

FEATURES OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND FLOWS INVOLVED IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MUREȘ COUNTY

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Abstract: Tackling the topic regarding the spatial distribution of the accommodation/lodging infrastructure of Mureș County for the entire transition period required first and foremost a quantitative analysis, with data sets from the *National Institute of Statistics - Mureș Statistics Department*, and the *Ministry of Tourism*. After collecting the statistical data, we processed and interpreted the data by creating tables, graphics, and maps, which improved our scientific endeavour. The aim of this paper was primarily to offer a general view of the existing accommodation capacity, from hotels to agrotouristic lodgings, classified by size and comfort level. According to the ministry, the accommodation infrastructure of Mureș County comprised of 373 units with 11,466 beds in 2016 (17.8% of the total accommodation units and 26% of the existing beds in the Central Region). Most units were *hotels* with 4,832 beds, more than half being *medium sized* units (50-200 beds), rated with *3 stars*, followed by *touristic pensions* with 3,206 beds, mostly located in Sovata, Sighișoara, and Târgu-Mureș, *motels* with 805 beds, *touristic villas* with 581 beds, *campings* with 549 beds, *rooms for rent* with 531 beds, *hostels* with 329 beds, *tourist stops* with 222 beds, *touristic and hunting lodges*, 208 beds, *agrotouristic pensions*, 169 beds, *rented apartments*, 66 beds and *vacation villages*, 22 beds. Mureș County, according to the Ministry of Tourism, has only one national designated touristic resort, *Sovata*, being the most complex and intricate touristic development (117 units with 4,179 beds), and one local resort, *Sângeorgiu de Mureș* (7 units with 202 beds). In 2016, there were 1,035 705 overnight stays made by 517,111 tourists, with an average of 2 overnight stays/tourist.

Key words: accommodation units, beds, hotels, touristic circulation,

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INTRODUCTION

The authors of the paper at hand are at their fourth incursion into the analysis of the accommodation infrastructure during the transition period, having already investigated several counties and regions such as Harghita, Maramureș, and the Romanian seaside. The whole aspect

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regarding the development and diversification of the accommodation capacity located in Mureş County is based on two sets of official data, one provided by the *National Institute of Statistics* (NIS), through the *TEMPO-Online* platform, Economic Statistics domain, chapter Tourism, while the other by the *Ministry of Tourism*, the *Authorized units section*, the latter being the closest to the situation on the ground. We must also emphasize that both sources have several downsides, as they are in complete disconcordance, somewhat warping the actual situation. The best way to proceed in our view is to conduct a direct ground research thus uncovering the numerous organization ways (authorized and unauthorized). However, such method implies significant financial and time resources, taking into account the fact that the county is large, with a total surface area of 6,714 km², and is comprised of 102 local administrative units. We would also like to mention that this paper is built on several theoretical and methodological articles and studies which gave us a better view on the matter at hand (Ciangă, 1998, 2006; Ciangă & Deszi, 2007; Cocean & Deszi, 2001, 2009; Drăghici & Pintilii, 2006; Erdeli & Gheorghilaş, 2006; Herman & Tătar, 2015; Herman, 2017; Ilie et al, 2017; Ilieş, 2007; Muntele & Iaşu, 2006; Rebegea, 2011; Şoneriu & Mac, 1973, (Tofan, 2014, Tofan & Niţă, 2014).

EVOLUTION OF ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY DURING 1990-2016

In order to capture the accommodation infrastructure dynamic between 1990 and 2016, we first used the statistical data from the National Institute of Statistics, followed by the data provided by the Ministry of Tourism (data available for 2016 only).

Therefore, according to the former, in 1990, the capacity of Mureş reached 107 units, encompassing 5,055 beds, more than half (54.5%) concentrated in *hotels* (21 units and 2,755 beds), followed by *touristic villas* (72 and 1,399), *campings* (5 and 607), *touristic inns* (7 and 283) and *touristic lodges* (2 units with 11 beds). After this period, the number of units fluctuated, with a gradual decrease until 2005, due to the numerical reduction of four of the five mentioned categories.

