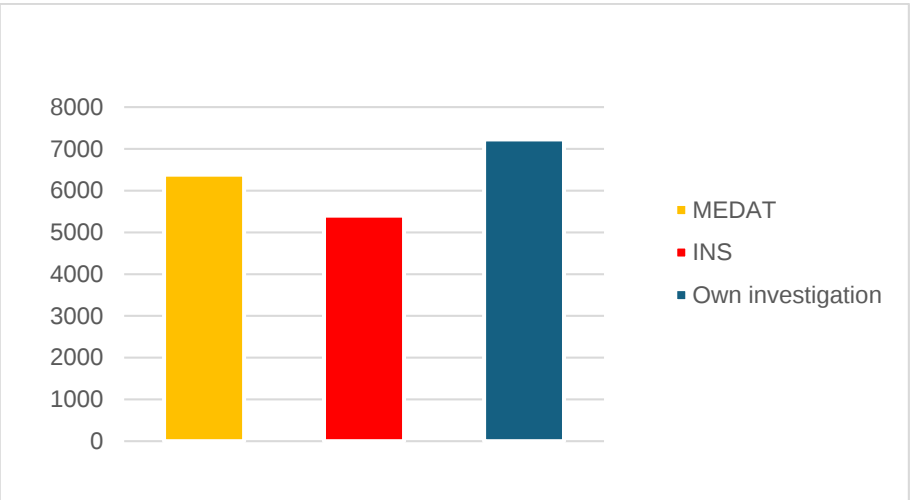


Fig. 3. Distribution of accommodation beds in 2024 - triple perspective

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

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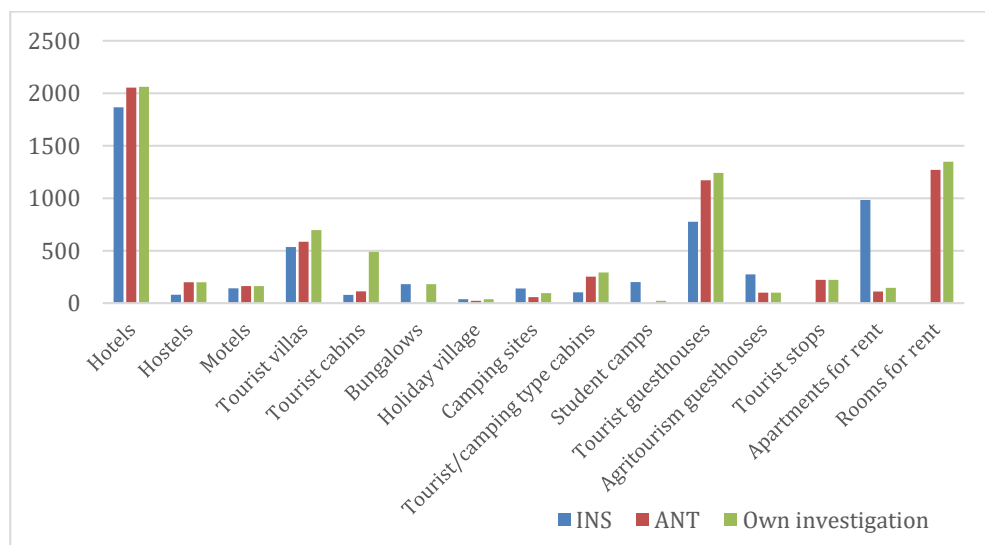


Fig. 4. Distribution of the number of accommodation beds in the study area by types of accommodation units in 2024 (triple perspective)

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

Table 3. Distribution of the number of accommodation beds in the study area in 2024 - triple perspective

Type of accommodation structure	INS	MEDAT	Own investigation
Hotels	1866	2054	2062
Hostels	81	200	200
Motels	141	163	163
Tourist villas	535	585	697
Tourist cabins	79	112	490
Bungalows	182		182
Holiday villages	38	22	38
Camping sites	140	58	96
Tourist/camping type cabins	104	253	293
Student camps	201		22
Tourist guesthouses	776	1171	1241
Agritourism guesthouses	275	101	101
Tourist stops		222	222
Apartments for rent	983	111	147
Rooms for rent		1271	1348

