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**RURAL TOURISM  
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE DEPRESSION COMPARTMENT  
OF SFÂNTU GHEORGHE**

*Doctoral Thesis Summary*

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## Table of Contents<sup>1</sup>

INTRODUCTION .....	13
1. Aspects of epistemological nature .....	13
2. The review phase. The brief summary of the relevant literature addressed in the branches of geography and in the field of rural tourism related to the studied space .....	15
3. Reserch hypotheses .....	21
4. The importance of the research and its objective .....	22
5. Methodological aspects of the scientific research .....	24
Chapter 1.	
1. Evolution, legal framework and environmental strategies in rural tourism in Romania .....	26
1.1. The evolution and development of rural tourism at national level and in the depression compartment studied .....	26
1.2. National legal framework in evaluating rural tourism .....	30
1.3. European legislation in the field of tourism: correlation and integration .....	37
1.4. Environment strategies and policies in Romanian rural tourism .....	44
Chapter 2.	
2. Position and extension of the studied geographic space .....	47
2.1. Geographic arguments .....	53
2.2. Administrative arguments .....	56
2.3. Arguments of functional nature .....	57
Chapter 3.	
3. Natural components and tourist and anthropic resources, premises in the development of rural tourism .....	59
3.1. The tourist potential of the natural components .....	60
3.1.2. The landscape potential of the relief .....	61
3.1.3. Climatic tourist potential as an element of favorability and restriction in the development of rural tourism .....	66
3.1.4. The hydrological tourist potential .....	69
3.1.5. The biogeographical tourist potential .....	74
3.1.6. Protected natural areas and their role in the development of rural tourism .....	79
3.2. Anthropic touristic heritage and traditional human activities .....	90
3.2.1. Buildings of touristic value .....	93
3.2.2. Cultural and artistic manifestations, fairs and exhibitions .....	108
3.2.3. Traditional rural civiliazation and culture .....	113
3.2.4. Traditional secondary occupations .....	121
Chapter 4.	
4. Infrastructure of touristic and general character .....	114
4.1. Accommodation facilities and catering .....	128
4.2. Ways and means of transport .....	156
4.3. Therapeutic and recreational infrastructure .....	157
Chapter 5.	
5. Tourist traffic and its role in the efficient use of tourist potential and infrastructure, premise in the socio-economic and administrative development of the rural area .....	161
5.1. General aspects .....	161
5.1.1. Models of tourist flows .....	162

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<sup>1</sup> The number of pages corresponds to the text of the PhD thesis.

5.2. The evolution of tourist traffic in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe .....	164
5.3. Quantitative and qualitative aspects .....	168
5.3.1. Principalii indicatori pentru determinarea fluxului turistic .....	181
5.4. Types and forms of rural tourism .....	189
Chapter 6.	
6. Empirical innovation and research of rural tourism in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe.....	293
6.1. Innovation .....	204
6.1.1. The importance of innovation .....	204
6.1.2 The dynamics of innovation in rural tourism .....	206
6.1.3. The innovating tourist potential .....	208
6.1.4. The characteristics of successful innovations in rural tourism .....	209
6.2. The empirical research .....	210
6.2.1 The research model .....	211
6.3.1. The analysis of Type 1 questionnaire addressed to the owners of tourist accommodation units .....	214
6.3.2 The analysis of Type 2 questionnaire addressed to the mayors .....	236
Chapter 7.	
7. Rural tourism in the context of sustainable development. Case study: The touristic model of the village of Bicfalău .....	248
7.1. The motivations of the case study .....	252
7.2. The main characteristics of the touristic potential of the village of Bicfalău .....	254
7.2.1. The general presentation of the locality of Bicfalău .....	254
7.2.2. Mansions and traditional rural houses .....	261
7.2.3. Characteristic street objectives as attractive touristic elements .....	268
7.2.4. Cetatea Melcului (The fortress of the snail).....	269
7.3. Administrative acts and infrastructure and cultural development projects of the local administration to support the sustainable development of the locality of Bicfalău .....	271
7.4. Cultural events, exhibitions and traditional fairs .....	274
7.5. The presentation of the tourist accomodation structures and their economic activities .....	278
7.5.1. The analysis of tourist accommodation structures .....	279
7.5.2. The motivations of the owners of accommodation units .....	284
7.5.3. The attitudes of the owners of accommodation units.....	285
7.5.4. The commitment of the owners of accommodation units.....	285
7.5.5. The analysis of Type 3 questionnaire, addressed to the tourists .....	286
7.6. SWOT analysis of the sustainable development of the village Bicfalău from the aspecty of rural tourism.....	302
7.7. The relation between investments of innovation and the services of tourist accommodation structures.....	306
Conclusions .....	309
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	317
APPENDIXES .....	332 - 362

**Key words:** rural tourism, sustainable development, tourist potential, anthropic touristic heritage, tourist traffic, innovation, innovation categories.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Aspects of epistemological nature

Rural tourism is a phenomenon, which through its spontaneous appearance has had a spectacular growth, becoming a complex and dynamic field of science with a remarkable economic function, based on the rural environment and the rural tourist resources. Today it may serve as the hope of sustainable economic and social development of a rural area. *“The emergence of new forms of tourism is a process that naturally occurs in major socio-economic transformations and is materialized by the individualization of rural tourism”* (Ciangă, 1998: 33).

Starting from the idea that tourism, in our case rural tourism, develops the economic growth, as well as its beneficial effects on society, the intended purpose in the work entitled *“Rural Tourism and Sustainable Development in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe”* is to study how the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe has evaluated from this point of view, which are the tourist resources and if the process of economic development can be improved with the help of innovation, the premise in the sustainable development.

### 2. The review phase. The brief summary of the relevant literature addressed in the branches of geography and in the field of rural tourism related to the studied space

The analysis of the phenomenon of rural tourism in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe requires, first of all, a careful scientific scan of all existing scientific and touristic material that have been approached in the field of rural tourism. In this respect, it was necessary to study carefully a large amount of bibliographic documentations (books and university volumes, cartographic materials, articles and studies, leaflets and tourist brochures, etc.).

### 3. Research hypotheses

After choosing the study area along with the proposed objectives, the hypotheses that complement the research were formulated.

I. *In order to make the most efficient use of existing tourist resources, their inventory proves to be necessary. Thus, there is an existing sustainable development.*

At the national level, there are many natural and anthropic resources with a high touristic potential, *“Romania proves to be a country with a well-known tourist vocation”* (Cocean, 2010:7), but only a small part of them is adequately known and promoted. Therefore, one of the main objectives of this thesis is to conduct the inventory of the existing tourist resources in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, and to find ways to make them fulfill their potential.

II. *Rural tourism determines sustainable economic and social development in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe.*

Rural tourism is considered to be an economic activity capable of sustainable development. But it depends on a number of geographic, economic, political, etc. factors, on natural and anthropic tourist resources, on touristic and general infrastructure, on tourism legislation and policy, and so on, which influence tourist activity in rural areas. From these databases, following the different research methods, will result the information that will support us in making the right decisions in terms of economic and social development, as well as future prospects.

III. *The sustainable development of rural tourism is inconceivable without innovation methods.*

In all branches of the economy, the notions of innovation and innovation methods are increasingly used, as it can be seen in tourism<sup>1</sup>, but unfortunately less in rural tourism. We believe that it is time for innovation by introducing new, more diversified and more interesting tourist services for a more sustainable development in the field of rural tourism.

IV. *The sustainability of rural tourism is in close connection with the environment.*

Like any economic activity, tourism, in our case rural tourism, puts a footprint on the environment, influencing both the natural environment and the social environment. The activities of rural tourism and the elements of the environment influence each other. “*Tourism belongs to the most ecological group of anthropic activities*” (Cocean, Dezsi, 2009: 262). With these positive ideas, we begin exploring the link between rural tourism and the environment in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe.

#### **4. Methodological aspects of the scientific research**

The methodological basis of a paper is given by the harmonious combination of theoretical and practical information.

Considering the complexity of the study, as well as the achievement of the objectives proposed within this paper, both quantitative methods (statistical analysis) and qualitative methods (case study, observation) were used.

Of major importance within the paper is the case study, which “*is a qualitative method of excellence*” (Iluț, 1997:105). The case study conducted at the level of the touristic village of Bicfalău, belonging to the Ozun commune, focused on the real situation regarding innovation in rural tourism, where there is a significant development, due primarily to accessing European funds within the various regional development programs, vocational training, own websites, as well as the existence of two tourism associations.

## **Chapter 1**

### **1. Evolution, legal framework and environmental strategies in rural tourism in Romania**

In Romania, before 1990, there were no significant economic activities in the field of rural tourism.

Starting with 1990, the first real and legal touristic activities in the rural environment have appeared in Romania as well.

Without discussing the history of legal regulations in the field of rural tourism in Romania before 1990, it should be noted that after the change of the centralized economy in the market economy, the first regulation that had tangency with rural tourism was Decision No. 438/1990 on the establishment and the organization of the Commission of the Mountain Regions of Romania<sup>2</sup>.

The main legal norms in force, as amended, in the field of tourism are presented in Appendix no. 1.

The LEADER program is an important tool for developing the rural areas of Romania, reducing the economic and social imbalances between urban and rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the field of health tourism, by modernizing treatment facilities and treatment with appropriate medical devices, or in adventure tourism, where we encounter the improvement of difficult paths, using innovations from the field of construction (for example, the thematic air path at the level of high trees in a secular forest in the Baraolt Mountains).

<sup>2</sup> According to Article 1 of the presented normative act, the Commission is the governmental advisory body of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry.

LEADER contributes to the diversification of non-agricultural economic activities and the encouragement of small entrepreneurs in the LEADER space, encourages innovative projects that are in line with the types of activities eligible for support through PNDR (National Rural Development Programme) 2014-2020 and with the local community development objectives.

Out of the three GALs (Local Action Group) present in Covasna County, the Progressio Local Action Group and Alutus Local Action Group include the UATs (administrative-territorial units) and NGOs situated in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe. Within the GAL Progressio Association<sup>3</sup> we find the following communes: Chichiș, Dobârlău, Ilieni and Ozun, while the other communes: Arcuș, Bodoc, Ghidfalău, Malnaș, Micfalău and Valea Crișului are situated within the GAL Alutus Regio Association<sup>4</sup>.

In 2008, Romania adopted the “National Strategy for Sustainable Development” on short (Orizont 2013), medium (Orizont 2020) and long term (Orizont 2030).

## Chapter 2

### 2. Position and extension of the studied geographic space

In order to delimit and position more precisely the the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe within the Brașov Depression, it is necessary to study in depth all the existing delimitations in the geographical literature as well as a geomorphological analysis of the relief reported at the major valleys of the main river networks, the dispersion of human settlements and administrative boundaries of communes and counties.

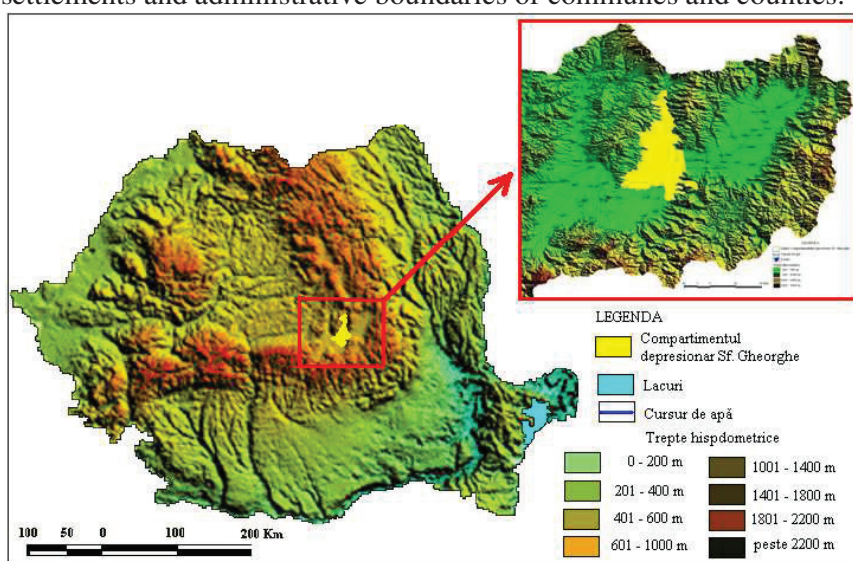


Figure no. 5 The geographical location of the the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe within the Brașov Depression and within Romania

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the communes mentioned in GAL Progressio, we also have the following communes as partners: Barcani, Boroșneu Mare, Brateș, Comandău, Dalnic, Reci, Sita Buzăului, Valea Mare, Zagon and the town of Covasna.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the communes mentioned in GAL Alutus Regio, we also have the following communes as partners: Aita Mare, Bățani, Belin, Bixad, Brăduț, Vârghiș and the town of Baraolt.

It should be noted that among the geographers, only the division of the central geographic sector of the Braşov Depression, located between the two “gates”, namely Sânpetru (in the West) and the gate from Reci (in the East), is the basis of a scientific discussion regarding geographic subdivisions (compartments), respectively their denominations.

The Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, together with the Depression Compartment Prejmer<sup>5</sup>, form the Şesul Frumos Depression (Tufescu, 1974:79), which is positioned between the Târgu Secuiesc Depression in the East and the Bârsei Depression in the West, belongs to the great geomorphological unit of the Braşov Depression<sup>6</sup> (Iancu, 1975), forming the largest Intra-Carpathian depression area (Pop, 2006: 91) in Romania, of about 1,800 square kilometers (Figure no.6).

We can simplify the division of this sector into two large compartments:

- The Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, located mainly in Covasna county, includes the Câmpul Frumos plain, the wet meadow of the Olt and Râul Negru in the studied perimeter;
- The Prejmer–Săcele Depression Compartment, including the Călnic plain and the Săcele piedmont from the administrative territorial unit of Braşov county.

Between the two compartments there is a well-defined natural boundary, respectively the sections of river stretches Teliu, Tarlung, Negru River and Olt.

## Chapter 3

### 3. Natural components and tourist and anthropic resources, premises in the development of rural tourism

#### 3.1. The tourist potential of the natural components

The analysis of the origin of the depression compartment Sfântu Gheorghe, located in the internal curvature of the Carpathians, is possible only through considering the entire Braşov Depression, as it forms a complex geological unit of tectonic origin (Ielenicz, Pătru, 2005:212).

The relief of the depression compartment studied is the result of the gradual deepening of watercourses (Olt, Râul Negru), especially by the Olt river, which formed a terrace relief between the Baraolt Mountains and the Bodoc Mountains, starting from the village of Micfalău and close to Sfântu Gheorghe on both sides of the river.

The contact of the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe with the mountain area is quite sharp, marked by a well-shaped alignment with many rural settlements.

Due to the geographical positioning of the Braşov Depression, implicitly the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe within the internal curvature of the Carpathians, surrounded by a mountain frame, as well as the presence of the interference of the influences of Eastern and Western air masses, we have the presence of a topoclimate with nuances of thermal excess (Pop, 2006:93).

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<sup>5</sup> \*\*\*, (1982), Enciclopedia Geografică a României, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, pagina 402.

<sup>6</sup> The Braşov Depression has the appearance of a plain (named by Vintilă Mihăilescu “*Şesul intercalat al Braşovului*” (The interleaved plain of Braşov), 1969). It has an elongated shape and is considered to be an Intra-Carpathian depression area of tectono-erosive origin, where the piedmonts and glacises that develop under the mountain, broad fields and plains follow. It has a lobed configuration that extends into valleys to the mountain, forming numerous bays.



The thermal comfort index “is based on a correlation between air temperature, humidity and wind” (Ciangă, 1998:49).

Existing climatic conditions that can produce climatic comfort conditions with bioclimatic stress indexes, which contain correlations of climate elements (temperature, air humidity, atmospheric pressure, wind) in relation to the human body, affect to a small extent those present (permanent or temporary residents/tourists) in the studied depression compartment, due to the relatively low atmospheric calm.

The evolution of the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe is also the result of the activity of the hydrographic network, being also an important hydrographical convergence zone (Újvári, 1972:398; Pop, 2006:93).

The presence of mineral waters as well as carbon dioxide emanations (mofetta<sup>7</sup>) are particularly important for tourism, as these hydrominerals can be used for both internal and external treatments.

