

VÂLCEA COUNTY – POLARIZING TOURISM ACTIVITY IN THE SOUTHWESTERN REGION OF OLTENIA

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Abstract:

Vâlcea County's natural tourism potential covers all tourism resources offered by the natural environment of the County, through its components: terrain, weather conditions and water, vegetation and fauna elements, including metamorphoses suffered by these as a result of human intervention. Based on the analysis of tourism potential and touring indicators, we have developed a SWOT analysis that serves as a tool that highlights the strengths, enables the establishment of ways to limit the weaknesses, exploit the opportunities and potential reduction of the impact that the threats may have on the tourism activity in Vâlcea County.

Keywords: *sustainability, tourism, development, Vâlcea County, Southwestern Region Of Oltenia*

JEL: Q26, Q27, Q56.

1. Introduction

Vâlcea County's natural tourism potential covers all tourism resources offered by the natural environment of the County, through its components: terrain, weather conditions, water, vegetation and fauna elements, including metamorphoses suffered by these as a result of human intervention.

The varied relief of the County, especially the Carpathian, registers as the most important touring advantage, showing interest both through the landscape value as through the differentiated possibilities of touristic endowments and in general the conduct of tourism business that is filled with

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different components of water, vegetation and fauna, increasing its complexity.

On the highest peaks of the Carpathians, a special tourist attraction it's presented by the alpine scenery of the mountainous plateaus of the Căpățâanii, Făgăraș, Lotru and Parâng. Also, very important for tourism are the plateaus with sinkholes and temporary karst lakes, gorges (Cheile Cheii), slopes, springs, rocky ridges and caves or underground rivers with waterfalls. Vâlcea County has an important spelunking potential of high scientific value and aesthetics, many of the caves being protected by law as natural monuments, natural reservations or are included in protected parks and areas. Protected natural heritage consists of: national parks, natural reservations, natural landscapes, natural monuments, protected areas and ornithological.

Climate and bioclimatic resources have a growing importance in the development and promotion of globe-trotting tourism, recreational tourism or leisure. The snow layer is distributed unevenly in the high mountain area, it lasts between 180 and 200 days, and its thickness can reach into areas housed at 7-8 m. In the middle mountain are, the snow remains for 140-150 days and its duration gradually decreases with the altitude's decrease, so that in the plateau are it maintains only for 60-80 days/year. This can allow the development of winter sports. In high mountain areas and with northern exposition the winter touring season can last from December to June. Climatic events such as drought, high temperatures, decreased duration of snow cover and the reduction of its thickness in the winter, floods, land slips, phenomena caused by climate change, adversely affect tourism activities, reducing the number of tourists.

We mention here a paradox of climate change that turned into gain: the heat wave in July 2012 offered some spas in Vâlcea County the highest rates of increase in the number of tourists. Climate risk elements impacting the tourist frequency are: the differences in seasonal rainfall; the diurnal thermal variations accentuated; the high level of atmospheric humidity, which combined with high temperature causes a low thermal comfort index; the wind, which when combined with low temperatures causes an index of cooling so that the cold sensation felt by the human body is accentuated; the brightness and chromatic atmosphere; the heliotrope spa comfort index. The climate is extremely important where there are phenomena of risks and natural hazards (land slips, floods) whose periodicity can not be predicted with precision, hence the negative impact on the tourism sphere.

Cultural potential is obvious in the national and regional context: many traditional events and festivals organized; the presence in the County of 790 historical monuments and architectural ensembles, of which Hurezi Monastery, a monument that is also part of the UNESCO patrimony; the presence of monuments and places of worship and secular: The Memorial House "Anton Pann", County Museum "Aurelian Sacerdoteanu" Vâlcea, the Art Museum "Casa Simian", the Village Museum of Vâlcea, Măldărești Complex Museum; the presence of institutions for performances (theater, philharmonic, folk orchestras, artistic ensembles); the existence of numerous monasteries and hermitages; the existence of archaeological sites.