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

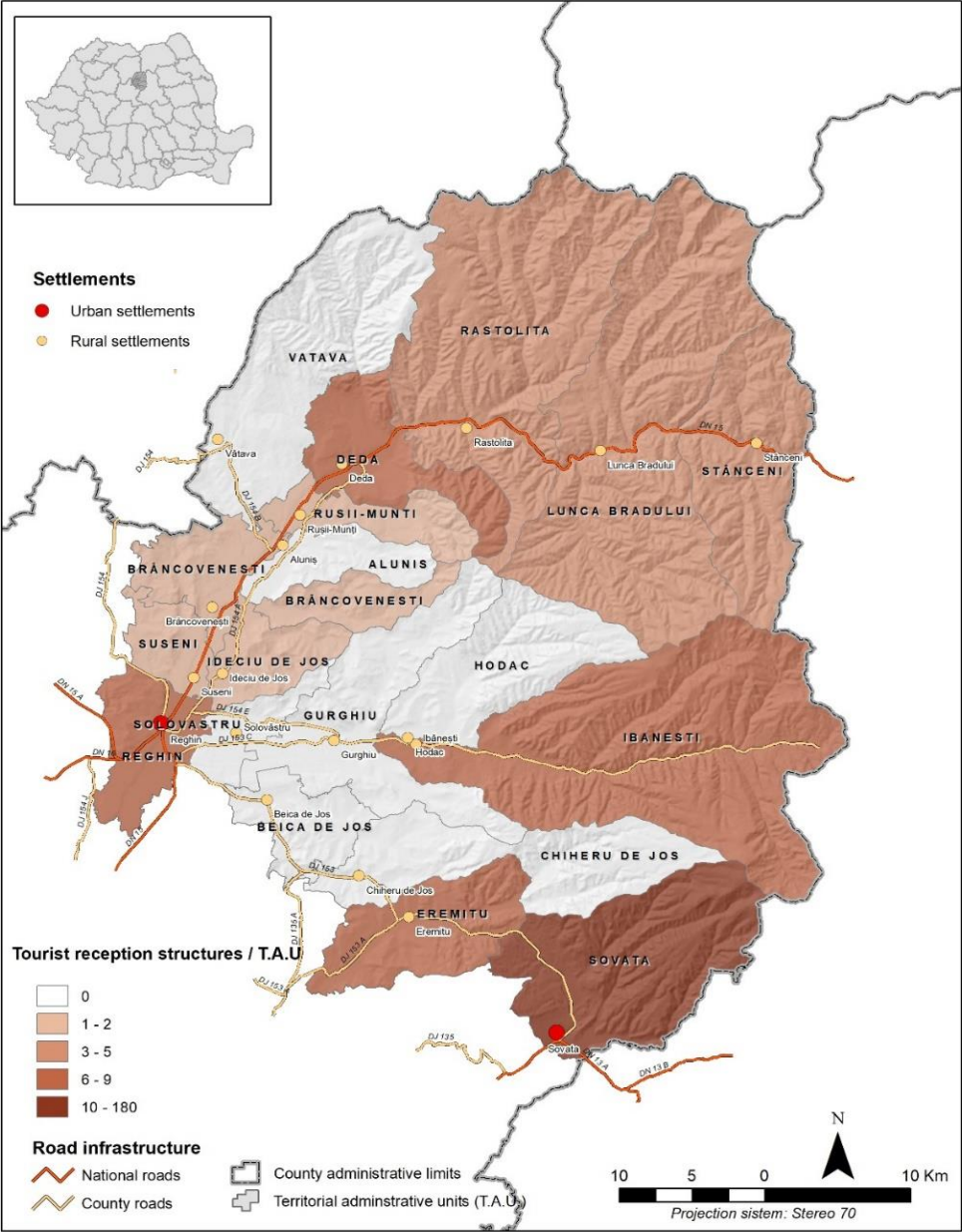


Fig. 5. Numerical distribution of the types of tourist accommodation units in 2024
Source: INS