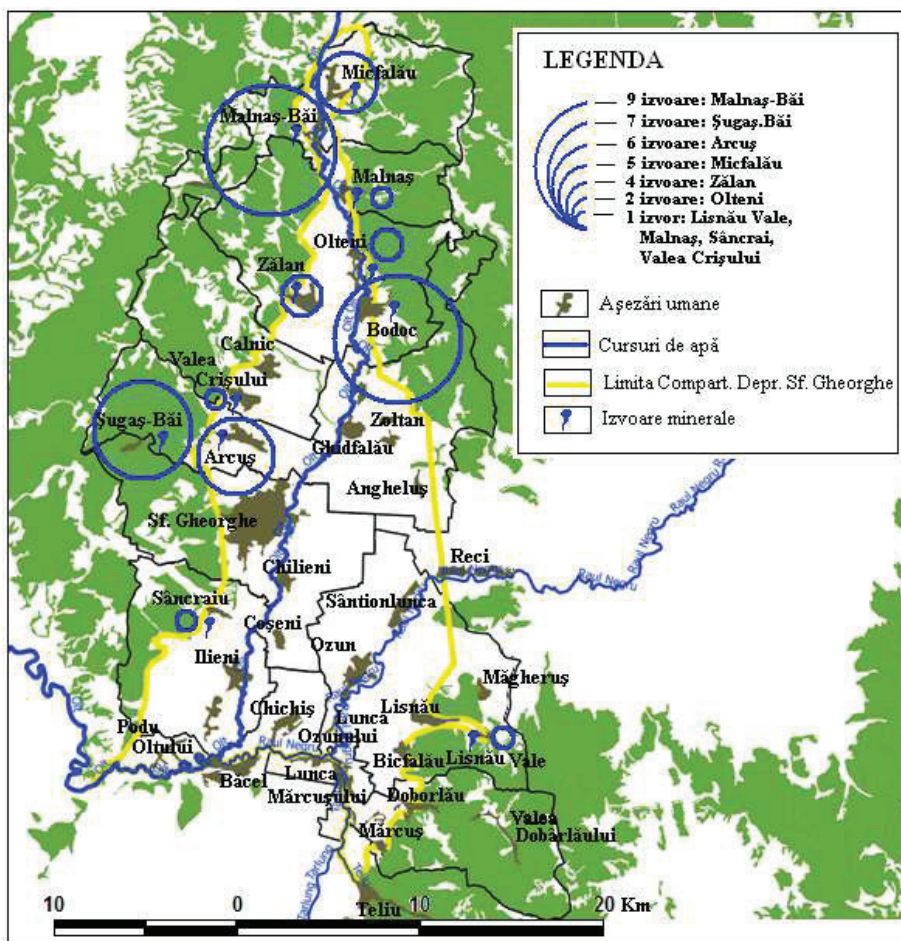


Figure no. 14 The distribution of mineral springs in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe

The natural landscape of the depression compartment studied is a very valuable touristic potential, both through the forest vegetation and the rich fauna of the surrounding mountain massifs.

<sup>7</sup> Mofette are natural gaseous carbon dioxide emanations, used in the external treatment of cardiovascular diseases.



Among the protected natural areas located on the territory of the studied compartment, we highlight the Natura 2000 ROSCI0111 site „*Mestecănișul de la Reci și Rezervație naturală de importanță națională VII.9 Mestecănișul Reci - Bălțile de la Ozun – Sântionlunca*” (The Birch from Reci and the Natural Reserve of National Importance VII.9 the Birch from Reci – Bălțile de la Ozun – Sântionlunca), as this protected area is mainly at the heart of human interactions in this geographic space.

The specific natural conditions of the natural reserves presented constitute a favorable natural environment for the development of ecological tourism on these protected areas.

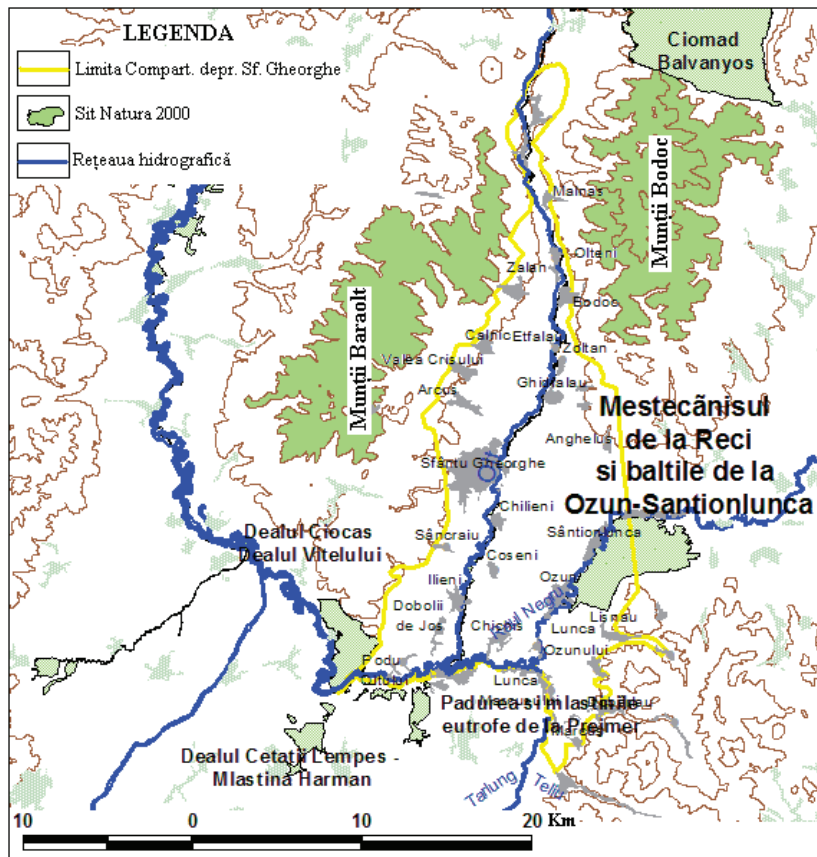


Figure no. 22 Natural protected areas  
(Source: Raduly Lenke, prelucrare în ArcGis și QGIS, 2017. )

### 3.2 Anthropic touristic heritage and traditional human activities

Anthropic touristic objectives from the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe can be grouped into several categories of major importance, thus we have:

- edifices (historical, religious, cultural and sport) with high tourist potential due to important elements of the building (age, uniqueness, novelty, size, function);
- monuments, statues and commemorative plaques, which represent a tourist interest resulting from the need to know historical events and personalities of the place;

<sup>8</sup>Natura 2000 is a European network of protected natural areas created in 1992, from the need to protect the nature and to maintain for a long-term the natural resources necessary for socio-economic development (<http://www.anpm.ro>).

- cultural and artistic manifestations within the village festival (organized annually in communal residences), and within the carnival,<sup>9</sup> etc.;
- the traditional fairs organized annually (at Ozun, Ilieni, Olteni) five times, according to a very ancient rule, according to which on the Wednesdays of the onomastic days of <sup>10</sup>Iosif, Orban, Ana, Rózsa and Miklós (Nicolae), or if these days do not fall on Wednesday, the first day of Wednesday after the given onomastic day the traditional fair takes place, where livestock farmers can sell their animals, and the craftsmen also have the opportunity to market their products;
- tourist resources of ethnographic nature<sup>11</sup>;
- rural handicraft<sup>12</sup>, such as the harvesting and processing of timber (Valea Dobârlăului, Lisnău), blacksmithing (Bicfalău, Valea Crișului, Micfalău, Zălan), furriering (Mărcuș), pottery (Valea Crișului), gingerbread baking (Lisnău);
- secondary occupations, such as the picking of wild berries, mushrooms, medicinal plants, etc. are very popular, due to the vicinity of the forest to the rural settlements in the depression compartment studied.

Also within the historical edifices of great value, we include mansions located in several rural localities in the depression compartment studied.

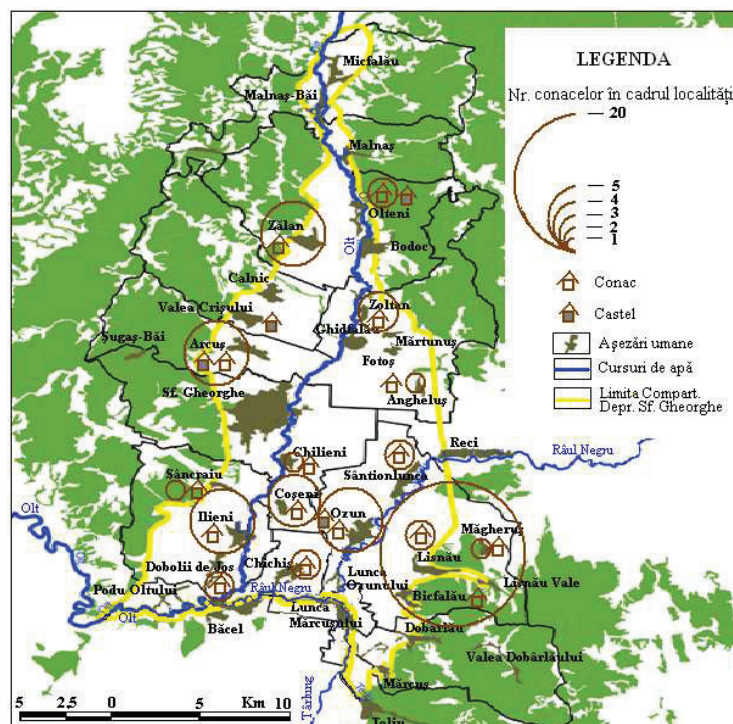


Figure no. 24 The distribution of mansions and castles within the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe

Usually the carnival is organized by cultural associations (Bik-Makk Association from Bicfalău), volunteer firefighters (Ozun, Chichiș, Valea Crișului), Town Hall (Micfalău) or local people (Bodoc, Ilieni).

<sup>10</sup> The traditional fairs of the year are begun in May with the Iosif's fair, where the residents of villages from the area can buy plants and seedlings, and the year ends with Nicolae's traditional fair in December, when the rural population buys the pig for next year's Christmas.

<sup>11</sup> This group contains a series of traditional activities (weaving, art of painting eggs, folk games and dances, etc.), folk architecture and folk art, folk clothing and folk songs, folk products, and so on.

<sup>12</sup>The information related to the existence of folk handicraft and craftsmen was obtained through Questionnaire no. 2 used in the case of the Mayors of the communes in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe.

## Chapter 4

### 4. Infrastructure of touristic and general character

Any tourist activity in a geographical region is a large consumer of accommodation structures of different types.

As a result of the field measurements, the following accommodation structures were identified in the depression compartment studied.

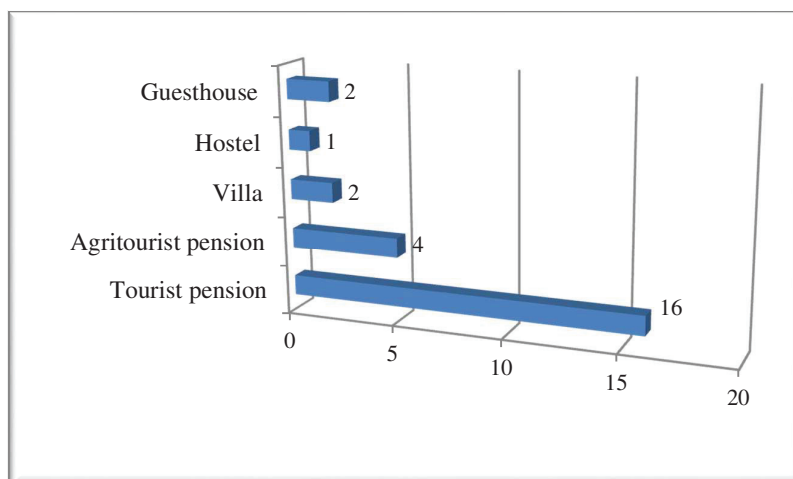


Figure no. 25 Type of accommodation unit for 2015

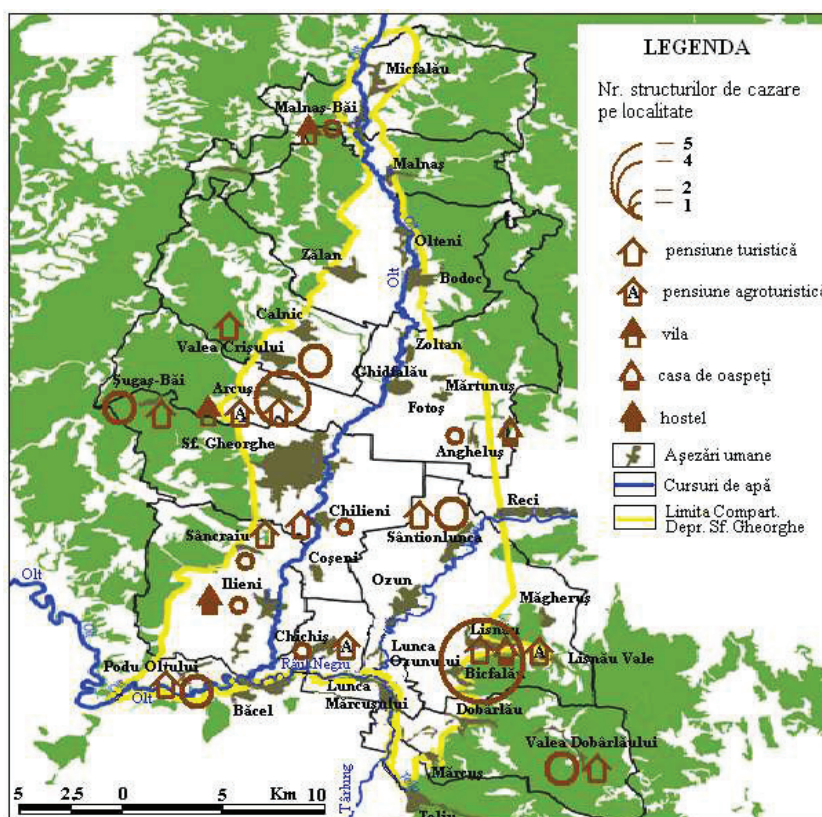


Figure no. 26 Accommodation units in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, 2015.



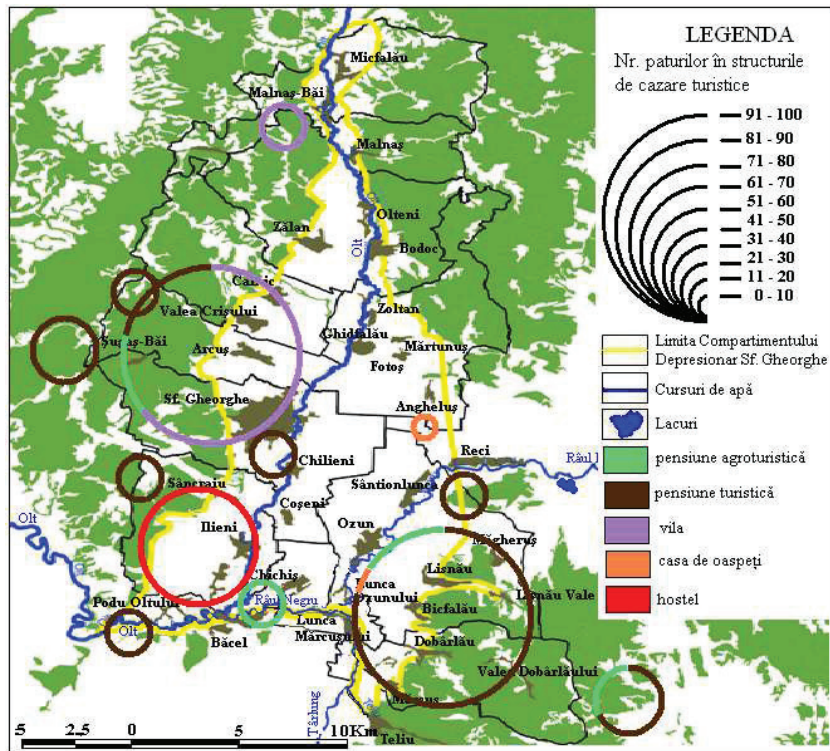


Figure no. 27 The size and structure of accommodation capacities at the level of localities, 2015.