The number of villas, found mostly in Sovata, decreased from 74 in 1992-1993 (2,930 beds) to only 8 with 338 beds, in 2011, while the touristic lodges, camping sites and school camps slowly deteriorated, as the new social and economic context changed after 1989.

The end of the first decade of the 21st century marks a slight increase in accommodation units, as new forms emerged, such as touristic and agrotouristic pensions, with a short regress in 2009, caused by the global economic crisis. Later, their number increased considerably, to 291 units in 2016, with 11,030 beds (14% of the total units and 16.3% of the total number of beds in the entire Central Region).

The accommodation infrastructure is as follows: 53 *hotels* with 4,760 beds (43.1%), 122 touristic *touristic pensions* with 2,423 beds (22%), 50 *agrotouristic pensions* with 1,084 beds (9.8%), 17 *motels* with 591 beds (5.3%), 17 *villas* with 487 beds (4.4%), 3 *school camps* with 381 beds (3.4%), 6 *hostels* with 340 beds (3%) and other forms of accommodation (*vacation villages, touristic lodges, bungalows, campings, cabins* etc.), with 964 beds (9%). Thus, for roughly a quarter century, there was an explosive growth of the accommodation capacity by 5,975 beds, or + 118.2%.

According to the second official source, Mureş County had an even more complex and more extensive accommodation infrastructure in 2016, with 373 units and 11,466 beds. Hotels reached 42.1% of the total number of beds, touristic pensions 28%, motels 7%, villas 5%, camping sites 4.8%, rooms for rent 4.6%, hostels 2.9%, touristic stops 2%, agrotouristic pensions 1.5%, touristic lodges 1.3%, apartments for rent 0.6% and touristic (vacation) villages 0.2% (figure 1).

If we compare the two data sets, it transpires that the ministry has registered two new categories (touristic rooms and apartments for rent), while the National Institute of Statistics has introduced bungalows, touristic cabins and school camps.

The most complex touristic development in the county is *Sovata*, a resort of national importance, which had 82 units in 1990 (76.6% of the total 107 units at county level), with a capacity of 3,903 beds (77.2% of the then total 5,055). 16 years later it registered a number of 81 units (27.8%) of

the 291 existing ones at county level and 3,612 beds (32.7%) out of a total of 11,030. This aspect proves that the accommodation infrastructure is comprised almost entirely of villas, many severely degraded, hence the substantial decrease in the actual accommodation capacity (Ciangă, 1998, 2006). If we confer with the Ministry's 2016 data base, the resort of Sovata has a more extensive accommodation infrastructure, comprising 117 units with a total of 4,179 beds, concentrated mostly in hotels (1,711 beds) and touristic pensions (698 beds).