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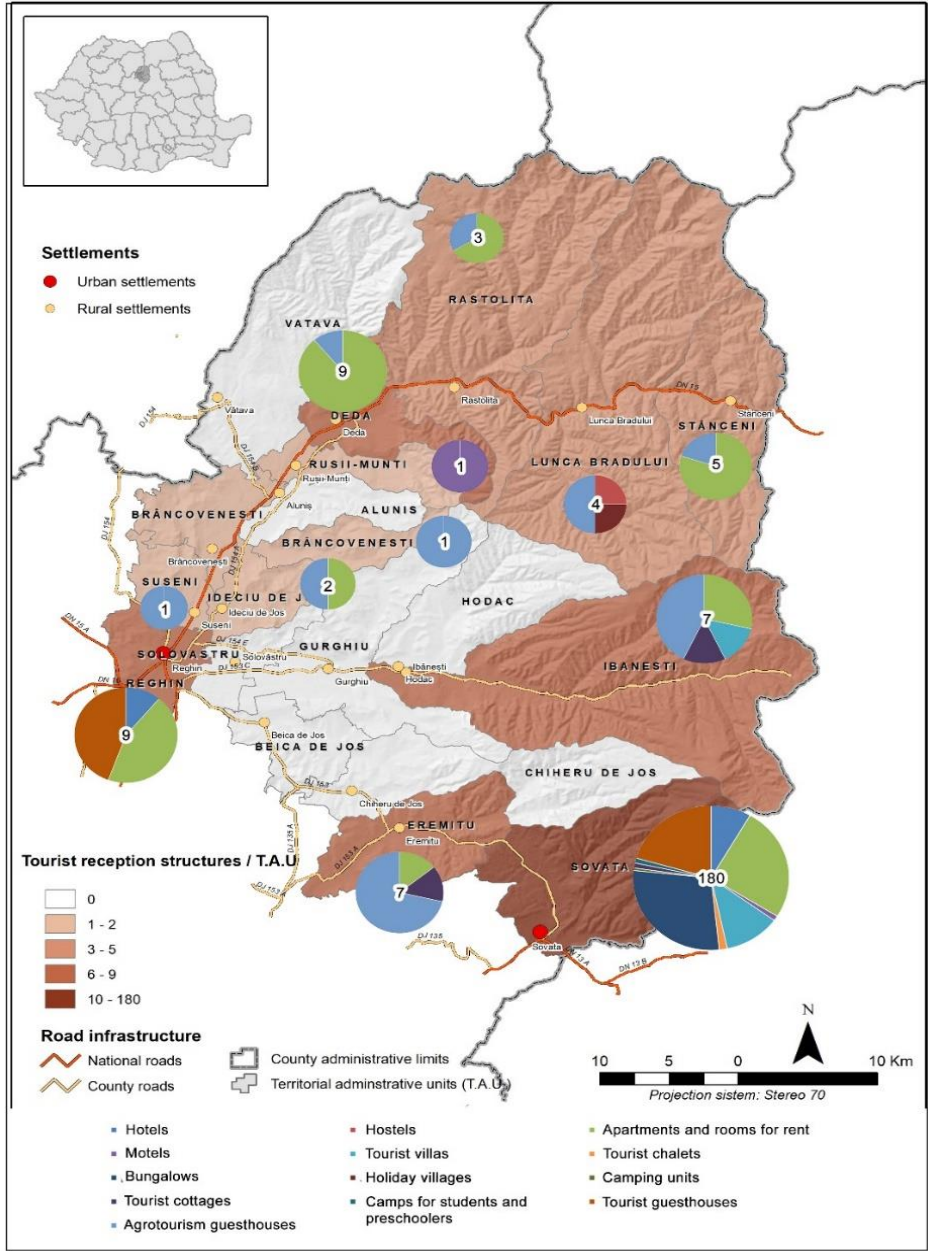