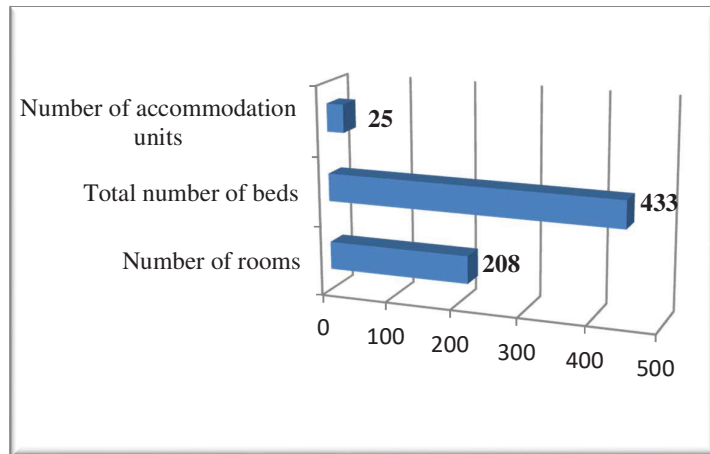


Figure no. 28 The capacity of accommodation structures for 2015

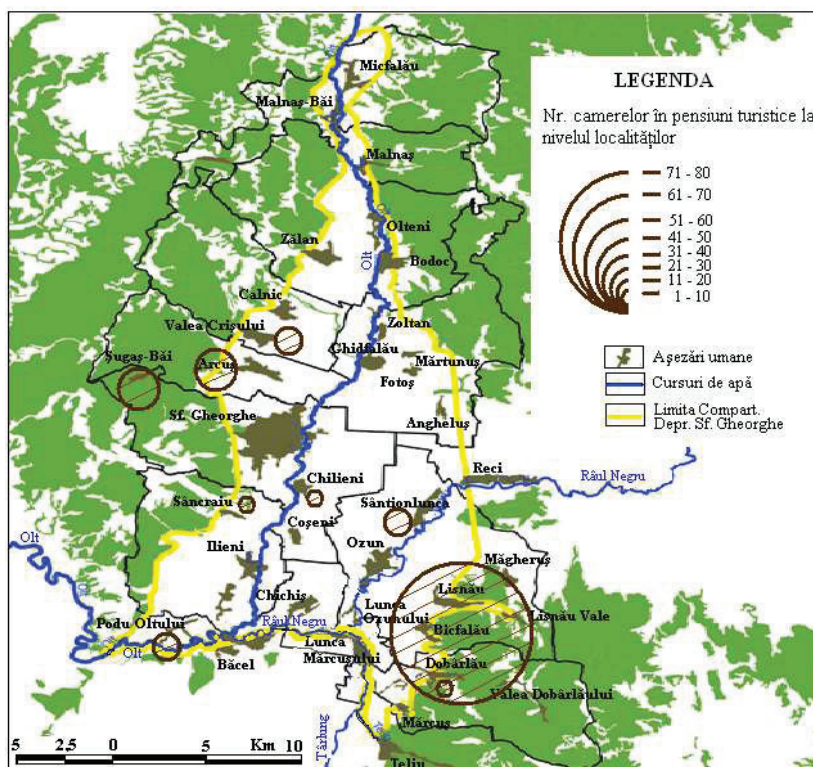


Figure no. 31 The room distribution of tourist pensions in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, 2015.

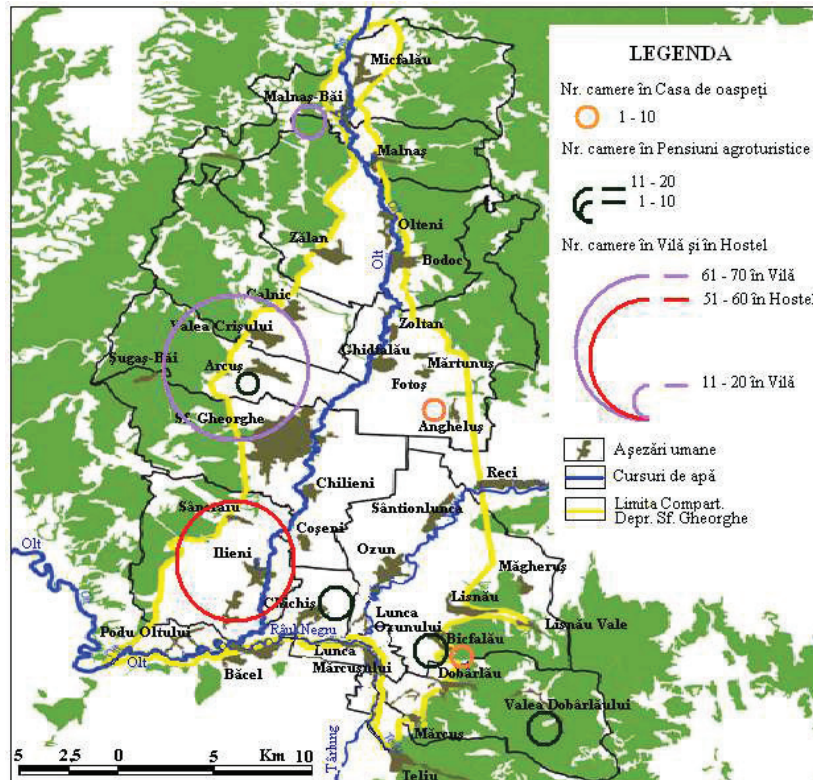


Figure no. 32 The room distribution of agritourist pensions, guesthouses, villas and hostels in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, 2015.

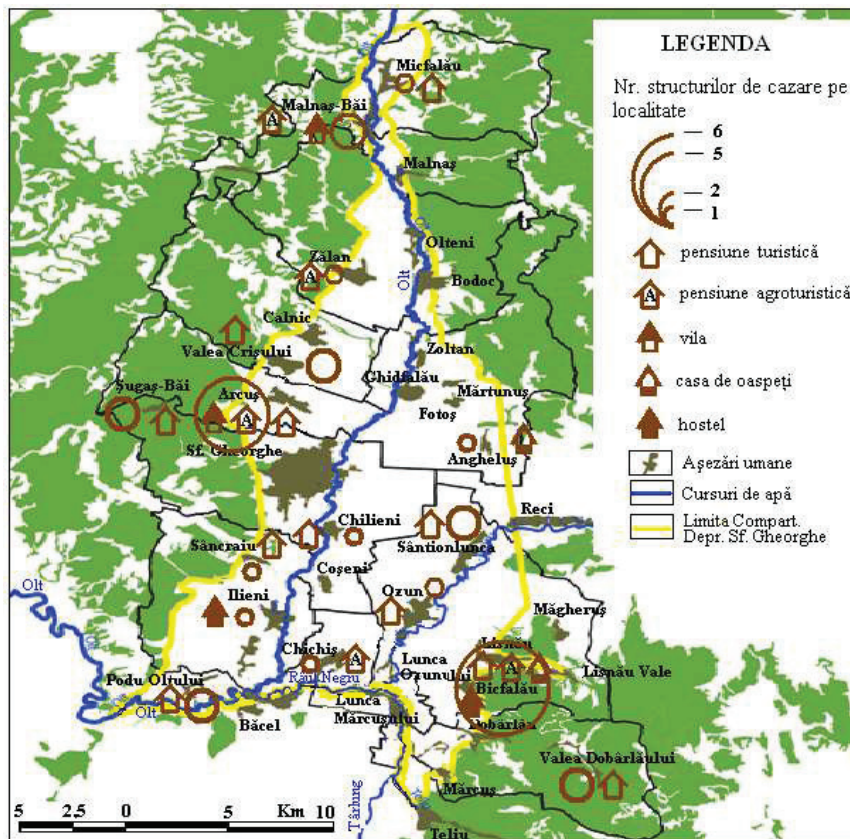


Figure no. 33 Accommodation units in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, 2016.

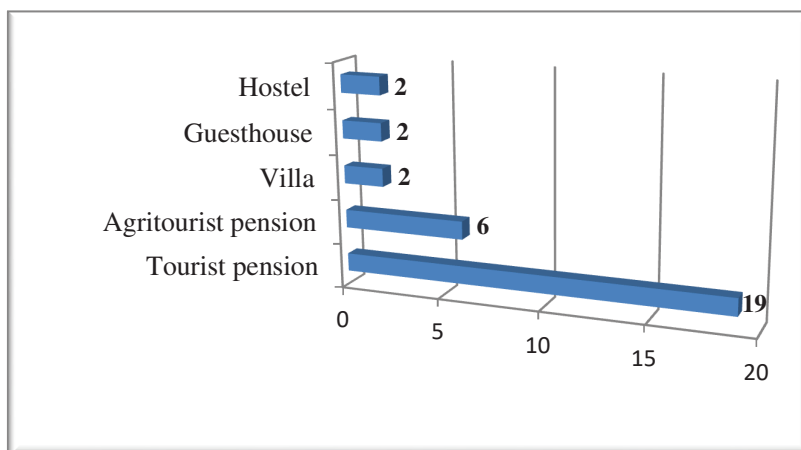


Figure no. 34 Type of accommodation unit for 2016



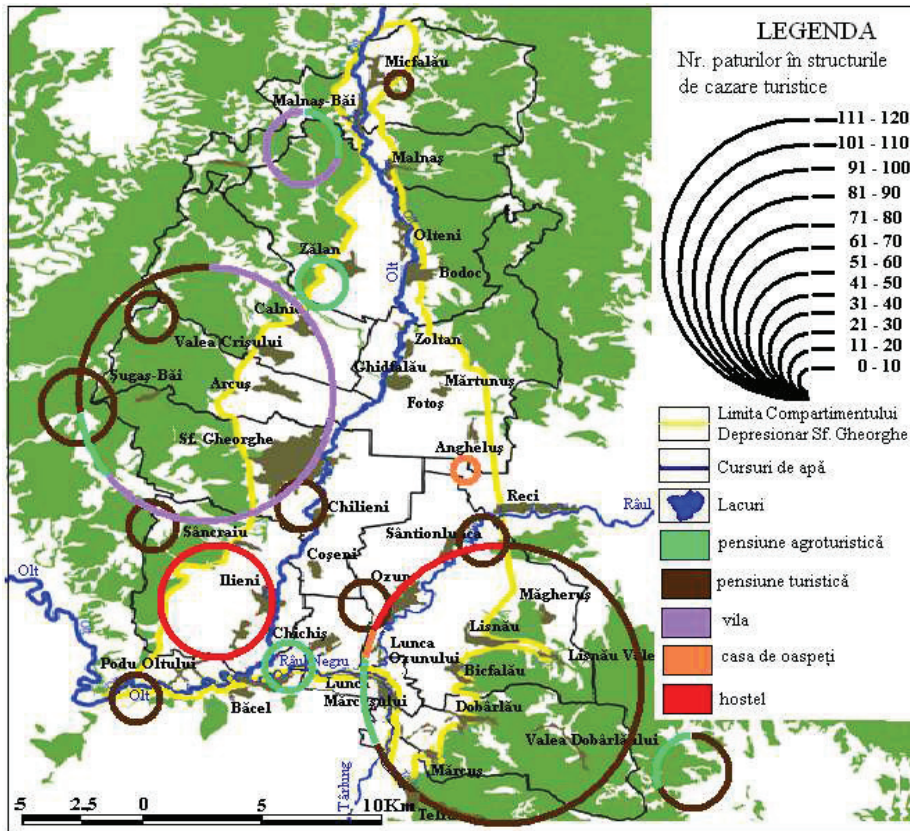


Figure no. 35 The size and structure of accommodation capacities at the level of localities, 2016.

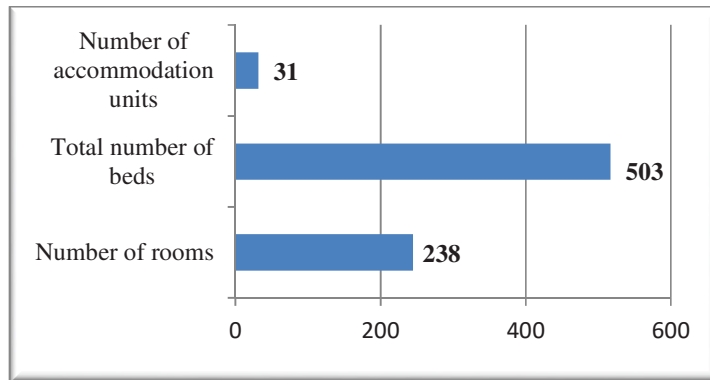


Figure no. 36 The capacity of reception facilities for 2016

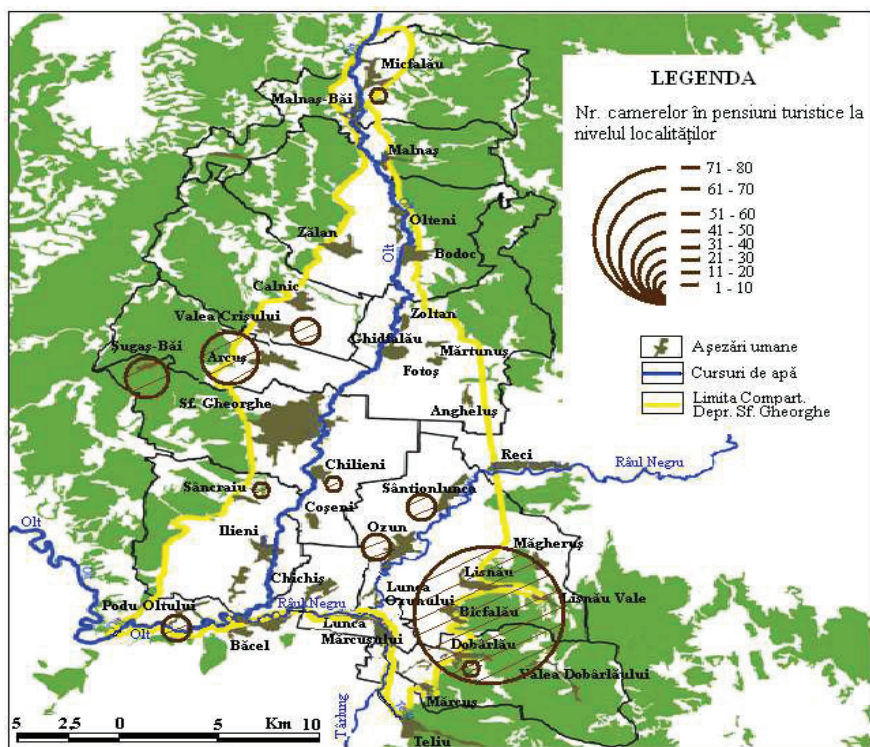


Figure no. 39 The room distribution of tourist pensions in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, 2016.

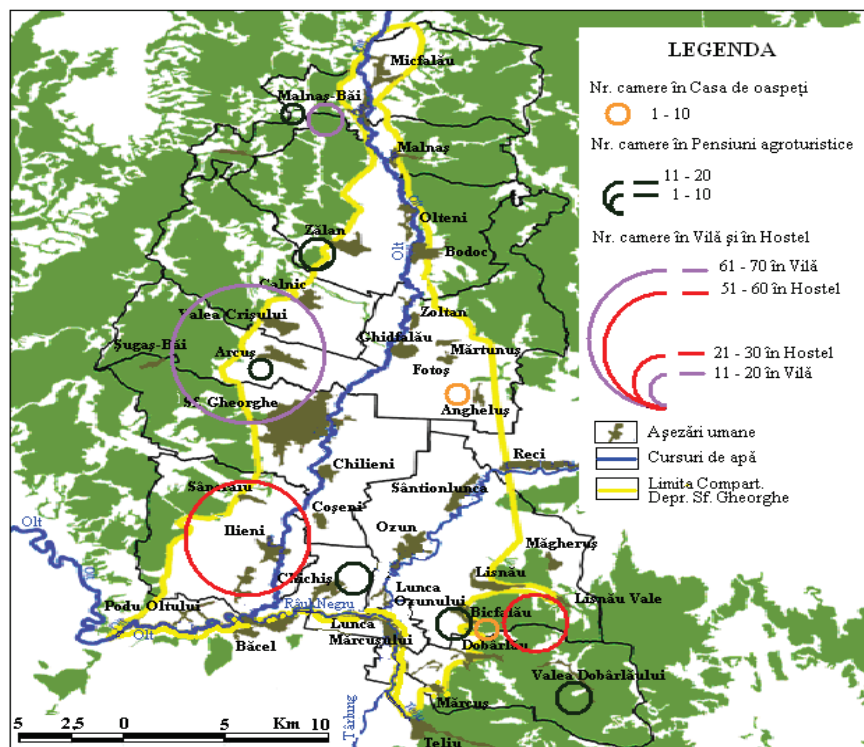


Figure no. 40 The room distribution of agritourist pensions, guesthouses, villas and hostels in the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, 2016.

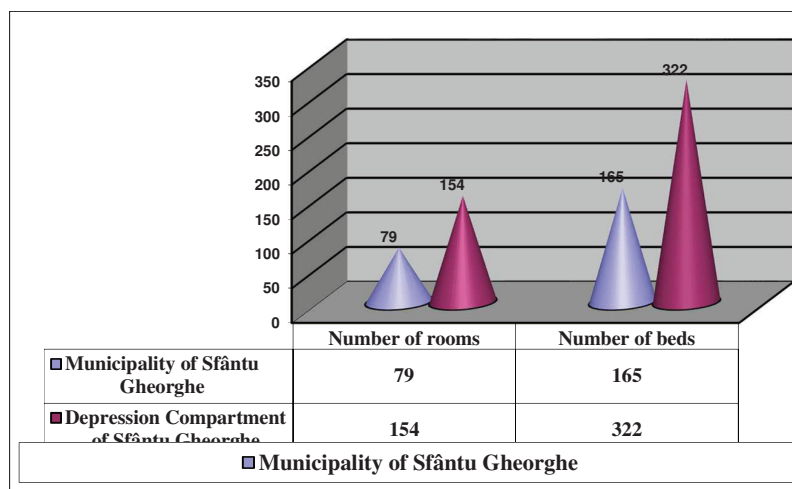


Figure no. 41 The report of rooms and existing places in the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe and the Depression Compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe at the level of tourist pensions for 2016

## Chapter 5

### 5. Tourist traffic and its role in the efficient use of tourist potential and infrastructure, premise in the socio-economic and administrative development of the rural area

In order to conduct a study on tourist traffic in the period between 2015 and 2016, several methods were used to collect information about the tourist flow in the rural settlements from the depression compartment studied.