Many monasteries, churches and hermitages from the Vâlcea County ensure prerequisites for sustainable development and sustainable monastic tourism in this area. Vâlcea County ranks II in monastic establishments in the country, on its territory being built 33 monasteries, 327 churches and 22 hermitages. Among the monastic consecrated settlements to be reminded: Cozia Monastery, founded by Mircea the Old, Horezu Monastery, Govora, Arnota, Surpate, Dintr-un Lemn, Turnu, Stănișoara, Frăsinei, Ostrov, Cornet, etc. It should also be remembered that the monastic all of Horezu Monastery was included since 1993 as a historical monument in the list of World Cultural Heritage - UNESCO. Also included are the churches and the hermitages dating back to the XVI-XIX century: Jgheaburi Hermitage from the Stoenești Commune, Jezer Hermitage built in the XVII century in the Cheia-Olănești town, Dobrușa Hermitage from the Ștefănești Commune, Hermitage Sf. Ioan de sub piatră dated in 1602, Old Cozia, Pahomie Hermitages and Bradu from Olănești.

1. Forms of tourism practiced in Vâlcea County

Vâlcea County disposes of three (Călimănești-Căciulata, Băile Olănești and Băile Govora) of the nine balneary resorts from the country, recognized nationally and internationally for curative potential and value. In the most balneary resorts there is a specific touring infrastructure, but whether sector it belongs to, public or private, it is mostly under poor conditions. Most accommodation units are ranked with two stars or less. There is a discrepancy between the quantitative level of accommodation supply (relatively high) and the quality level of its (relatively low). Tourism service providers admit that the subsidized system of ticketing ensure a significant share of the number of accommodated tourists. The treatments offered by traditional practices are

often held with equipment that has a degree of advanced disrepair. There are also private providers of tourism services in balneary resorts, who upgrade and expand their offer for their facilities and products to meet growing tourism demand, especially during summer season (2007, Tourism development strategy in Vâlcea County 2007 – 2013).

In recent years, Vâlcea County has developed social tourism which determines a flow of tourists which benefits from social grants allocated from the state budget. Accommodation in the resorts is subsidized for people who suffer from certain diseases and for the elderly. This segment of tourism is by definition characterized by low costs, but also reduced revenue for operators who provide services.

Apart from mountainous and hilly land, there are some other elements of natural tourism potential and anthropic which prerequisites successful practice of these forms of tourism: the existence of national parks Cozia and Buila-Vânturarița with an area of 17,100 ha, respectively 4.186 ha; the existence of reservations; the existence of caves; the presence of rare animals; the existence of walking trails. Vâlcea County is rich in protecting natural areas which, if properly equipped, can contribute to the quality of life of the residents, but also to the dynamics of the local economy. Thus, the special forest perimeters (protected natural areas) and also the forests are important for their capacity to provide green space for settlements and their suitability for undertaking leisure activities.

Spotlighting the mountain tourism involves designing original and attractive tourist programs with various interests, specific to different areas of the County. The complexity and attractiveness of the touring potential may materialize by organizing specific tourism programs, such as excursions, hiking, trails and tourist itineraries on the mountain trails, marked; climbing; actions targeting tourism; speotourism; rural tourism in various areas of mountainous etc.

Practicing rural tourism and agritourism involves recreation in rural environment, the opportunity to participate in household activities, or events which are not available in urban areas. To attract potential tourists there are challenges of development and challenges of promoting. In recent years, there has been a significant increase both in terms of quantity and quality of the rural accommodation units, thanks to the interest of individual investors and the possibility of financing from European funds. It is necessary to develop more touring products/programs that not only focus on accommodating

tourists, but also on the diversification of the services of recreation and animation. Currently, there are opportunities for the expansion of specific activities of the sustainable tourism practiced in protected areas. These can have a significant positive impact on service providers from the local communities, within and around the protected areas. It is acknowledged the need for sustained promotion of traditional rural events for easy planning and development of tourist stay and some of the tourism products specific to the natural protected areas.