Fig. 6. Distribution of the number of tourist accommodation units at the level of municipalities in 2024
Source: INS

Even though at the level of year 2024, according to INS data, the study area had approximately 50% of the existing accommodation units in Mureș County, and about 42% of the capacity of existing accommodation beds at the county level, which overall places the study area in an honorable position within the county, it should be noted that not all the municipalities subject to research have tourist accommodation units (Fig. 5), so there are municipalities that do not have tourist accommodation units, and others with a low or medium number. Within the county, the high percentage of the tourist accommodation units in the mountainous and marginal contact area of Mureș County is due to the existence of the Sovata spa resort, which represents the main tourist centre of both Mureș County and the study area.

The difference in data provided by the three analyzed sources can be noticed in table 4, representative of the ranking of municipalities in the study area in terms of the size of the accommodation infrastructure.

Thus, according to INS data, three administrative units, Deda, Reghin and Sovata, are in the category of municipalities with a high and very high size of tourist infrastructure. According to data provided by MEDAT, in the two previously mentioned categories there are five municipalities: Deda, Eremitu, Ibănești, Reghin and Sovata. Finally, our own investigation placed in the category of those with a high and very high dimension of infrastructure a number of 7 municipalities: Deda, Eremitu, Ibănești, Răstolița, Reghin, Stânceni, and Sovata.

At the opposite end, in the category of municipalities without any tourist reception structure with accommodation functions, there are, according to the INS, seven UATs (Aluniș, Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Gurghiu, Hodac, Solovăstru, and Vătava), and according to MEDAT and our own investigation, there are only three UATs (Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, and Vătava).

Regarding the identification of the number of existing accommodation beds in the mountainous and marginal contact area of Mureș County, the same three sources of information (INS, MEDAT and our own investigation) have been taken into account (Table 5). Thus, according to INS and MEDAT data, only the city of Sovata has a very high capacity, owing to its over 4000 beds. In the category of UATs with a high accommodation capacity, INS records five UATs (Eremitu, Ibănești, Lunca Bradului, and Reghin), and MEDAT, six UATs (Deda, Eremitu, Ibănești, Lunca Bradului, and Reghin). In terms of our own investigation, the commune of Eremitu is in the category of those with a very high accommodation capacity, while the communes of Rușii-Munți and Stânceni are added with a high accommodation capacity, in addition to MEDAT. At the opposite end, the communes that have no accommodation capacity are Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, and Vătava, according to MEDAT and our own investigation, and Alunis, Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Gurghiu, Hodac, Solovăstru, and Vătava according to data provided by the INS.

Table 4. Size of the accommodation infrastructure of the study area at the level of municipalities in 2024 - triple perspective

Size of accommodation infrastructure	INS	MEDAT	Own investigation
Non-existent (0 units)	Aluniș, Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Gurghiu, Hodac, Solovăstru, Vătava	Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Vătava	Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Vătava
Low (1-3 structures)	Brâncovenești } Rușii Munți } - 1 structure Suseni } Ideciu de Jos- 2 structures Răstolița- 3 structures	Aluniș } Gurghiu } Hodac } 1 structure Rușii-Munți } Suseni } Brâncovenești } 2 structures Solovăstru }	Gurghiu - 3 structures Hodac- 1 structure Rușii-Munți - 3 structures Suseni- 1 structure Brâncovenești- 2 structures Solovăstru- 2 structures
Medium (4-7 structures)	Eremitu - 7 structures Ibănești - 7 structures Lunca Bradului - 4 structures Stânceni- 5 structures	Ideciu de Jos- 4 structures Lunca Bradului - 5 structures Răstolița - 4 structures Stânceni- 5 structures	Ideciu de Jos- 6 structures Lunca Bradului- 9 structures
High (8-20 structures)	Deda - 9 structures Reghin - 9 structures	Deda- 14 structures Eremitu - 12 structures Ibănești - 11 structures Reghin - 14 structures	Deda - 18 structures Eremitu - 18 structures Ibănești - 21 structures Răstolița - 11 structures Reghin - 17 structures Stânceni- 11 structures
Very high (over 20 de structures)	Sovata -181 structures	Sovata - 174 structures	Sovata - 181 units
TOTAL	238	257	304