The presentation of the number of tourists arrived and accommodated in the tourist reception facilities in the depression compartment studied, as well as the number of overnight stays and their provenance are processed from the data provided by the owners/managers of the accommodation units.

Table no. 17 Tourist traffic in the existing accommodation structures in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe<sup>13</sup>, 2015.

Locality	Name of tourist accommodation	Total number of arrivals	of which:		Total number of overnight stays	of which:	
			Romanian tourists	Foreign tourists		Romanian tourists	Foreign tourists

<sup>13</sup> Except for the accommodation structures for which no concrete data could be obtained, namely: Ezüstfenyő Tourist Pension Margó Tourist Pension from the locality of Arcuş, Csilla Tourist Pension from Valea Crişului, Struţi Tourist Pension and Insula verde Tourist Pension from Podu Oltului, Phoenix Pension from Şugaş-Băi.

Arcuș	Szakács House	129	86	43	370	276	94
	Centrul de Educație al Adulților (Adult Education Center)	1921	1401	520	5763	2802	2961
	Ezüstfenyő Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Margó Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chichiș	Lipicai Pension	246	210	36	984	912	72
Valea Dobârlăului	Cerbul Dobârlău Pension	208	198	10	554	526	28
	Perla Bârsei Pension	112	104	8	237	219	18
Angheluș	Casa comunitară a Parohiei reformate (Community House of the Reformed Parish)	121	48	73	139	48	91
Ilieni	Centru de conferințe pentru tineretul creștin a Parohiei reformate (Conference Center for Christian Youth of the Reformed Parish)	1109	612	497	4060	2448	1612
Sâncraiu	Kiss Pension	547	511	36	1094	1022	72
Sântion-lunca	Magdolna Pension	242	218	24	269	218	51
	Pakucs Pension	201	198	3	301	198	103
Bicfalău	Mókus Pension	239	175	64	725	534	191
	Téglás Pension	472	361	111	1428	1042	386
	Casa comunitară a Parohiei reformate (Community House of the Reformed Parish)	11	-	11	77	-	77
	Zölddiófa Pension	122	81	41	369	249	120
	Casa Husar	106	87	19	346	300	46

	House						
Malnaş Băi	Anna Villa	65	56	9	132	105	27
Valea Crişului	Casa cu flori Pension	670	499	171	1102	752	350
	Csilla Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
Podu Oltului	Ştruţi Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Insula verde Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chilieni *	Calipso Pension	765	634	131	1689	1355	334
Şugaş Băi Resort **	Görgő Pension	157	98	59	471	271	200
	Phoenix Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL		7,443	5,577	1,866	20,110	13,277	6,833

\* From an administrative point of view, the village of Chilieni with rural aspect belongs to the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe.

\*\* The Şugaş-Băi Resort is not in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, but due to its function and active touristic role within the depression compartment studied, it is necessary to include the resort in this study.

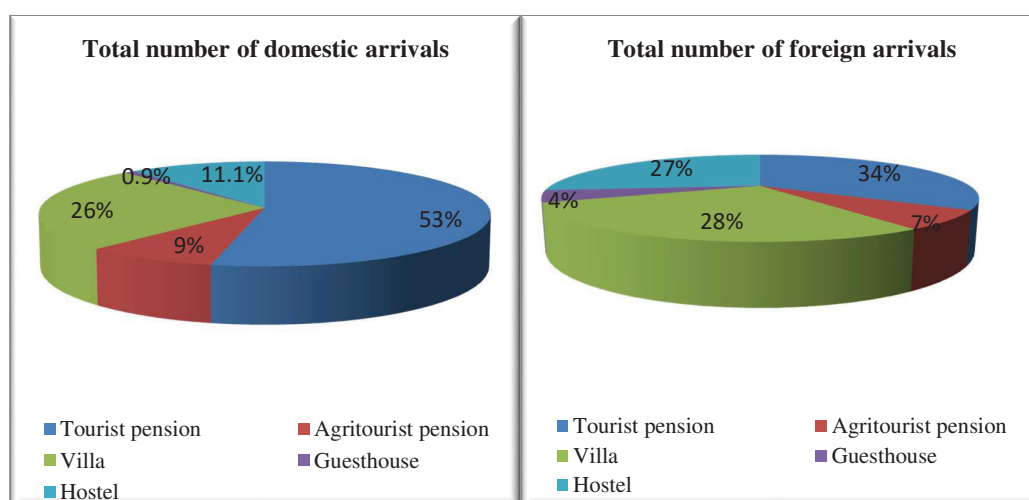


Figure no. 50 Tourist traffic based on the provenance of the tourists for the types of accommodation units for 2015

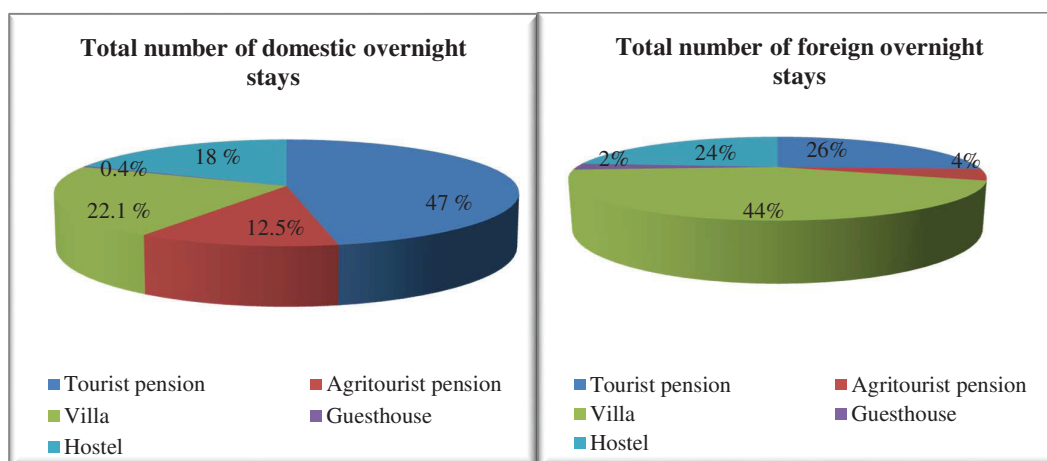


Figure no. 51 Total number of overnight stays for the types of accommodation units for 2015

Table no. 18 Tourist traffic in the existing accommodation structures in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe<sup>14</sup>, 2016.

Locality	Name of tourist accommodation	Total number of arrivals	of which:		Total number of overnight stays	of which:	
			Romanian tourists	Foreign tourists		Romanian tourists	Foreign tourists
Arcuș	Szakács House	120	85	35	360	255	105
	Pensiunea pt. Muzeul din Arcuș (Pension of the Museum from Arcuș)	82	15	67	225	20	205
	Centrul de Educație al Adulților (Adult Education Center)	1996	1603	393	4988	3416	1572
	Ezüstfenyő Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Margó Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
Zălan	Vass Pension	74	19	55	258	38	220
Chichiș	Lipicai Pension	363	314	49	982	835	147
Valea Dobârlăului	Cerbul Dobârlău Pension	296	291	5	582	567	15
	Perla Bârsei Pension	198	190	8	380	358	22

<sup>14</sup> With the exception of: Ezüstfenyő Tourist Pension Margó Tourist Pension from the locality of Arcuș, Csilla Tourist Pension from Valea Crișului, Struți Tourist Pension and Insula verde Tourist Pension from Podu Oltului, Phoenix Pension from Șugaș-Băi.



Angheluș	Casa comunitară a Parohiei reformate (Community House of the Reformed Parish)	120	40	80	260	45	215
Ilieni	Centru de conferințe pentru tineretul creștin a Parohiei reformate (Conference Center for Christian Youth of the Reformed Parish)	1369	676	693	4107	1583	2524
Sâncraiu	Kiss Pension	562	520	42	803	714	89
Ozun	Béldi Mikes Castle	69	23	46	203	64	139
Sântion-lunca	Magdolna Pension	249	219	30	281	219	62
	Pakucs Pension	196	191	5	221	206	15
Bicfalău	Mókus Pension	385	296	89	1340	1067	273
	Téglás Pension	565	456	109	1736	1406	330
	Veverița Hostel	162	84	78	403	130	273
	Casa comunitară a Parohiei reformate (Community House of the Reformed Parish)	8	-	8	32	-	32
	Zölddiófa Pension	153	92	61	383	132	251
	Casa Husar House	96	85	11	195	171	24
Malnaș Băi	Casa Éltés Pension	49	37	12	99	63	36
	Anna Villa	98	51	47	192	96	96
Micfalău	Micfalău Pension	96	90	6	117	93	24
Valea Crișului	Casa cu flori Pension	731	708	23	1170	1101	69
	Csilla Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
Podu Oltului	Ștruți Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Insula verde Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-

Chilieni *	Calipso Pension	984	839	145	1701	1402	299
Șugaș Băi Resort **	Görgő Pension	352	279	73	1004	708	296
	Phoenix Pension	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL		9,373	7,203	2,170	22,022	14,689	7,333

\* From an administrative point of view, the village of Chilieni with rural aspect belongs to the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe.

\*\* The Șugaș-Băi Resort is not in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, but due to its function and active touristic role within the depression compartment studied, it is necessary to include the resort in this study.

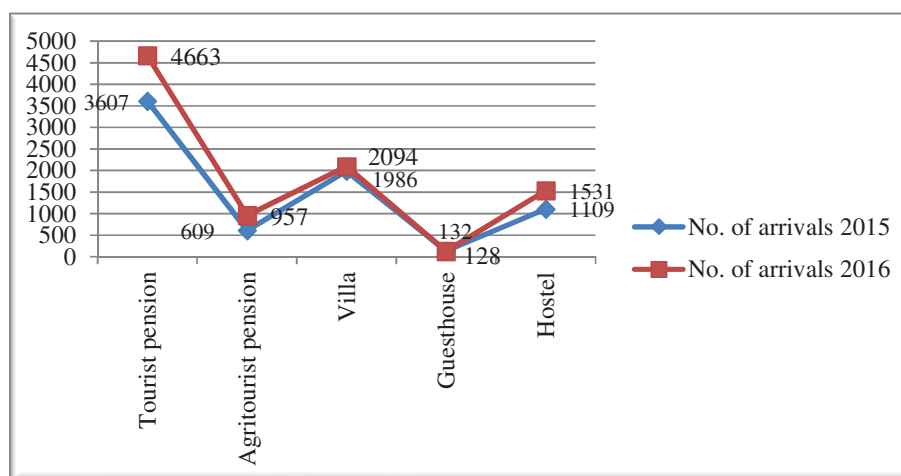


Figura nr.57. Tourist traffic based on arrivals for types of accommodation units, 2015 and 2016

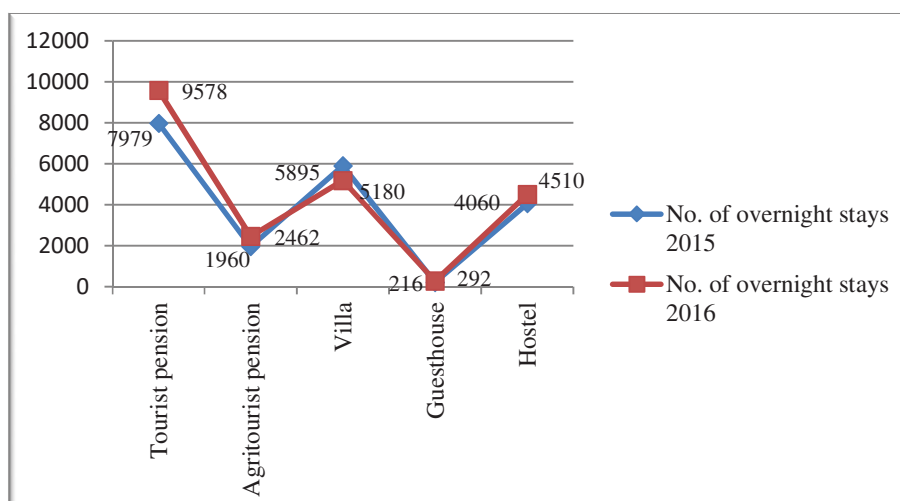


Figure no. 58 Total number of overnight stays for the types of accommodation units, 2015 and 2016

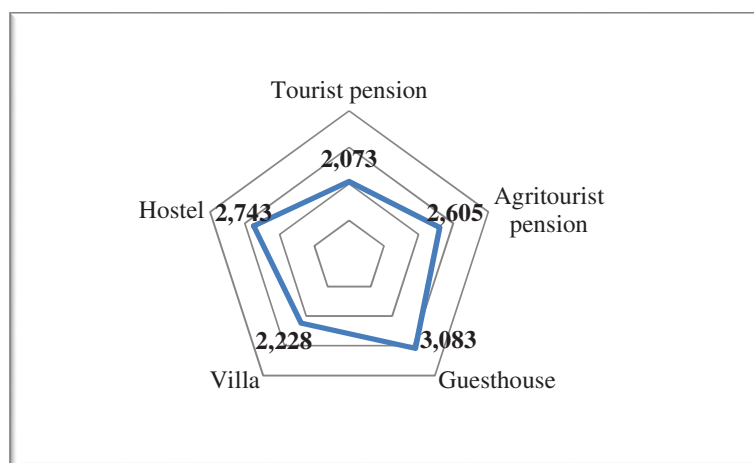


Figure no. 60 Total period of stay for the types of accommodation, 2016

The tourist potential existing in a geographical area determines the types and forms of tourism. However, the most important aspect in the determination of the tourist destination remains the “*motivation of the movement*” (Ciangă, 2002:181).

Table no. 24 Forms of tourism and practical activities

Commune	Village	Form of tourism	Description of the tourist activity (examples)
Arcuș	Arcuș	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The location, as well as the arrangement of the two pensions was made in a pleasant natural environment, so that the tourists who go there can get away from the noisy environment they come from.
		- <i>team building tourism</i>	The Centrul de Educație a Adulților (Adult Education Center) is often the venue for various conferences and team buildings.
		- <i>cultural tourism</i>	The four existing churches, as well as the privately owned village museum belonging to one of the existing pensions, allow tourists to participate in various organized events.
		- <i>weekend tourism</i>	The proximity to the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe favors the development of this kind of tourism.
		- <i>agritourism</i>	The traditions and customs, as well as the arrangement of rural households with orchards of fruit trees and the garden with animals and vegetables, are a potential attraction for tourists.
Bodoc	Zălan	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	Although the pension has existed only for one year, it is the ideal place for relaxation and rest.

		- <i>weekend tourism</i>	The relatively small distance from the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe favors travels of a few days.
		- <i>agritourism</i>	The arrangement of rural households with orchards of fruit trees and the garden with animals and vegetables, are a potential attraction for tourists from the urban environment.
Chichiș	Chichiș	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The location as well as the arrangement of the pension is in a pleasant natural setting. The recreation of the arriving tourists is also ensured by the quality of the services offered.
		- <i>equestrian tourism</i>	Thanks to the well-arranged services including horse-drawn vehicles, the arriving tourists also have at their disposal equestrian instructors.
		- <i>recreational – sport tourism</i>	Diversifying the offered services by combining recreation with horse-riding, gives tourists the opportunity to recreate by moving.
		- <i>weekend tourism</i>	The small distance from both the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe and the municipality of Brașov, favors travels of a few days.
Dobârlău	Valea Dobârlău	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The location of the two pensions in the vicinity of the forest and the stream, as well as the arrangement of tastefully decorated gazebos, make it an ideal place for tourists eager to relax and rest.
		- <i>weekend tourism</i>	The small distance from the two administrative centers of Covasna and Brașov counties allows tourist to travel easily to these pensions.
		- <i>agritourism</i>	Establishing a stable with animals as well as the garden with fruit trees is the ideal factor for tourists coming from an urban environment.
Ghidfalău	Angheluș	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The arrangement and the recent renovation of the guest house allow the recreation of the arriving tourists.
		- <i>agritourism</i>	Being in a locality where traditions and customs are preserved, the harmony of rural households allows the development of agritourism.