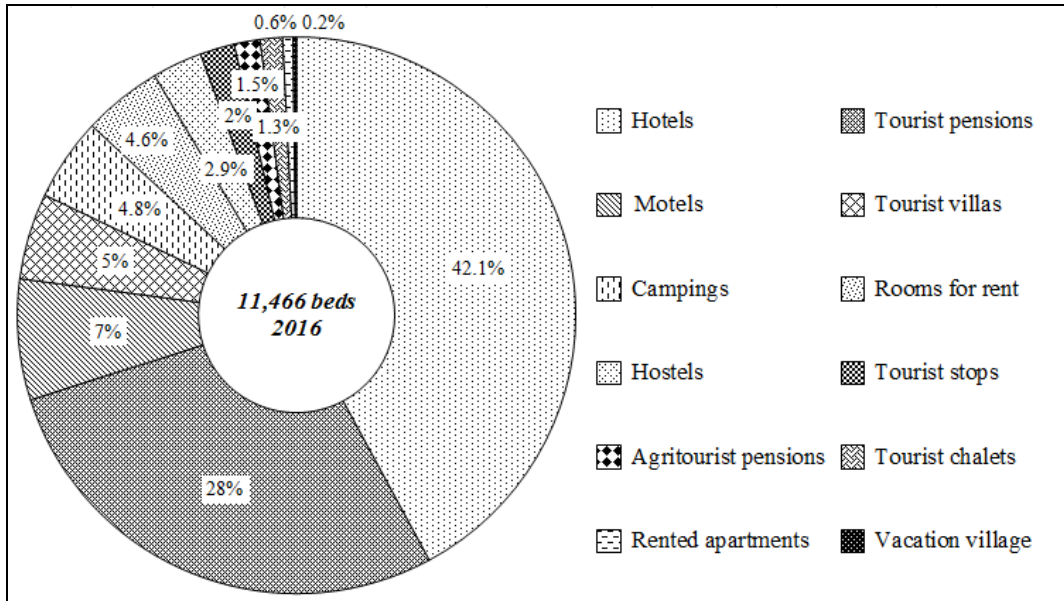


Figure 1. Mureș County. Percentage of accommodation categories, 2016.
(Data source: Ministry of Tourism, processed)

In terms of the territorial distribution of the accommodation units found in Mureș County, there are two cities with an infrastructure dominated hotels and touristic guest houses. One is the medieval town of Sighișoara (in 2016, it had 49 units and 1,848 beds, according to the National Institute of Statistics, and 72 units with 1,769 beds, according to the Ministry of Tourism) and the other is the county capital, Târgu-Mureș, which registered 48 units with 2,687 beds, and 52 units with 2,271 beds, according to the latter reference. Accommodation units can be found in 44 other local administrative units, divided into three categories: *resorts of local importance (Sângeorgiu de Mureș*, with up to 200 beds); *towns*, with up to 350 (Luduș, Reghin, Ungheni), and *rural settlements*, hosting between 6 and 300, such as Ibănești, Daneș, Acățari, Lunca Bradului, Eremitu, and Corunca, each with more than 100 beds.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MAIN ACCOMMODATION CATEGORIES

a) Hotels comprise the largest category for the entire 25 year period. Their number swelled (from 21 units in 1990 to 53 units in 2016), while their capacity increased as well (from 2,755 beds in 1990 to 4,760 in 2016) (according to NIS). For 2016, the Ministry of Tourism recorded 56 hotel units in Mureș County (4,832 beds), concentrated mostly in three urban areas: Sovata (14 units with a capacity of 1,711), Târgu-Mureș (17 with 1,657) and Sighișoara (12 units with 729 beds), in while 13 hotels can be found in the following towns: Reghin (3 with 138 beds), Ungheni (2 and 168), Târnăveni (2 and 82), and Luduș (one with 60 beds); hotels are also located in rural areas, such as Sâncraiu de Mureș (one with 36 beds), Daneș (one with 43), Corunca (one with 66) and Sângeorgiu de Mureș (2 with 142 beds). Most hotels are rated with 3 stars (31), followed by 4

stars (17), 2 stars (6), 1 star (2) and 5 stars hotels (a single unit, *Binder Bubi* in Sighișoara, 52 rooms and 101 beds).