Mountain tourism from the County is advantaged by the Transalpina road, ranked as the highest way road from Romania and the entire chain of the Carpathian Mountains, both in the country and beyond, reaching a maximum altitude (2145 m) in Pasul Urdele (Urdele Pitch) . Transalpina crosses the Parâng Mountains from north to south, on the same direction with the Olt Valley and the Jiu Valley.

The forms of culture from Vâlcea County represent a significant motivation for many visitors. Architectural and religious monuments, many of which are cultural assets, are major attractions. The large number of monasteries, churches and other religious buildings form the boject of many group or individual trips. Visual art elements, present in museums or galleries, require adequate financial support for promotion. Cultural and folkloric events offer a significant potential for tourism development, which can be an advantage to being sustained and preserved for future generations. There are organized many festivals and traditional annual events that do not attract the expected interest of the visitors. There are deficiencies regarding the insurance of promoting numerous events on time to allow planning and promoting circuits. Collection and better transmission of information is needed about such events. It is also necessary creating centralized points and computerized for ticketing, preferably with Internet booking option.

Vâlcea County offers its visitors a wide range of opportunities that allows active tourism development. Many of the attractions of this type of tourism are regulated, administered and promoted by associations along with authorities of profile or business area. There is a well-developed system for marking trails, especially in mountain areas and authorized as maintained and safe for hikers. Vâlcea County enjoys a great attraction among the practitioners of winter sports through existing arrangements in Voineasa-Vidra, where it prevails a mountain landscape and there is an infrastructure that can support the development of these sports.

Voineasa mountain resort, which benefit from a ski domain, offers opportunities for accommodation and practicing winter and summer sports. Here has opened the newest ski area, Voineasa - Transalpina, with 7 ski paths whose length exceeds 6.3 kilometers, with an optimum capacity of 19,500 pers./h who benefit from four chairlifts and ski lifts (most modern gondola lift in Romania), which cover a length of 12137 m and has the optimum capacity of 7192 pers./h.

However, given the fauna of the mountains, hunting tourism represents a form of tourism with possibilities for future development. Important to mention is tourism related to far-reaching sporting events (Olympics, both summer and winter national championships, competitions and other sporting contests), organized in Vâlcea County, which attract a specific segment of tourists.

Oeno-gastronomic tourism

Traditional culinary specifics of the area and also the presence of agritourism pensions in the County provides the prerequisites needed to develop this type of tourism, but in terms of appropriate promotion thereof.

Tourism type "City Break" is favored by the existence of large accommodation in the major urban centers in the County, of which is distinguished the County seat, City of Râmnicu Vâlcea. Also, this type of tourism can be an occasion for cultural events such as: the Folklore Festival "Cântecele Oltului", Folk Ceramics Fair "Rooster of Hurez" ("Cocoșul de Hurez"), Craftsmen Fair, Vine and Wine Festival, Autumn of apples – Fruiter's Feast ("Toamna merelor - sărbătoarea pomicultorilor") etc.

Apart from mountainous and hilly landscape, developed on about 66% of the County, there are a number of elements potentially enabling the successful practice of this type of tourism: the existence of national parks Cozia and Buila-Vânturarița, natural reservations and caves, the presence of protected fauna and flora species.

Practicing this type of tourism is favored by the significant foreign investments attracted in the County. Also, the sustainability of practicing this type of tourism is ensured by the presence of various accommodation units in the County seat, City of Râmnicu Vâlcea and the opening of new exhibition and conference centers.

Event tourism is occasioned by cultural events such as: Folklore Festival "Cântecele Oltului" Folk Ceramics Fair "Rooster of Hurez",

Craftsmen Fair, Vine and Wine Festival, Autumn of Apples - Fruiter's Feast etc.

Wine tourism is a relatively new segment for Romania, but already existing through projects as "Wine Route", aiming to promote wine and wine-growing localities in the County.

In the period 2011-2012 was implemented the project "Wine Road Vâlcea", whose overall objective it was to develop tourism and increase the visibility of Prundeni Commune and nearby communities, by promoting wine and specific marketing activities. The project promoted viticulture tourism, traditions from Prundeni and from suburban villages.