Iieni	Iieni	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The location as well as the arrangement of the accommodation structure were made in a pleasant natural setting.
		- <i>cultural tourism</i>	The presence of (fortified and unfortified) churches and mansions, combined with various organized events, allow the development of cultural tourism in the locality.
		- <i>tourism for meetings of scientific sessions on culture and folk art</i>	Centrul de conferințe pentru tineretul creștin al Parohiei reformate (The Conference Center for Christian Youth of the Reformed Parish) hosts several such events. Particularly during the summer, the organized conferences are often targeted at youth.
		- <i>agritourism</i>	Being in a locality where traditions and customs are preserved, the harmony of rural households allows the development of agritourism.
	Sâncraia	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The location as well as the arrangement of the pension are in a pleasant natural setting, being close to the forest.
		- <i>weekend tourism</i>	Most of the tourist arriving here, practice this form of tourism due to the small distance to the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe.
		- <i>agritourism</i>	The harmony of rural households allows the development of agritourism.
Ozun	Ozun	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The arrangement as well as the recent renovation of the castle from the 18th century, built in classicist style, allow arriving tourists to relax <i>in a noble way</i> .
		- <i>equestrian tourism</i>	In the annex building of the castle, there is a stable for riding, where those eager can ride even with Count Mikes' heir.
		- <i>noble–elitist tourism</i>	After the renovation of the castle, the heirs decided to place six rooms in the tourist circuit, in a form of tourism that is unique in the studied region, namely the noble–elitist tourism.
	Sântionlunca	- <i>leisure tourism</i>	The arrangement of the two pensions provides the necessary

		conditions for recreation.
	- <i>transit tourism</i>	The location of the pensions on the roadside of national road DN11 is favorable for the tourists crossing the area.
Bicfalău	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	Due to the geographic location of the village, as well as to the picturesque natural setting, any tourist arriving here has the possibility to be psychically and physically recharged.
	- <i>leisure tourism</i>	The quality tourist services, the appropriate accommodation in the five accommodation units, ensure the satisfaction of the tourists.
	<i>cultural tourism</i>	Due to the large number of mansions (20 in their original form and 16 already modified), the reformed fortified church, as well as the cultural and tourist activities organized by the existing associations offer varied opportunities for tourists.
	- <i>hiking and mountain adventure tourism</i>	The palette of tourist services was enlarged by marked tourist routes, which can also be covered with the help of thematic maps.
	- <i>weekend tourism</i>	The relatively small distance from the two administrative centers of Covasna (16 km) and Braşov (25 km) counties allows tourist to travel to these pensions within a short time.
	- <i>tourism for meetings of scientific sessions on culture and folk art</i>	Associations with tourist profiles and not only organize such events, which often take several days.
	- <i>team building tourism</i>	Thanks to the rooms and the equipment appropriate for team building activities, many companies go to this tourist service.
	- <i>agritourism</i>	Traditional customs and activities, as well as the presence of household annexes with a specific architecture, reminding of mansions (stonework with thick walls and high, double-pitched roofs, etc.), the presence of



			domestic animals and others, are a major attraction for tourists.
Malnaș	Malnaș Băi	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	Due to the geographic location of the village, as well as the natural setting, the tourist facilities favor the psychical and physical recharging.
		- <i>spa tourism</i>	The existence of mineral waters and the spa center of local interest allows the treatment of certain diseases.
		- <i>gastronomic tourism</i>	On the occasion of the hunting day and the festivity of the commune, cooking contests using game meat are organized. After judging, these meals can also be tasted by the public.
		- <i>hunting tourism</i>	It is a form of tourism that is practiced by a certain category of people, as a price surcharge is required.
		- <i>weekend tourism</i>	The accommodation units are especially happy with the presence of those arriving on weekends.
Micfalău	Micfalău	- <i>gastronomic tourism</i>	There is a group of people (retirees) from the locality, who are preparing traditional dishes on the basis of very old folk recipes at the various events (commune festival, Fejer Akos Sport Day, etc). After judging, these meals can be tasted by the public.
		- <i>hunting tourism</i>	Due to a very rich hunting fund in the Baraolt and Bodoc Mountains, there are demands in this regard.
		- <i>transit tourism</i>	DN12 passes through the locality, being an important national road (Sfântu Gheorghe - Miercurea Ciuc route) that is crossed very often.
Valea Crișului	Valea Crișului	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	Due to the geographic location of the village, as well as the natural setting, the requirements for recreation are favored here.
		- <i>hunting tourism</i>	Many tourists come here to hunt.
		- <i>weekend tourism</i>	The distance does not prevent tourists from the capital to come here because of the pleasant natural environment and the tourist services offered.

		- <i>equestrian tourism</i>	The Kalnoky Equitation Centre has 15 horses. An Equestrian School has been established, which organizes training courses with instructors.
Hărman	Hărman**	-	-
	Podu Oltului	- <i>recreational tourism</i>	The position of the locality being close to the municipality of Braşov favors the satisfaction of the requirements formulated by tourists.
		- <i>cultural tourism</i>	The Orthodox Church in the locality, as well as the nearby archaeological findings (Ariuşd), represent a tourist interest.
	Chilieni***	- <i>cultural tourism</i>	The presence of churches of various denominations (Orthodox, Reformed, Unitarian), as well as the mansions offers tourists the opportunity to study the history and culture of civilization. Being situated at a distance of only 3 kms from the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe, it is an accommodation opportunity for many tourists from the town during cultural events.
		- <i>transit tourism</i>	DN 12 is an important road with increased road traffic.

Tabel nr. 26. Innovating forms of rural tourism

<b>Name of form of tourism</b>	<b>Description of the tourist activity (examples)</b>
<i>gastronomic rural tourism</i>	Often the accommodation units in the studied area are visited because of the local gastronomy. The prepared traditional meals are fresh, and the ingredients used are natural, without any additives.
<i>noble–elitist tourism</i>	There is a single accommodation unit (Ozun), where a part of a castle from the 18th century was adopted for tourist purposes; the tourists accommodated here have the opportunity to experience the life of a special social category.
<i>team building tourism</i>	Many companies organize such programs, which are in fact training courses with qualified instructors, aiming at team formation, increasing the capacity of work efficiency of the employees and not only.
<i>educational tourism</i>	Within the school, 1-3 day trips are organized with different themes (“doing school differently”, school in nature, etc.), with the purpose of educating children on the chosen theme.

<i>family therapy tourism</i>	In many families, due to their current lifestyle, during the week they do not have time to educate their children. Thus, they participate in such sessions with the whole family, with the aim of educating parents and children.
<i>wildlife tourism (e.g. bears, deer, etc.)</i>	There are designated places from where, at the right time, bears coming at certain intervals can be observed with guidance.
<i>extreme-paintball tourism</i>	Upon request, there are companies that provide such equipment (paint gun with paintballs), with which tourists can play in the nature.
<i>extreme paragliding tourism</i>	Specialized companies offer parachute flying, which is an unforgettable experience.
<i>vogue tourism</i>	It is especially practiced among young people with good financial situation. It meets the following idea: <i>go where the crowd goes.</i>

## Chapter 6

### 6. Empirical innovation and research of rural tourism in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe

Among the first people who set the concept of innovation was Joseph Schumpeter<sup>15</sup>, who in his work published in 1934, defined innovation as a “*new combination of production factors*”.<sup>16</sup>

The combination of the natural and anthropogenic framework favors the innovation process in a rural tourist area: “*The tourism planning of the rural area is circumscribed to the general process of planning and organizing the geographic space...*” (Ciangă, Dezsi, 2007:251).



Figure no. 62 The role of innovation of rural tourism  
(Source: Raduly Lenke, 2017.)

Thus, the three types of innovators were formed within rural tourism, namely:

1. *The rural innovator out of need* is the case of residents from rural environment.
2. *The developed rural innovator* is the case of a rural entrepreneur who has passed the first level or has had an accommodation unit for a long time and wants an innovation to develop the provided business.
3. *The urban innovator in the rural area*, who is not from the locality, comes from the urban environment, their aim being to invest in rural areas with the help of rural tourism.

<sup>15</sup> Schumpeter, J. (1934). *The Theory of Economic Development*, Harvard University Press

<sup>16</sup> The translation of the English quotation belongs to me.

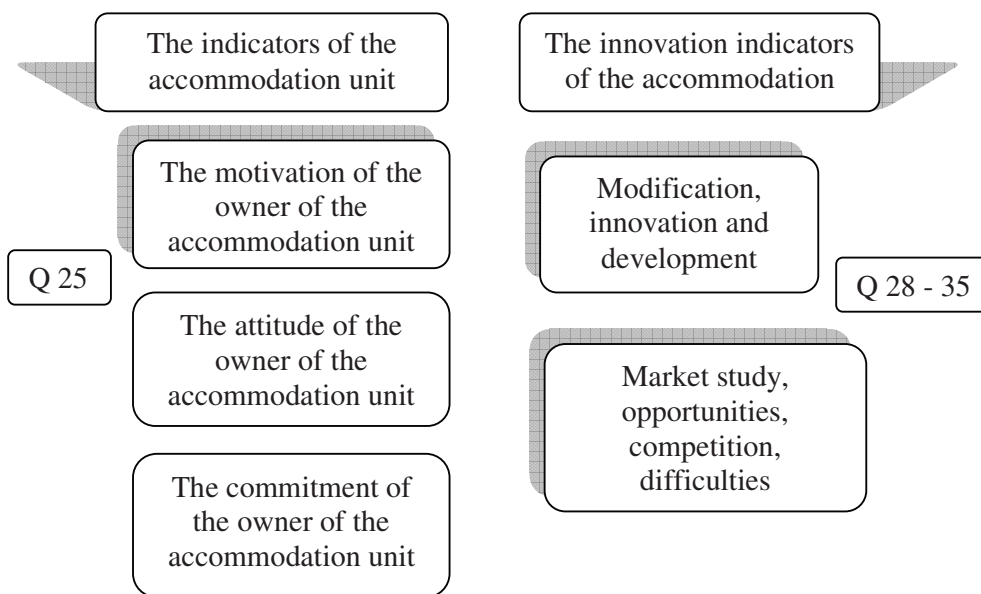


Figure no. 63 The model of the owners of accommodation units  
 (Source: Raduly Lenke, processing based on Type 1 questionnaire, 2017.)

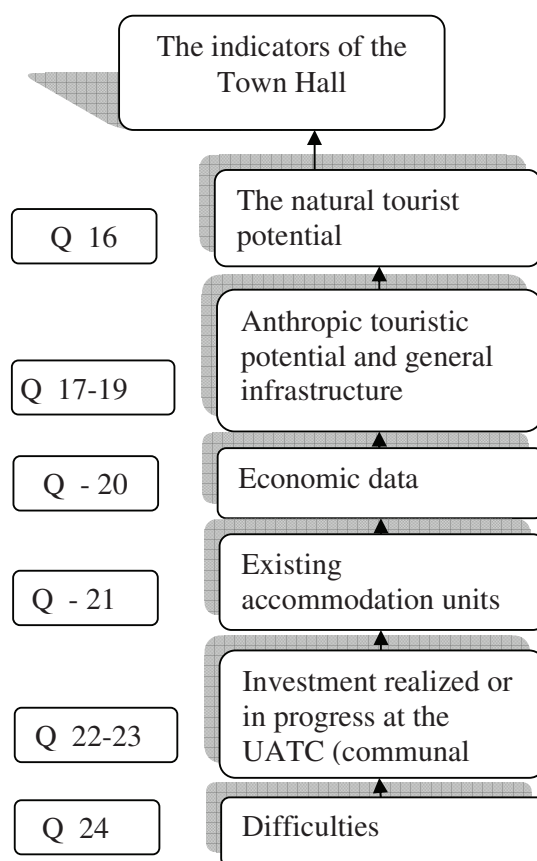


Figure no. 64 The model of UATCs (communal administrative-territorial units) in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe

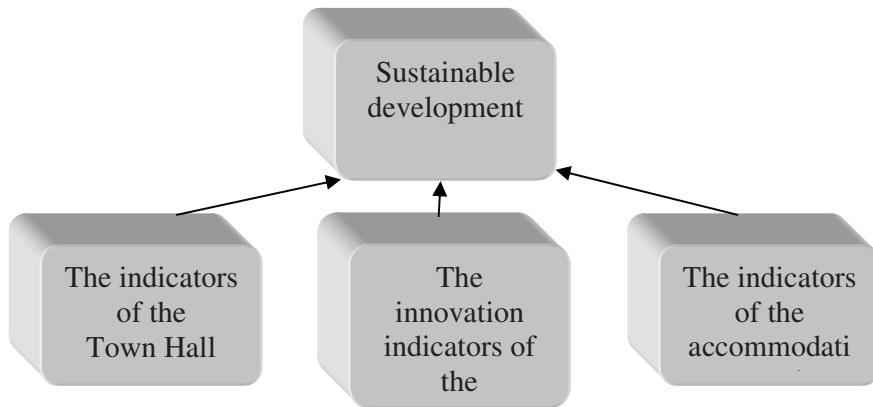


Figure no. 65 Final model of research  
 (Source: Following the Structure of Innovation Capacity, the Essmann-model – processed by Raduly Lenke, 2017.)