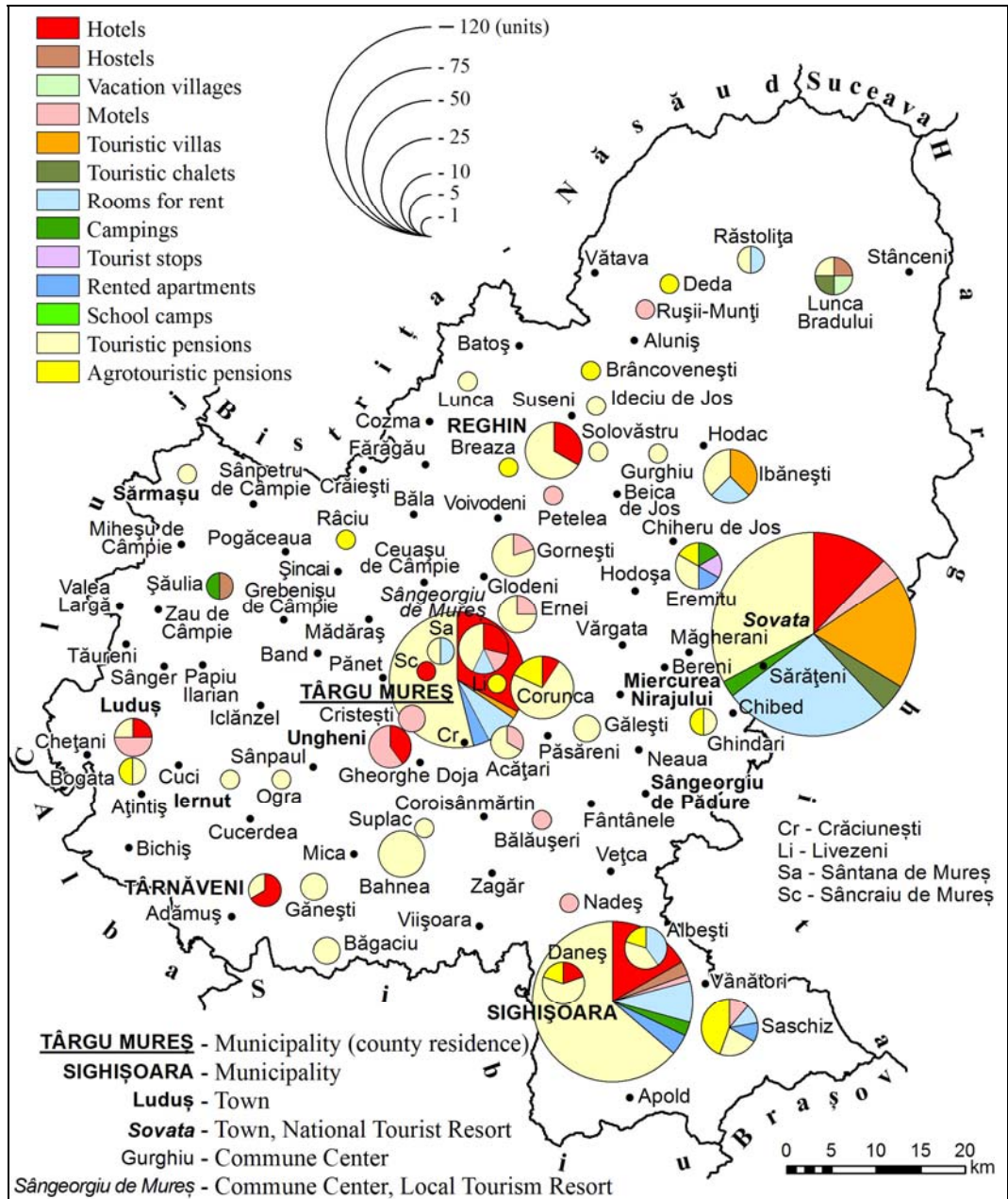


Figure 2. The number of main accommodation categories in Mureș County, 2016.
(Data source: Ministry of Tourism, processed)

In terms of extent, more than half (32) are *medium-sized* (50-200 beds), 19 small (under 50 beds) and only five are very large, two in Târgu-Mureș (*Grand*, 104 rooms and 208 beds, and *Continental*, 111 rooms with 222 beds) and three in Sovata (*Aluniș*, 145 rooms and 292 beds; *Făget*, 138 rooms and 276 beds and *Danubius Health*, 168 rooms and 334 beds).

b) Hostels were first recorded in official statistical books in 2005. They increased their capacity, according to NIS, from 20 to 340 beds in 2016. Our second statistical source recorded a number of 5 hostels with 329 beds, four being rated with 2 stars (*Burg*, 16 rooms and 43 beds, located in din Sighișoara; *Teleki*, 33 rooms and 110 beds din Sovata; *Andrei*, 12 rooms and 72 beds in Șăulia; *Integro*, 20 rooms and 90 beds in Lunca Bradului and one three star unit, *Casa Vlad*, 4 rooms and 14 beds in Sighișoara).