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

Table 5. Size of the accommodation capacity of tourist accommodation units in the study area at the level of municipalities in 2024 - triple perspective

Accommodation capacity	INS	MEDAT	Own investigation
Non-existent (0 places)	Alunis, Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Gurghiu, Hodac, Solovăstru, Vătava	Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Vătava	Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, Vătava
Low (8-40 beds)	Brâncovenesti - 8 beds Ideciu de Jos-34 beds Suseni - 20 beds	Aluniș- 2 beds Brâncovenesti - 8 beds Gurghiu - 10 beds Hodac- 10 beds Suseni - 24 beds Solovăstru - 28 beds	Aluniș- 22 beds Brâncovenesti - 8 beds Hodac - 10 beds Suseni - 24 beds Solovăstru - 28 beds
Medium (41-100 beds)	Deda - 98 beds Răstolița - 50 beds Rușii-Munți - 82 beds Stânceni - 60 beds	Ideciu de Jos – 66 beds Răstolița - 58 beds Rușii Munți - 82 beds Stânceni - 69 beds	Gurghiu - 62 beds Răstolița- 93 beds
High (101-370 beds)	Eremitu - 137 beds Ibănești - 111 beds Lunca Bradului -175 beds Reghin – 243 beds	Deda - 122 beds Eremitu – 278 beds Ibănești - 176 beds Lunca Bradului - 161 beds Reghin - 327 beds	Deda- 191 beds Ibănești- 348 beds Ideciu de Jos-276 beds Lunca Bradului-232 beds Reghin- 351 beds Rușii Munți- 107 beds Stânceni - 148 beds
Very high (over 370 beds)	Sovata- 4383 beds	Sovata- 4851 beds	Eremitu - 382 beds Sovata – 4945 beds
TOTAL	5401	6111	7227

Source: author data processing according to INS and MEDAT in 2024

Taking into account the data provided by the two official sources (INS and MEDAT), it emerges that the accommodation infrastructure of the mountainous and marginal contact area of Mureș County is of medium size and capacity. Our own investigation, however, places the study area at a higher level, which shows that the official sources do not have a picture of the reality on the ground. This leads us to also mention the fact that part of the tourist accommodation units in the mountainous and marginal contact areas of Mureș County operate “under the table”, which becomes a problem for the tourist act if this “trend” continues in the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The tourist infrastructure in the mountainous and marginal contact area of Mureș County is under development, the general trend in recent years being to improve both the degree of comfort and accommodation capacity. The COVID-19 pandemic period affected tourism activities in Romania (Rusu, 2022), but the tourism infrastructure in the mountainous and marginal contact area of Mureș County proved to be resilient, as the number of tourist accommodation units as well as their capacity increased after 2020 (from 163 units in 2020 to 230 units in 2024, and from 4458 beds in 2020 to 5408 beds in 2024), this increase also being felt at the level of the number of municipalities including accommodation units. This positive trend is expected to be maintained in the coming period, as tourism represents a very important economic activity in terms of the economic development of the study area.

A problem noticed following the present study is related to the fact that there are some municipalities in the study area that do not have any tourist accommodation units (Beica de Jos, Chiheru de Jos, and Vătava) although they have a complex natural and anthropogenic tourist potential that can support the development of tourist activities, implicitly the emergence of tourist structures with accommodation and public catering functions. We mention that this emerged from the analysis carried out from a triple perspective, so that none of the information sources identified the existence of any tourist accommodation unit in these communes. This highlights the inability of local authorities to attract investors in tourism in the administered communes, the low level of awareness of the attractive value of tourism resources (both natural and anthropogenic) by local residents, as well as the fact that tourism activities can represent an important pillar in the economic development of the area, which will undoubtedly increase the income and living standards of the local residents.

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