**The analysis of Type 1 questionnaire addressed to the owners of tourist accommodation units**

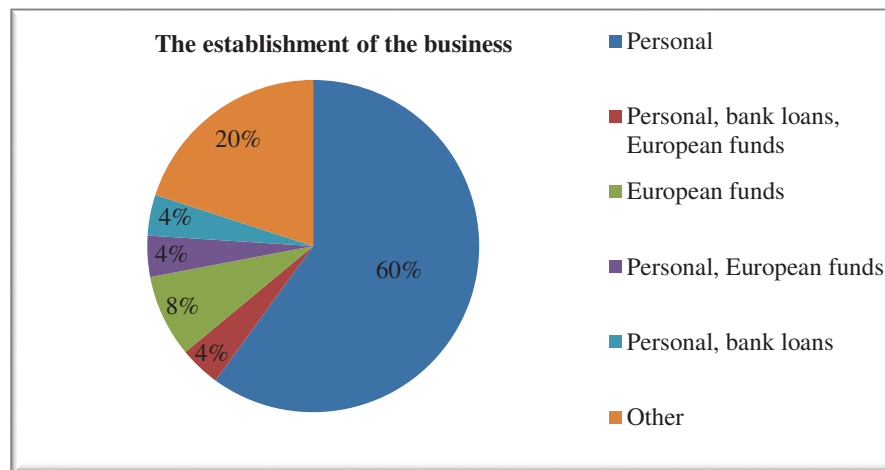


Figure no. 66 The financial resources of the owners

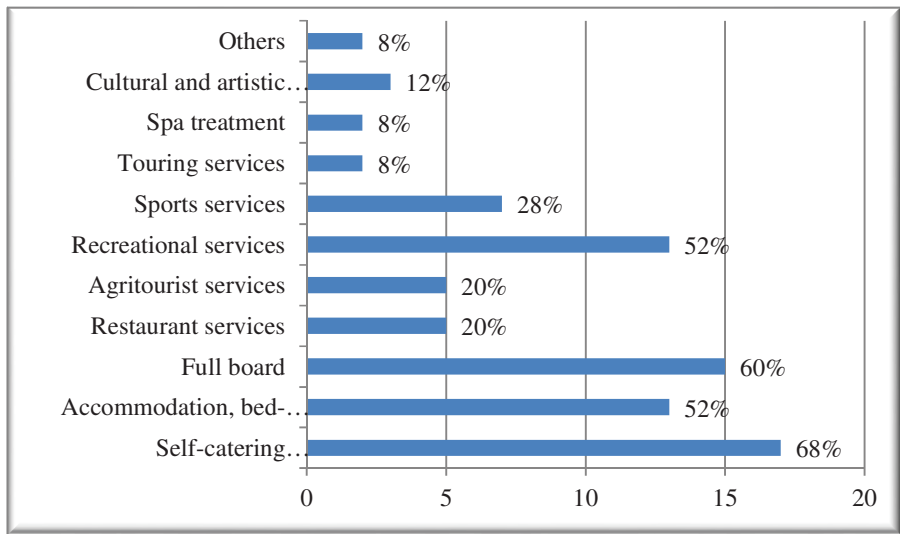


Figure no. 68 Grouping by the offered services

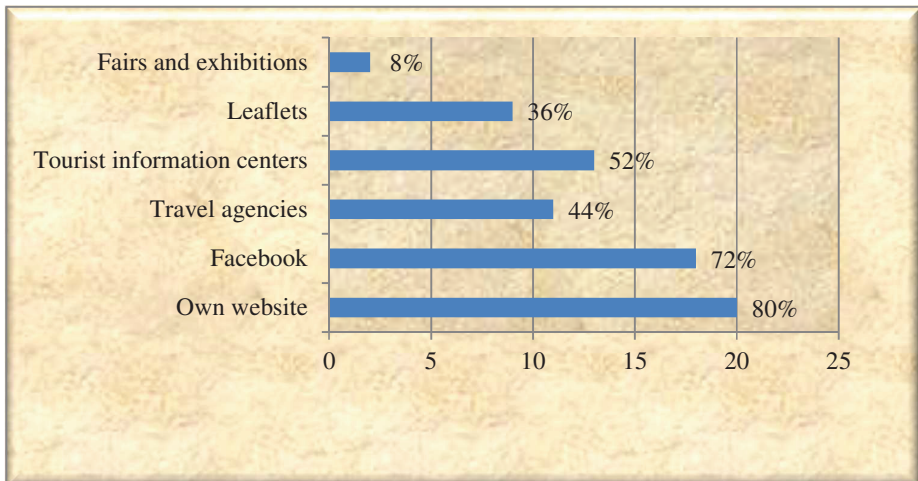


Figure no. 70 Means of promotion used

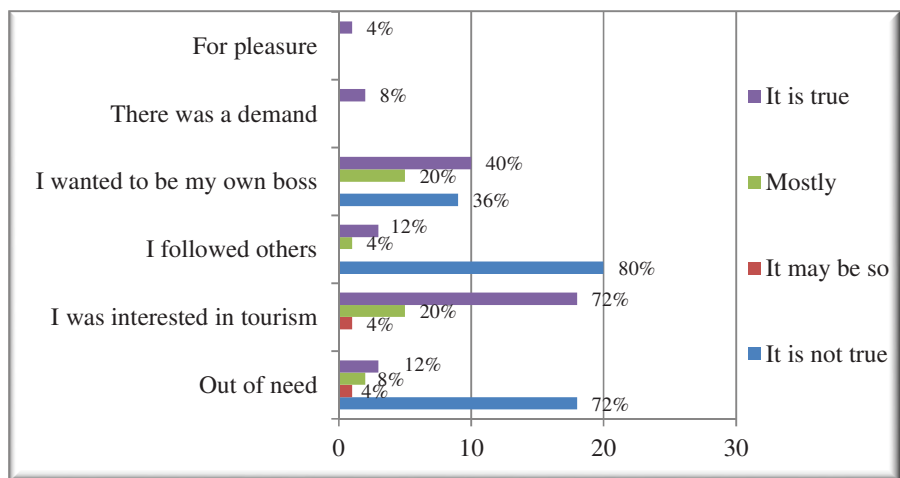


Figure no. 74 The motivations of the owner



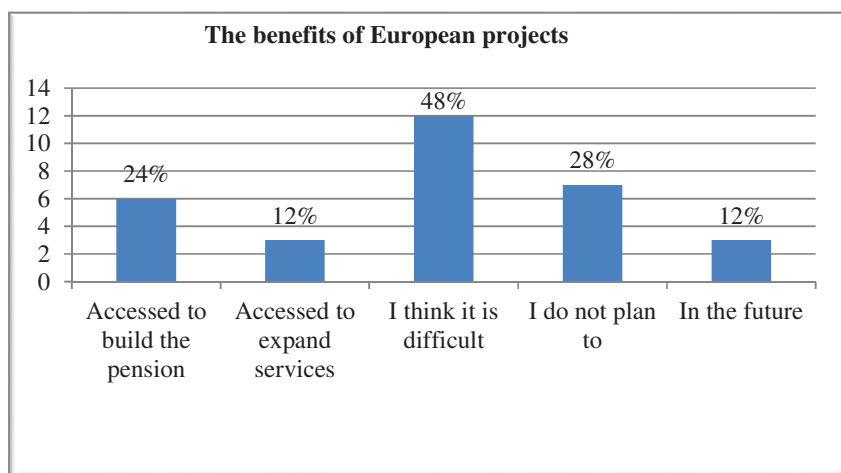


Figure no. 81 Opportunities

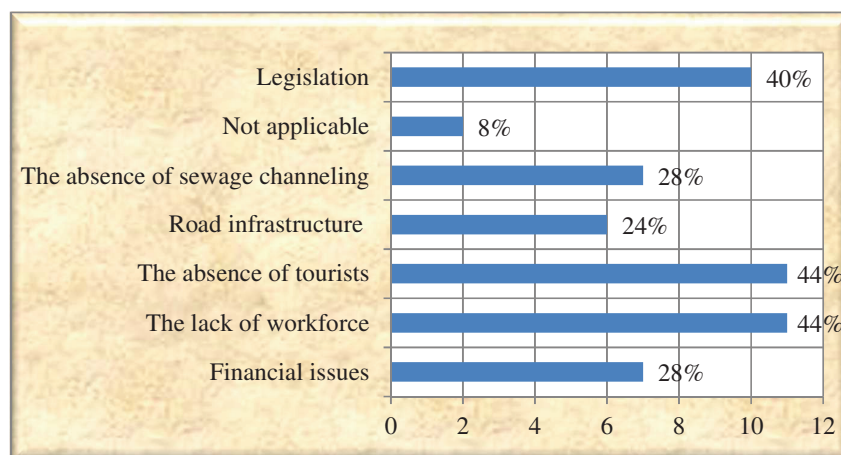


Figure no. 85 Difficulties

**The analysis of Type 2 questionnaire addressed to the mayors**

In total, ten mayors were interviewed from the following communes: Arcuș, Bodoc, Chichiș, Dobârlău, Ghidfalău, Ilieni, Malnaș, Micfalău, Ozun and Valea Crișului.

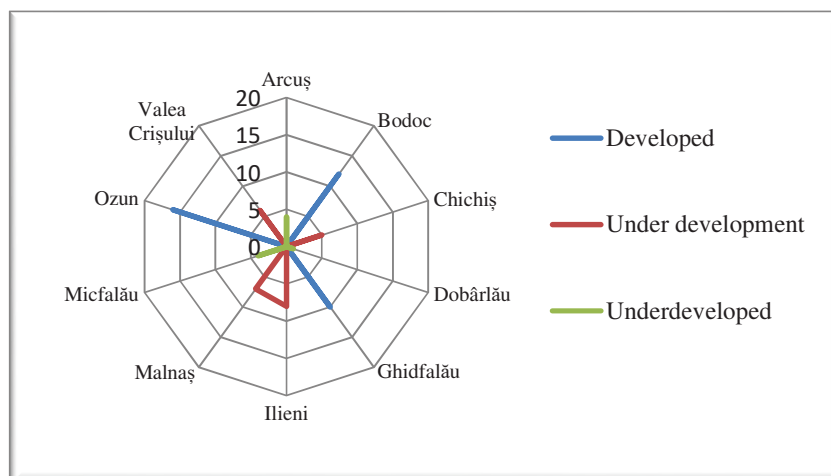


Figure no. 87 The UATC (communal administrative-territorial units) classification based on the existing infrastructure

If we analyze UATs (administrative-territorial units) in terms of the number of accommodation units, the situation is as follows:

- UATC (communal administrative-territorial units) with the most *accommodation units*: Ozun 9, Arcuș 5, Dobârlău 2, Ilieni 2, Malnaș 2, Valea Crișului 2, Bodoc 1, Chichiș 1, Ghidfalău 1, Micfalău 1.

Based on the type of accommodation, we obtain the following classification:

- UATC (communal administrative-territorial units) with the most *tourist pensions*: Ozun 6, Arcuș 3, Valea Crișului 2, Dobârlău 1, Ilieni 1, Micfalău 1.
- UATC (communal administrative-territorial units) with the most *agritourist pensions*: Arcuș 1, Bodoc 1, Chichiș 1, Dobârlău 1, Ozun 1, Malnaș 1.
- UATC (communal administrative-territorial units) with the most *other forms of accommodation*: Ozun 2: *Casa de oaspeți (Guesthouse) of the Church and Hostel*, Arcuș 1: *Centrul de Educare al Adulților (Adult Education Center)- villa*, Ghidfalău 1: *Casa de oaspeți (Guesthouse) of the Church*, Ilieni 1: *Centru Diaconic (Deacon Center of the Church and Hostel)*, Malnaș 1: *villa*, Micfalău 1: *Serviciul de ajutor Malta (Malta help service) - camp*.

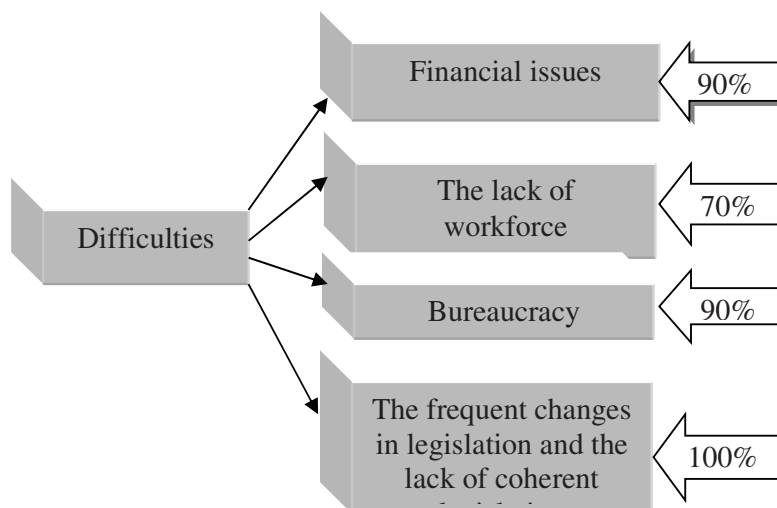


Figure no. 89 Problems faced by mayors

The economic activity in almost every locality in the studied region is influenced by rural tourism. There are more developed localities from the point of view of tourism, while others will have to explore this area of activity, which deserves extra attention if we consider that in the studied area there are not many alternatives to develop economically and the existing ones do not cover the needs in this sense. The classification criteria of these localities is based on the model developed by Ciangă and Dezsi, following the "base of functionality" (2007:269):

- *Ethno-folkloric tourist villages*: Bicfalău, Dobârlău, Arcuș, Zălan, Ilieni, Ozun, Angheluș.
- *Fishing tourist villages*: Chichiș, Valea Crișului.
- *Villages of hunting interest* Micfalău, Malnaș Băi și Valea Crișului.

- *Pastoral tourist villages*: Valea Dobârlăului, Bicfalău, Angheluș Zălan, Podu Oltului. - -
- *Tourist villages with scientific objectives*: Arcuș, Zălan, Ozun, Sântionlunca, Malnaș Băi, Micfalău, Valea Crișului, Iieni and Podu Oltului.
- *Tourist villages with historic, art and architectural monuments*: Arcuș, Bodoc, Iieni, Chichiș, Ozun, Bicfalău, Valea Crișului, Podu Oltului, Chilieni.
- *Tourist villages known for artistic and artisanal creations*: Dobârlău, Arcuș, Mărcuș, Valea Crișului, Sântionlunca, Bicfalău.
- *Tourist villages known for their climate and landscape*: Mărcuș, Valea Dobârlăului, Bicfalău, Sâncraiu, Olteni, Malnaș Băi, Valea Crișului, Șugaș Băi.
- *Spa tourist villages*: Malnaș Băi, Olteni, Șugaș Băi, being resorts of local interest.
- *Tourist villages for practicing sports*: Chichiș, Zălan, Șugaș Băi.
- *Tourist villages known for their fruit trees and wine growing*: Zălan, Bicfalău, Sâncraiu.

The research using Type 1 and 2 questionnaire at the level of the studied depression compartment, was aimed at two groups, namely: the owners of the accommodation units and the town halls to which they belong. The objective was to receive information about the motivation, attitude and commitment at the level of the tourist activity they carry out, as well as future planning in this regard.

Thus, after analyzing the final criteria, the indicators of the pension, the innovation indicators of the pension, the indicators of the town hall, which have a close connection:

- the natural tourist potential includes a mountain relief with a significant landscape attraction, with climatic elements favorable to the development of rural tourism, being completed by the richness and diversity of hydromineral and biodiversity resources, as well as protected areas. The level of development of the UATC (communal administrative-territorial units) is increasing, as well as the tourist accommodation structures;
- the owners of the accommodation units have a good collaboration with the town halls they belong to, they are aware and interested in the changes in the tourist market, and are convinced that thanks to their business, the place where the accommodation unit is located develops;
- most accommodation owners want to remain and continue to work in the field of rural tourism with their economic activity, contributing both to the economic growth of the locality where the business is in progress and to the promotion of the existing image and tourism potential.

The final model describing the empirical results, based on the Essmann model, the *Innovation Capacity Structure - ICC: The innovation process*, in our case sustainable development, based on *knowledge and skills* – pension indicators and innovative indicators of the pension, as well as the *organizational support* – the indicators of the Town Hall.

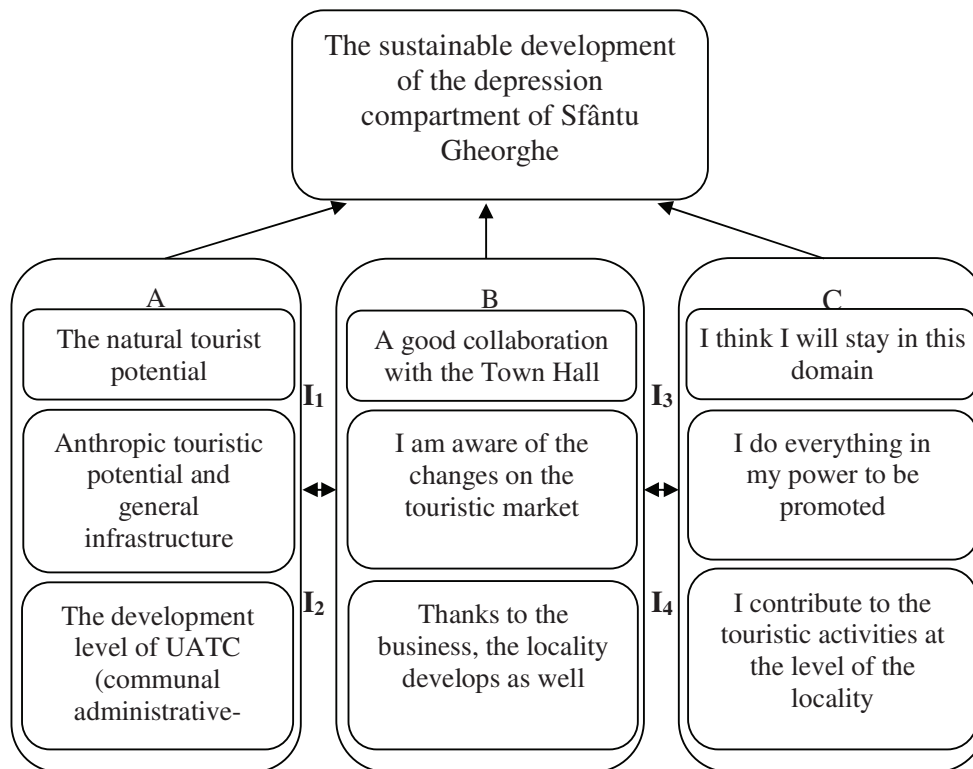


Figure no. 91 Final model of research  
 (Source: Following the Structure of Innovation Capacity, the Essmann-model – processed by Raduly Lenke, 2017.)

## Chapter 7

### 7. Rural tourism in the context of sustainable development. Case study: The touristic model of the village of Bicfalău

Considering the existence of a large number of rural localities, namely 34 villages and a tourist resort (Șugaș Băi) in the area covered by the present study, following theoretical study and especially after the researches carried out on the field, we opted for this study as a touristic model: the rural settlement of Bicfalău, due to the fact that from almost all the points of view, it fell over the other rural settlements in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe.

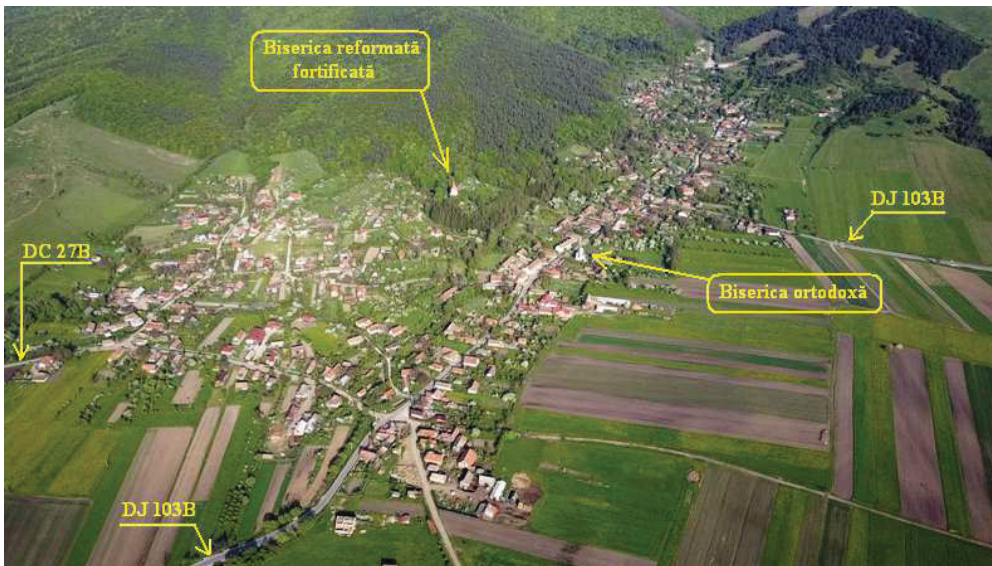


Photo no. 49 The village of Bicfalău, aerial view.

The major attraction of the village of Bicfalău is the large number of mansions.

It can be seen that these mansions built at the end of the 18th century are generally characterized by smaller sizes, having 2-3 rooms and a smaller gate, positioned asymmetrically.