c) Touristic (vacation) villages are commercial accommodation units created by private entrepreneurs after 1990 (Ciangă, 2006), used by groups of tourists and visitors for conferences, business trips, camps etc. In Mureș County there is only one such unit, located in Lunca Bradului, Sălard village, called *Integro* (villas no 4 and 5), in the same precinct and with the same owner as the already mentioned hostel. It is a two star establishment and has 10 spaces with 22 beds.

d) Motels are usually located on the main roads, close to urban centres: Sovata (*Stâna de Vale*, 24 beds; *Veritas*, 26 beds; *Sora*, 32 beds; *Ursu Negru*, 61 beds); Ungheni (*Terra*, 40 beds, *Darina II*, 52 beds and *Darina*, 94 beds); Luduș (*Salcâmul*, 22 beds and *La Mol*, 79 beds); Cristești (*Via*, 20 beds and *MBO*, 24 beds), and one unit in Acățari (*Vector*, 77 beds), Bălăușeri (*Kapusi*, 14 beds), Ernei (*Korona King*, 16 beds), Gornești (*Kapusi*, 22 beds), Nadeș (*Hanu Morii*, 17 beds), Petelea (*Adra*, 23 beds), Rușii Munți (*Montana*, 82 beds), Sângeorgiu de Mureș (*Gemini*, 16 beds), Saschiz (*Tranzit*, 18 beds) and Sighișoara (*Corsa*, 46 beds). In terms of comfort, most are 2 and 3 star establishments, while two are rated with a single star.

e) Touristic villas, almost entirely located in Sovata resort, declined numerically, a phenomenon similar to what has occurred in other resorts such as Borsec, Sângeorz Băi, Vatra Dornei, Lacu Roșu, Băile Tușnad, etc., from 72 units (1,399 beds) in 1990, to just 17 (487 beds), in 2016. According to the Ministry of Tourism, there are 25 villas in Mureș County, with a capacity of 581 beds, found mostly in Sovata (21 units with 581 beds, over 80% rated with two or three stars), but also in Ibănești, 3 units with 38 de beds (*Villa No. 1/Central Pavilion*, 32 beds, 3 stars; *Villa No. 2*, 2 beds and *Villa No. 3*, with 4 beds, both 2 star rated) and Târgu Mureș, one unit (*Romulus and Remus*, 3 beds, 3 stars).

f) Touristic lodges (chalets), according to the NIS, oscillated around the 2-4 units mark, with roughly 100 beds, with the exception of the period between 1998 and 2000, when there were no operational units in the county. The ministry indicates that, in 2016, there were six such units with 154 beds, five in Sovata (*Aluniș-Sebeș*, 30 beds; *Baraban Tina*, 40 beds; *Bavaria*, 6 beds, all two star establishments; two three star units, *Hanul Coniței*, 22 beds and *Repas*, 34 beds) and one in Lunca Bradului (*Șeștina*, 22 beds, 2 stars).

The Mureș Forestry Department offers lodging, for hunting purposes, in four hunting lodges, located on the Gurghiu and Mureș rivers (*Lăpușna*, 10 beds; *Fâncel*, 12 beds; *Gălăoia*, 16 beds and *Ketag* in Sălard with 16 beds).

g) Bungalows have been recorded by the National Institute of Statistics since 2003, when there was only one operational unit of this kind, located in Sighișoara, with a capacity of 24 beds. Their number steadily increased, currently reaching 12 units with 224 beds, all located in the town of Sighișoara. The Ministry of Tourism, however, records two new categories - *rooms and apartments for rent*. The former category comprises 49 units with 531 beds, most of them located in Sovata (31 units with 398 beds), while the latter only 7 units (66 beds), three in Sighișoara (36 beds), two in Târgu-Mureș (4 beds) and one apartment in Saschiz (8 beds) and Eremitu (18 beds) each.