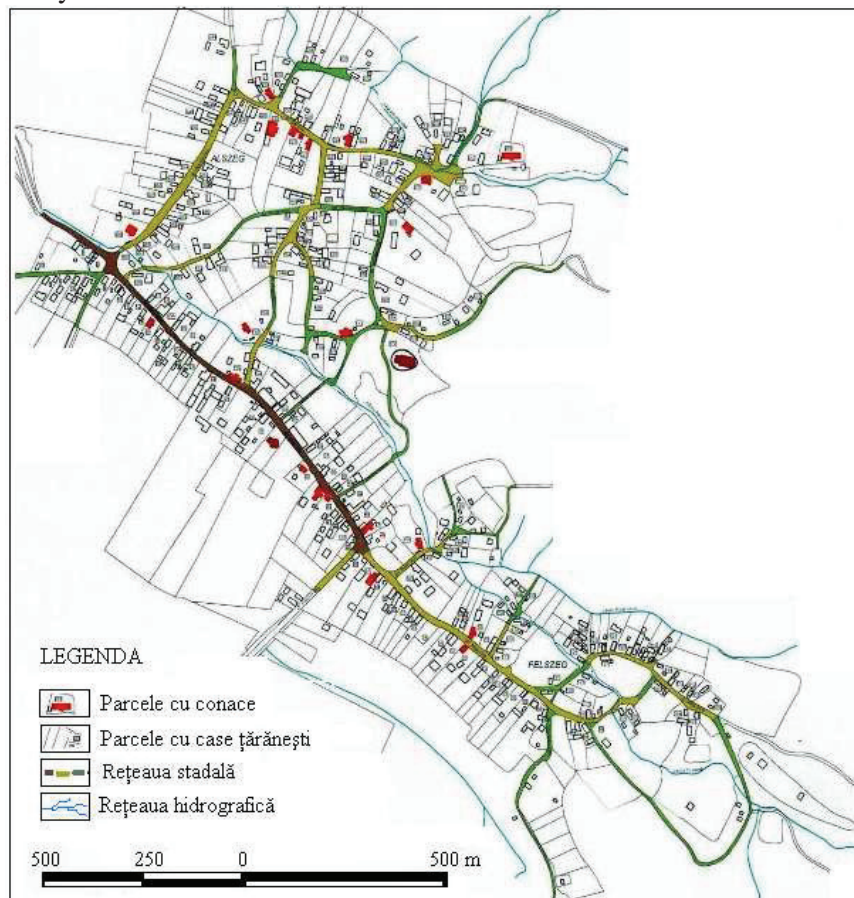


Figure no. 98 The distribution of mansions and rural houses in the built-up area of the locality of Bicfalău



Table no. 33 Investments realized or in progress in the village of Bicfalău in the period (2012– 2017)

Description of the investment:	Source of funding	Amount (thousands RON)	The phase of work
Modernizing the road infrastructure of DC 27B	European funds	1,200	received
Sewage system in the village of Bicfalău.	The World Bank	1,992	received
Realization of individual connections to the sewage system objective in the village of Bicfalău.	The World Bank	490	received
The modernization of the streets from the village of Bicfalău.	European funds PNDR (National Rural Development Programme)	2,300	under implementation
Extension and modernization of the drinking water network in the village of Bicfalău.	European funds PNDR (National Rural Development Programme)	2,100	under implementation
Rehabilitation and modernization of the school in the village of Bicfalău.	The Government of Romania	900	under implementation
Rehabilitation, modernization and endowment of cultural settlement, Bicfalău village.	National Investment Company (CNI)	1,800	nearing completion
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE PROJECTS WITH FUND</b>		<b>10,782</b>	
The development of touristic marketing in the commune of Ozun, Bicfalău village.	European funds PNDR (National Rural Development Programme)	965	Ineligible project
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF INELIGIBIL PROJECTS</b>		<b>965</b>	

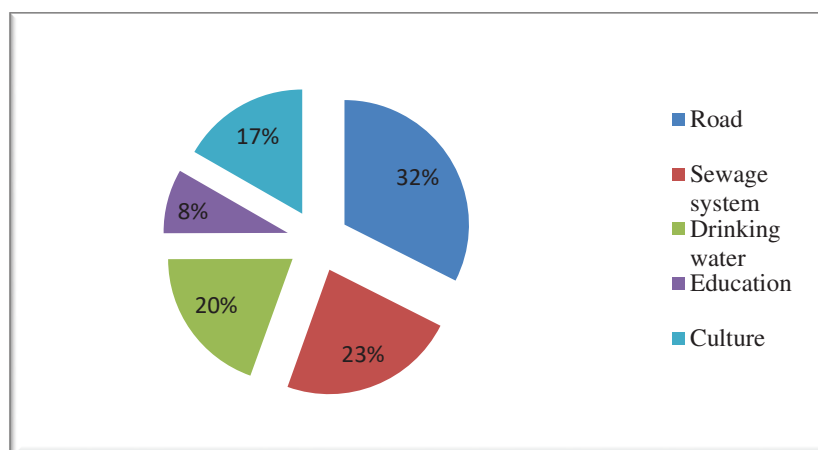


Figure no. 100 Percentage of investments by branches (2012 – 2017)

From the studied area, the village of Bicfalău is the only locality that has the most tourist accommodation structures

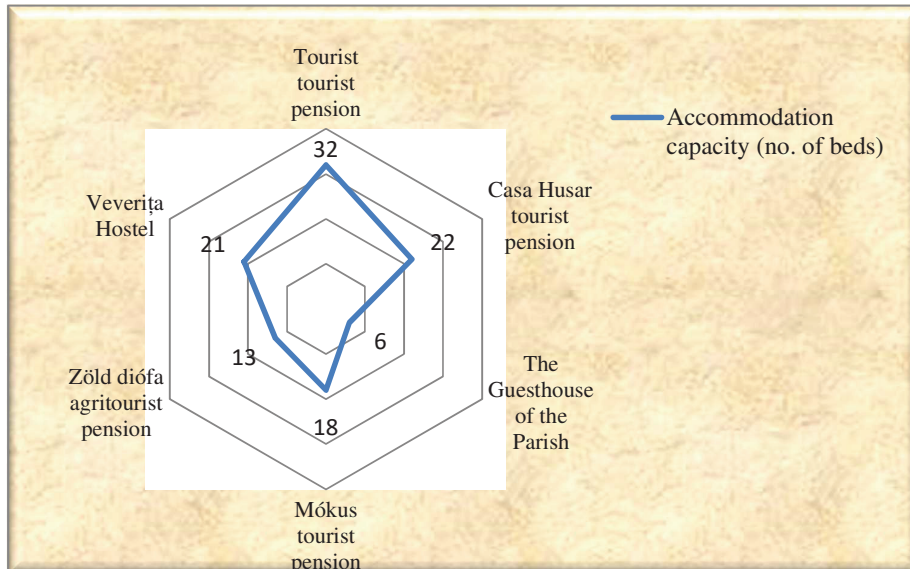


Figure no. 102 Capacity of accommodation of the accommodation units from Bicfalău, 2016

For a correct analysis of the tourist traffic in the two years (2015 and 2016), a type 3 questionnaire was prepared at the level of the village of Bicfalău, based on several criteria: the provenance of tourists, their motivations in choosing the tourist destination, professional training, the duration of the stay, fidelity and age.

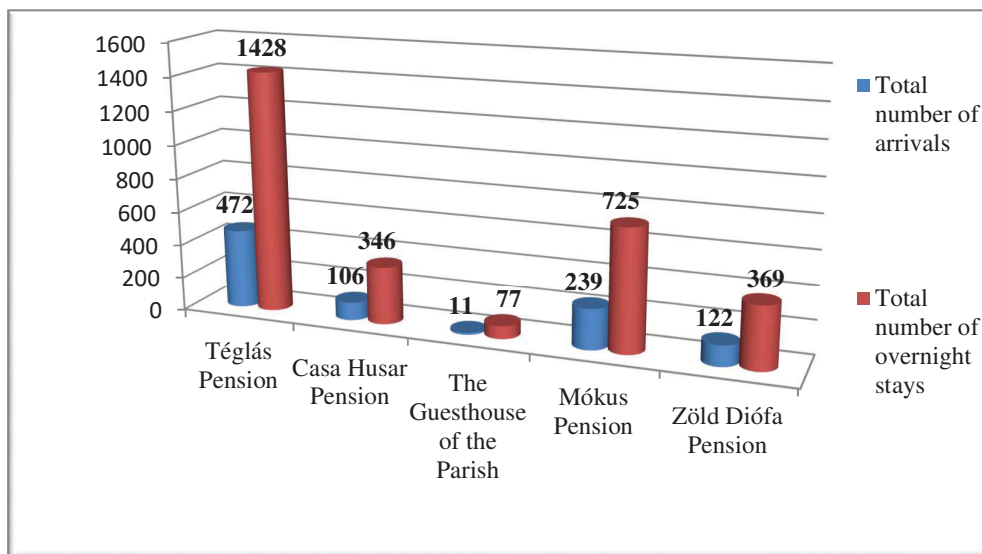


Figure no. 111 Tourist traffic for 2015



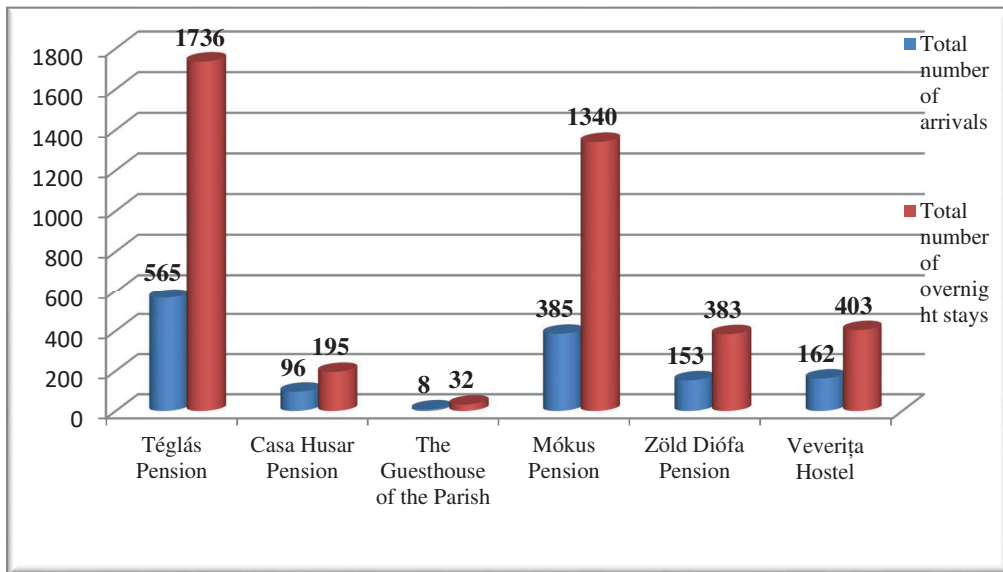


Figure no. 112 Tourist traffic for 2016

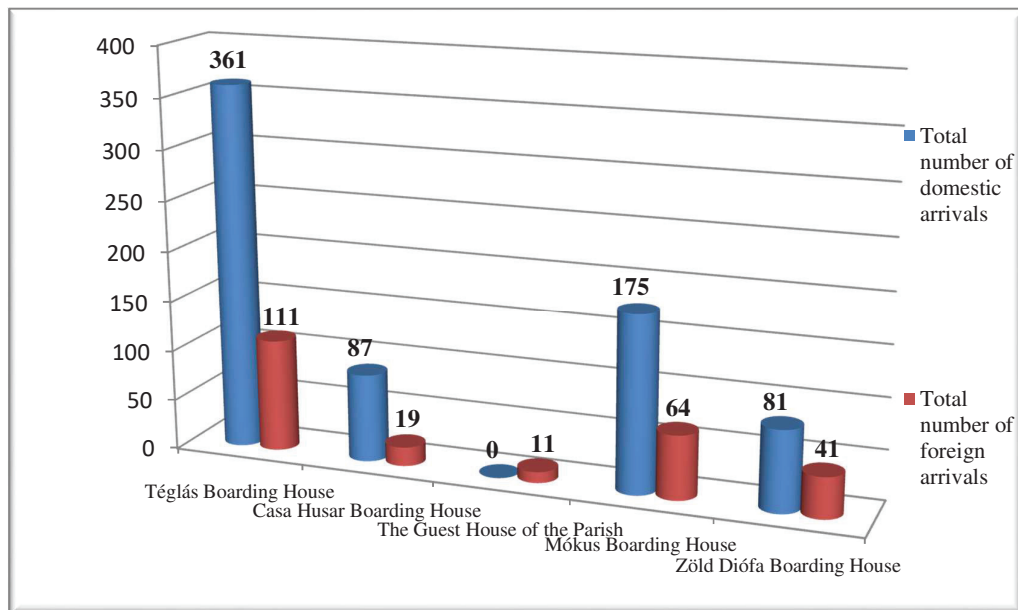


Figure no. 113 Tourist traffic based on the provenance of the tourists for 2015

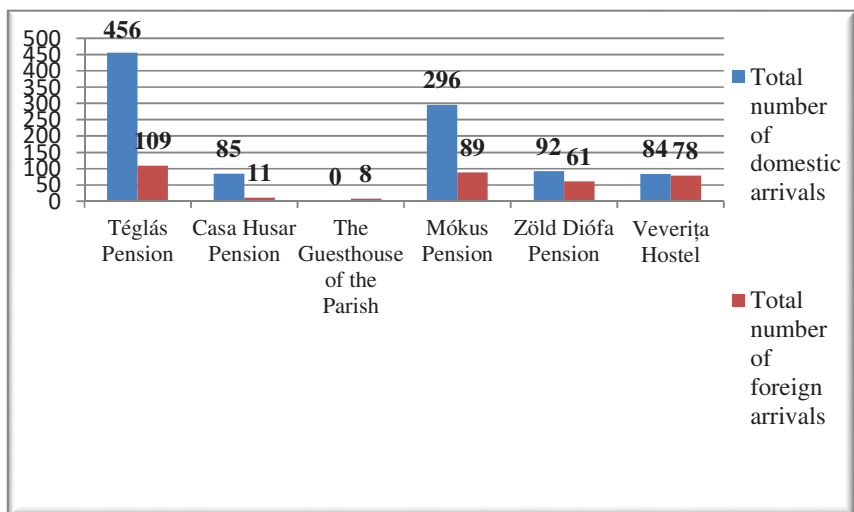


Figura nr.114. Tourist traffic based on the provenance of the tourists for 2016

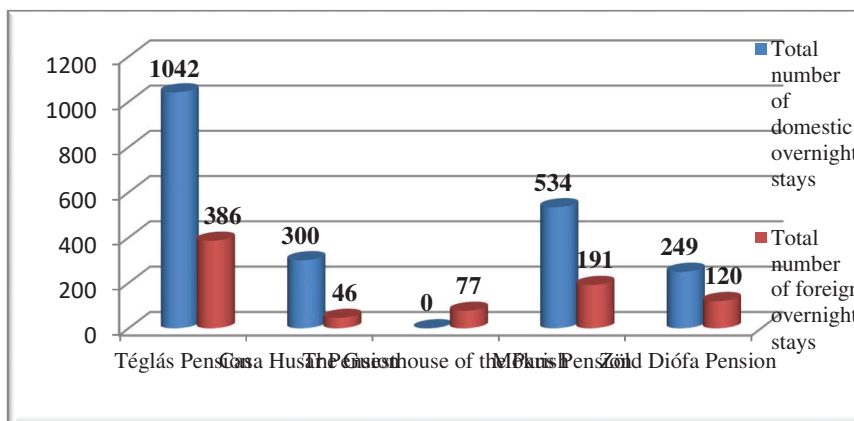


Figure no. 115 Total number of overnight stays based on the provenance of the tourists for 2015

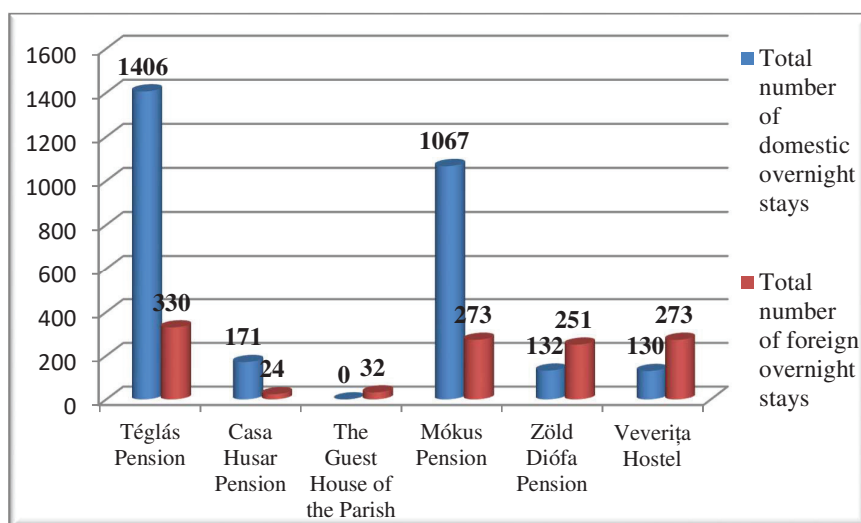


Figure no. 116 Total number of overnight stays based on the provenance of the tourists for 2016