h) Camping sites, alongside villas, touristic lodges and school camps, experienced a drastic decline in lodging capacity, from 607 beds in 1990 to 202 beds 16 years later (according to the Mureș Statistical Department). Peak capacity was reached at the beginning of the first decade of the 20th century (910 beds). According to our second source, we see a larger structure, comprised of 7 units with 549 de beds, three found in Sovata (*Gabriel*, 12 beds, 2 stars; *Vasskert*, 113 beds, 2 stars and *Stâna de Vale*, 143 beds, one star); two in Sighișoara (*Aquaris*, 110 beds and *Vila Franka*, 92 beds, both 2 star establishments); one in Eremitu (*Mustang*, 58 beds, 2 stars) and one in Șăulia (*Andrei*, 21 beds, 5 stars).

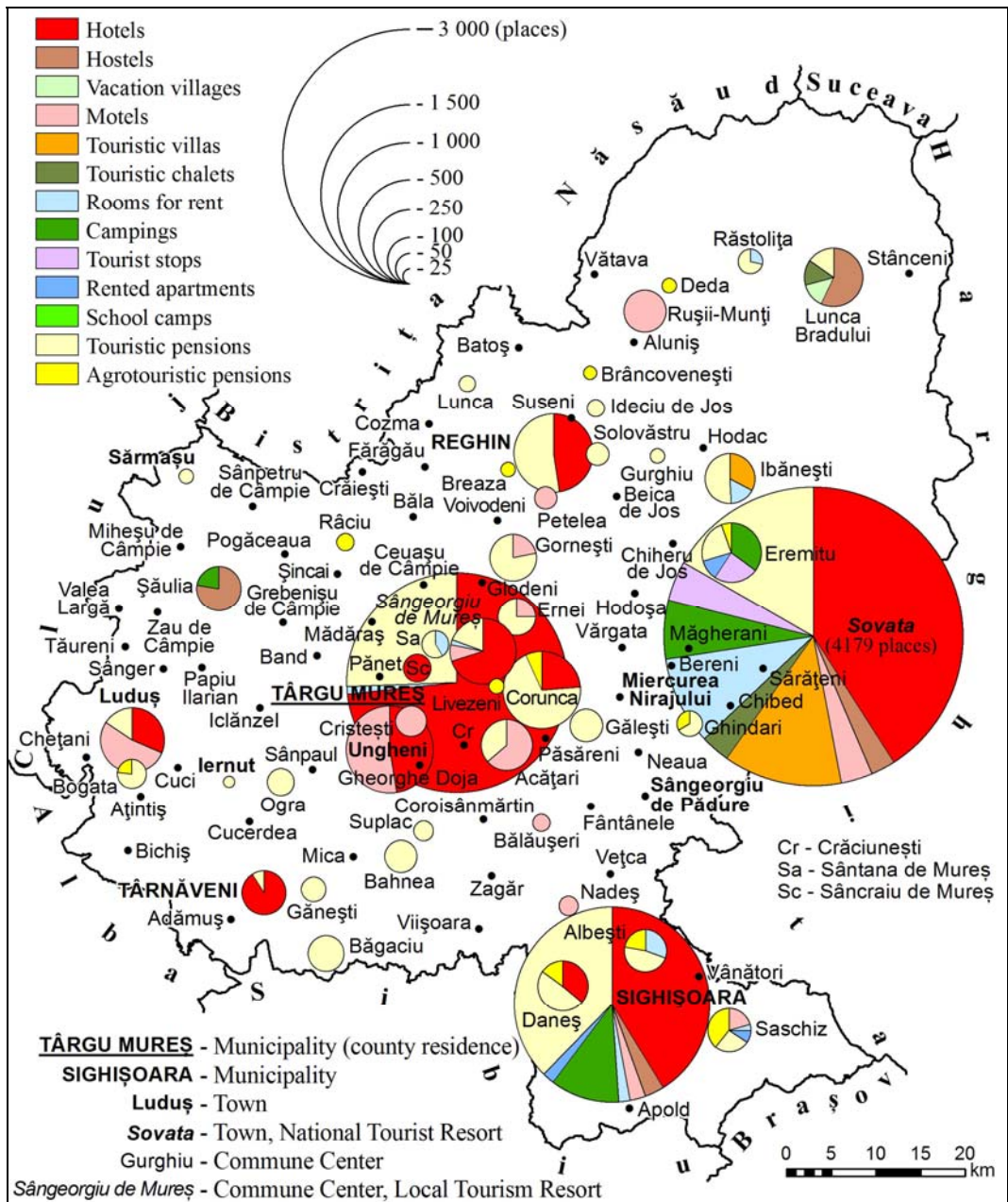


Figure 3. The number of accommodation places in Mureș County, 2016.
(Data source: Ministry of Tourism, processed)

There are also two *touristic stops* which are able to provide adequate lodging conditions for 222 tourists, situated in Sovata (*Cireșelul*, with 182 beds and one star rating) and Eremitu (*Nomad*, 40 beds with 2 stars), as well as a couple of *touristic houses* in Sovata (183 beds) and in Șăulia (92 beds).

i) School camps lost most of their accommodation capacity. At the beginning of the 1990s, there were four such establishments in Mureș County (Târgu-Mureș, Sovata, Ibănești, and

Răstolița), with more than 200 beds. According to NIS, there are now only two such units, one in Târgu Mureș, with 180 beds, and another one in Sovata, with 201 beds.

j) Touristic pensions started being officially recorded in 2000, when Mureș County had eight operational units with a total capacity of 214 beds, while in 2016, a number of 122 units (2423 beds), according to NIS. Closer to the reality on the ground, the Ministry of Tourism registered 178 units with 3206 beds, mainly located in the larger touristic centres: Sighișoara (48 units with 666 beds), Sovata (38 units and 698 beds), and Târgu-Mureș (28 units and 579 beds).

k) Regarding agrotouristic pensions, the two sources are in stark contradiction, NIS registering 50 units with a capacity of 1,084, while the ministry solely 16 units with 169 beds, in areas like: Albești, Bogata, Corunca, Ghindari, Livezeni, Saschiz etc. The actual situation is most definitely more complex and the number of pensions surely exceeds the official data, taking into account that, even before 2007, there have been massive funding possibilities for such establishments using structural funds from the European Union.

ASPECTS REGARDING TOURISTIC CIRCULATION (2001-2016)

In terms of touristic circulation in Mureș County, the National Institute of Statistics only provides solid data for 12 local administrative units, for the 2001-2016 timeframe. Therefore, the county touristic circulation registered 402,983 overnight stays in 2001 and 1,035,705 stays fifteen years later, which translates in a 157% increase. The volume of overnight stays was due to 130,466 tourists in 2001 and 517,111 in 2016, a considerable increase of 296.3%. The average duration decreased from 3.1 overnight stays/tourist in 2001 to only 2 overnight stays/tourist in 2016.

Table 1. Characteristics of the touristic circulation (2001 and 2016) in Mureș County
(Data source: NIS, processed)