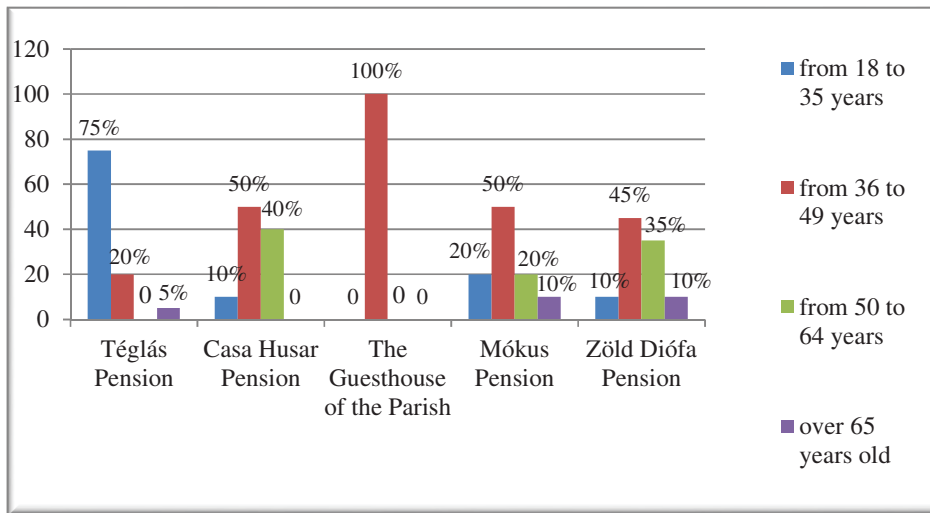


Figure no. 123 The origin of domestic and international tourists by age, cumulatively for the years 2015 and 2016

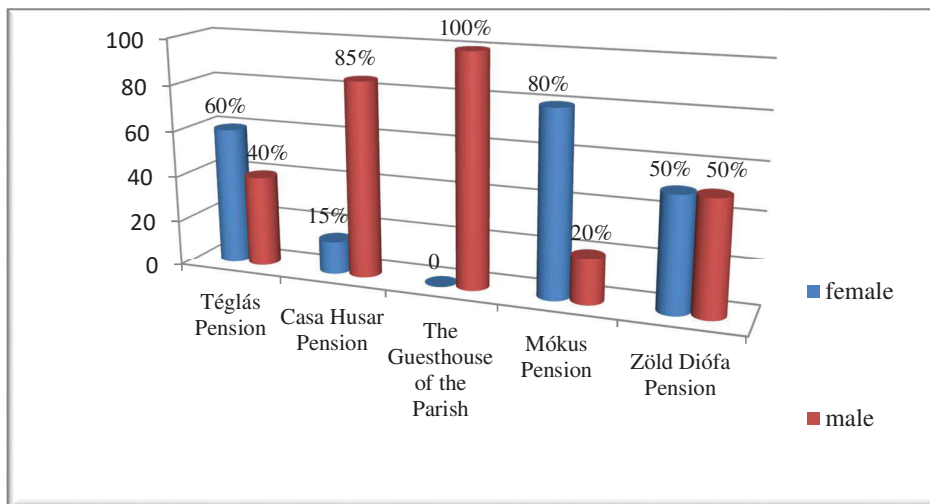


Figure no. 124 The provenance of tourists based on gender for the years 2015 and 2016

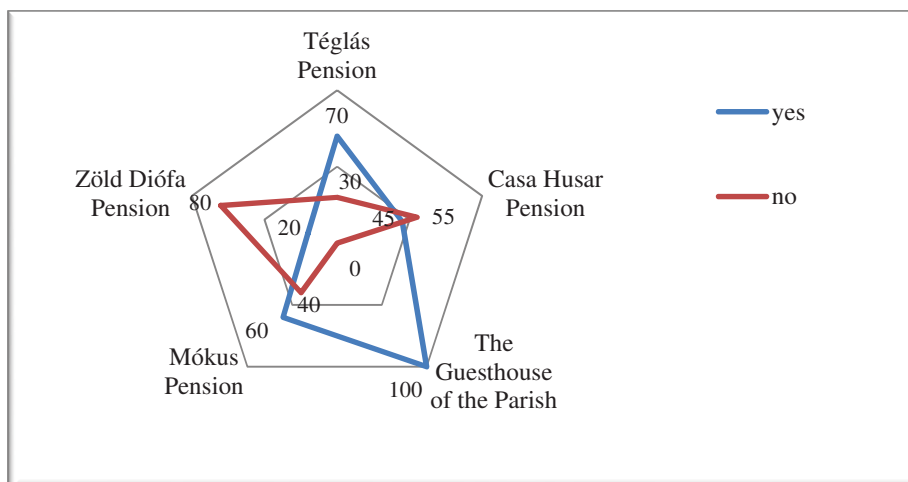


Figure no. 127 Indicators of fidelity (%) cumulatively for the years 2015 and 2016

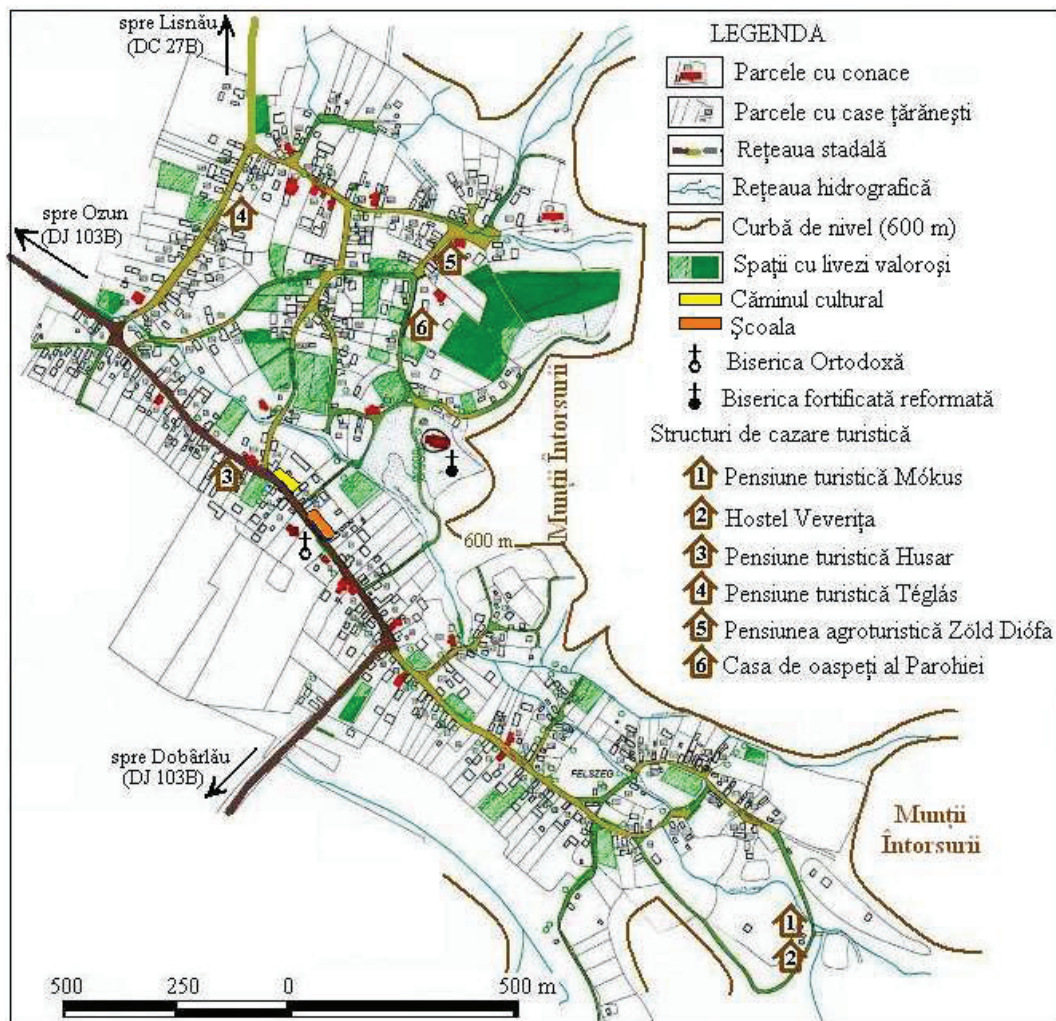


Figure no. 131 The tourist map of the locality of Bicfalău  
 (Source: Raduly Lenke, processing PUG (General Urban Plan) Bicfalău, 2017)

## Conclusions

The present study may be a contribution to scientific research on the phenomenon of rural tourism in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe, a phenomenon and an economic activity that does not have a very long history, but which manifests its presence due to the existing touristic resources, as well as to some people with innovative skills.

The researched geographic area has a natural and anthropic potential of great value, which can be used by professional and qualitative tourist facilities, thus contributing to the economic and social development of the villages in the studied area.

There were chosen tools and methods of analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, which ensured the best results regarding the inventory of all the resources with tourist valences, the characteristics, motivations and attitudes of the owners of the accommodation units, the level of tourist activities carried out in the area, as well as the state of general and touristic infrastructure existing or in progress at the level of the examined communes.

The main forms of tourism practiced in the area of study were identified on the basis of the motivation of the movement, considered the most important criterion in defining the types and forms of tourism.

Returning to the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the paper, we can demonstrate that:

Hypothesis no. 1 *The depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe has enough tourist resources of great value, both natural and anthropic, thus there is the possibility of sustainable development.*

The natural tourist patrimony having geographical features with touristic importance, which is present in the studied area, starting at altitudes above 1,241m (the peak of Cărpiniș from Bodoc Mountains), with its many passes and passages, which provide easier circulation, the natural landscape of the Baraolt, Bodoc and Întorsurii Mountains, together with favorable climatic conditions, are an important basis for the development of rural tourism. The rich mineral waters varied in their chemical composition, very beneficial to the organism, both in their internal and external use, renowned abroad, as well as the variety of existing biodiversity, strengthen the tourist attraction. We can say that the researched geographic area has a high quality and unaltered natural potential, which deserves to be protected and exploited with professionalism in rural tourism activities.

Also, the anthropic heritage is an original treasure, consisting of the assembly of historical (castles and mansions), religious, cultural or sports buildings, existing medieval fortresses or their ruins, along with existing legends, monuments, statues, cultural and artistic manifestations and rural handicrafts, traditions, folklore and folk dances, the local gastronomy, specific of this ethno-cultural area, contributes to the increase of the tourist attraction.

General and touristic infrastructure represent a moderate deficiency, as nowadays, the existence of the drinking water network and the sewage system, as well as the modern roads are indispensable in rural settlements, the infrastructure that is not entirely implemented in each locality of the studied geographic space. However, due to infrastructure projects that are accepted for funding and will soon be implemented, the appearance and function of the rural areas will substantially be improved in the development of tourism within these rural settlements. Villages with centralized water supply, sewage system and arranged roadways prepare the fertile soil for the establishment of touristic businesses in the studied geographic area, which will determine the appearance of tourist accommodation structures, restaurant services, etc.

The three components (the natural and anthropic touristic heritage, as well as the infrastructure) researched and analyzed within the thesis form together a suitable tourist potential that proves the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis no. 2 *Rural tourism can induce sustainable economic and social development in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe.*

Rural tourism helps to protect and develop the studied geographic area, which through manifestations can provide positive examples of long-lasting ecological economic activity.

This is completed by Hypothesis no. 3 as well. *The sustainable development of rural tourism is inconceivable without innovation methods*, that supports locals to maintain their rural status even in the process of urbanization.

Entrepreneurial spirit should be encouraged in rural areas, thus stopping the migration of young people abroad. In this sense, legal rules should be adopted regarding the promotion of craft and tourist activities in rural areas, as it is the only way that could prevent the massive exodus of young people, which now characterizes rural environment, not only from the depression compartment studied but from the whole country . The



gained knowledge especially among young people should be exploited at home and not elsewhere.

Hypothesis no. 4 *Developing rural tourism has a positive effect on the environment in the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe.*

Awareness of environmental protection has become a very common concept both within groups and for individuals, since only a sustainable community appreciates and protects the ecosystems around them. However, it must be noted that awareness is not the same as activities initiated in this respect. Many times awareness is overcome by those activities that bring significant benefits.

The activities of rural tourism and the elements of the environment influence each other.

Due to the fact that the tourist traffic is a determinant factor in the appreciation of the level of valorization of the tourist potential of an area, the analysis of the tourist traffic in the depression compartment studied was aimed at a comparison between 2015 and 2016, which was the monitoring period from a touristic point of view. Thus, at the level of the 10 communes, as well as the two related localities, the fundamental data base of the current research was set up. There is a slight increase in tourist traffic in 2016 (by 1,930 more tourists and 1,912 more nights spent) compared to 2015, respectively, new accommodation units were established (six in number). It is very important that at the level of the communes, apart from the guesthouse, which had a slight decrease in the number of arrivals (four persons) in 2016, the other accommodation units did not decrease or stagnated regarding the number of arrivals and overnight stays of the tourists. Based on the type of the accommodation unit, the most popular one was the tourist pension, followed by villa, hostel, agritouristic pension and guesthouse.

Three indicators were used to determine the tourist flow:

*The length of the stay*, which at the level of the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe for 2016 was 2.349 days. This qualitative indicator has shown the will of tourists to stay for a certain time in the same place. Being a quite early economic branch, the result was an acceptable medium, but in the future it must be increased by identifying and appropriately valorizing the new resources of attraction (thematic hikes, revitalization of folk traditions and customs, gastronomy, etc.), as well as the offered services must be diversified and improved.

The intensity of the tourist traffic at the level of the depression compartment studied for 2016 had values of 0.934, which resulted from a low total number of overnight stays per inhabitant, resulting in a tourist activity at an early stage.

*The touristic function rate* at the level of the study area for 2016 was 0.021. Thus we can say that the touristic function of the studied area in 2016, at the total number of accommodation places in relation to the total inhabitants, was very low.

The analysis of the tourist traffic with the help of the three indicators, compared to the natural and anthropic treasury, the ethno-cultural resources, the general and touristic infrastructure, may lead in the future to an increase in the tourist traffic within the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe. However, the development trend of rural tourism needs to be improved by implementing individual strategies for each accommodation unit, focusing on the main attractions.

Based on the Type 1 questionnaire, *the model of the owners of accommodation units* was developed, which was based on the indicators of the accommodation unit and the innovative indicators of the accommodation structures. Type 2 questionnaire was the basis of developing *the model of UATC (communal administrative-territorial units) represented by the Mayors from the depression compartment of Sfântu Gheorghe*, with the indicators

of the town halls. Based on these sources of information, *the final research model* was developed, following the Structure of Innovation Capacity, the Essmann-model<sup>17</sup>.

This research model can bring a number of elements that can be applied in other similar studies or in the elaboration of tourism development strategies.

The application of innovation categories in tourist activities, as well as the identification of the types of innovators in rural areas contribute to the development of tourist activity in rural areas. Implementing successful ideas, as well as identifying them, can bring benefits both economically and socially.

For an efficient and sustainable development it was necessary to adopt measures to improve tourist activities based on some innovative methods that ensure sustainable economic and social development:

- analyzing the objectives proposed by the European Union and applying them to rural tourism ("*smart, sustainable and favorable growth of inclusion*");
- encouraging entrepreneurial spirit in rural areas;
- adequate informing and training on the benefits of European projects;
- establishing tourism associations;
- applying the innovation process in the touristic arrangement of rural areas (especially the newly built accommodation units, which should match the architectural style of the locality, stopping the inadequate modifications of old buildings, establishing a space away from the old center of the village, thus avoiding damage to the rustic image, etc.);
- applying innovation categories through tourist activities in rural areas;
- the types of innovators presented (rural innovator out of need, developed rural innovator and urban innovator in the rural areas) should be applied in other areas with rural tourism activities;
- it is necessary to repeat the research within a period of 3-5 years;
- this research can also be applied to other areas where tourism requires improvement.

The case study for the village of Bicfalău aimed to complement the research results with concrete examples of the achievements in the innovation processes within rural tourist activity, which helps the development of the locality in the medium and long term. Type 3 questionnaire was also of great help, which was addressed to tourists accommodated in the accommodation units from Bicfalău, presented extensively in Chapter 7.

The case study of the village of Bicfalău is a particular example of planning and enhancing for the purpose of tourism a built heritage, stimulating both investment and attractiveness, as well as tourist traffic. It can also become a touristic model both at the level of the studied geographic area and at the level of the entire county.

The present study included a geographic area rich in tourist resources, with an ethno-cultural and eco spa potential much more emphasized than in the other parts of our country, but with a low percentage of investments and tourist developments, an issue requiring more attention in the first place, from the Communal Administrative Territorial Units, but also from the environment of private entrepreneurs, who want to develop sustainable business in the field of tourism in rural areas.

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<sup>17</sup>Essmann, H.E. (2009), *Toward Innovation Capability Maturity*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Stellenbosch University, Matieland.



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