Crt. no.	Location	Overnight stays		Evolution ±%	Number of tourists		Evolution ±%	Duration	
		2001	2016		2001	2016		2001	2016
1	Târgu-Mureș	90,220	308,304	241.7	58,231	182,496	213.4	1.5	1.7
2	Sighișoara	12,078	134,711	1,015.3	9,393	101,067	976.0	1.3	1.3
3	Târnăveni	1,484	7,381	397.3	1,484	3,962	167.0	1.0	2.0
4	Luduș	683	5,253	669.11	683	2,067	202.6	1.0	2.5
5	<i>Sovata</i>	267,181	380,250	42.3	41,979	112,101	167.0	6.3	3.4
6	Acățari	1,360	12,558	823.3	1,360	7,960	485.3	1.0	1.6
7	Albești	6,229	3,281	-47.3	4,146	2,823	-32.0	1.5	1.2
8	Daneș	637	11,631	1,726.0	583	3,522	504.1	1.1	3.3
9	Gornești	701	5,239	647.3	367	4,418	1,103.8	2.0	1.2
10	Ibănești	6,391	1,492	-76.6	913	1,322	44.8	7.0	1.1
11	Șăulia	1,162	4,225	263.6	302	774	156.3	3.8	5.5
12	<i>Sângeorgiu de Mureș</i>	14,857	50,418	239.3	11,025	25,135	128.0	1.3	2.0
TOTAL		402,983	1,035,705	157.0	130,466	517,111	296.3	3.1	2.0

Sovata- resort of national importance; *Sângeorgiu de Mureș* – resort of local importance.

This phenomenon is due to the increased short term mobility of the population, as transportation methods grew and improved, or due to falling prices. This emphasizes a domination of the cultural-itinerary tourism on one hand and a dwindling spa tourism on the other, as the latter implies longer visits (Rebegea, 2011).

In the year 2016, the majority of overnight stays and number of tourists were registered in hotel units (69.5% of overnight stays and 66.1% tourists), especially in Sovata (303,465 overnight stays and 78,506 tourists), and Târgu-Mureș (234,316 overnight stays and 145,759 tourists).

Tourist seasonality emphasizes the existence of an absolute demand maximum, constantly manifested in the months of August, with 69,921 monthly arrivals, out of which 80.5% being Romanian tourists, and 147,278 monthly overnight stays, 61% in hotels.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the main existing lodging categories in Mureş County, based on the two official sources, finally allows us to draw several general conclusions:

- according to NIS, the last 26 years saw an increase in the number of accommodation units, as well as a growth in their lodging capacity (from 107 units with 5,055 beds in 1990, to 291 unități cu 11,030 beds în anul 2016);

- the second official source, the Ministry of Tourism, provided better data regarding the lodging structure of Mureş County (which received permits in 2016); therefore, the lodging and accommodation infrastructure of the count is much more complex, encompassing 373 accommodation units with a total of 11,466 beds; these beds are concentrated in hotels (42.1% of the total capacity), touristic pensions (28%), motels (7%), villas (5%), camping sites (4.8%), rooms for rent (4.6%), hostels (2.9%), touristic stops (2%), agrotouristic pensions (1.5%), touristic lodges (1.3%), apartments for rent (0.6%) and touristic (vacation) villages (0.2%);

- the NIS data base, besides the basic lodging facilities (hotels, hostels, villas, camping areas, etc), contains ancillary forms of lodging and accommodation (bungalows, school camps and small touristic cabins); the data bases provided by the Ministry of Tourism however do not contain such establishments, instead including new lodging structures such as rooms and apartment for touristic rent;

- of the 15 accommodation categories, hotels hold the largest lodging capacity, as in 2016 these structures provided 4,832 beds of the total county capacity (11,466 beds, according to the Ministry of Tourism), concentrated mostly in the resort of Sovata, and in Târgu-Mureş and Sighișoara (this last urban area has the only 5 star establishment in the county);

- the most complex touristic facilities in Mureş County are found in Sovata, a renowned mixed type resort (spa, rest and relaxation, entertainment), which currently has an average of 100 units with roughly 4,000 beds, 1,700 of which found in hotels;

- the county capital, Târgu Mureş, and the well known medieval town of Sighișoara, with its still inhabited fortress, contain 35% of the total touristic volume of Mureş County;

- tourist flows punctuate the fact that the majority of vacationers and most overnight stays took place in hotel units (69.5% of overnight stays and 66.1% of tourists);

- as stated in our previous scientific endeavours, we would like to point out that there are still problems regarding the veracity and the actuality of the statistical data provided by the authorities; in such situations the best solution is to perform extensive field research, which can lead to a better general image of the issue at hand.

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