In order to develop this type of tourism, intense action is needed to promote the integration of localities with potential vineyard in package tours and commercialization of specific tourism products by the tour operators (2014, **Study on the development of tourism in the South-Western Oltenia**).

2. Accommodation capacity analysis and specific tourism infrastructure in the County Vâlcea

In 2014 touring accommodation structures in Vâlcea County accounted for 53.44% of all housing units existing in the South-West Oltenia region, with the largest share of all counties in the region.

Table no. 1 Structures with functions of tourist accommodation in the South-West Oltenia region (2014)

| Region/County | Total (count) | Weight % |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------|
| South-West Oltenia region | 436 | 100,00 |
| Dolj County | 52 | 11,93 |
| Gorj County | 87 | 19,95 |
| Mehedinți County | 45 | 10,32 |
| Olt County | 19 | 4,36 |
| Vâlcea County | 233 | 53,44 |

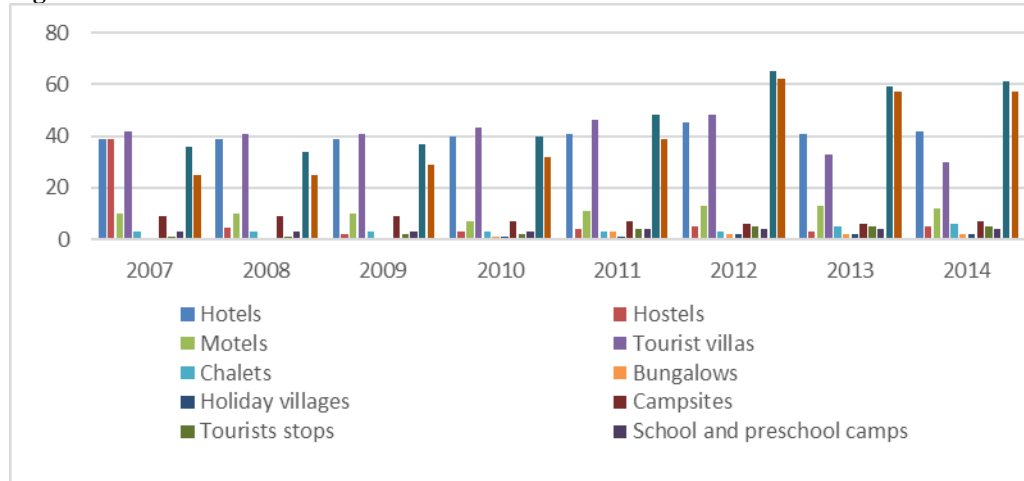
Source: The National Institute of Statistics, online database Tempo

According to the Statistical Yearbook for year 2012 Vâlcea, the County was ranked No. 6 in the country in terms of tourist accommodation

establishments existing and No. 4 in terms of the number of overnight stays in tourist accommodation.

Regarding the development of tourist accommodation establishments in the County Vâlcea it can be noted an increase of 38.69% in 2014 compared to 2007. 28.18% of tourist accommodation establishments in Vâlcea County are guesthouses, followed by 26.46% agro tourism pensions, 18.02% hotels and 12.87% villas.

Fig. 1 The evolution of structures with functions of tourist accommodation



Source: Data from the National Institute of Statistics, online database Tempo

The distribution of tourist accommodation units by type and location in Vâlcea County is as follows (2014, **South-Western Oltenia Regional Development plan for 2014-2020**):

- Over half of all housing units are pensions (tourism / agro tourism);
- 67.81% of all housing units are situated in urban areas, while 32.19% are situated in rural areas;
- 100% of all school and preschool camps of total South-West Oltenia are located in Vâlcea County;
- 100% of holiday homes and campsites of the total South-West Oltenia are located in Vâlcea County;

- 50% of registered motels in South-West Oltenia are located in Vâlcea County;
- 83% of registered tourist villas in the South-West Oltenia is located in Vâlcea County;
- More than 50% of the total agro tourist and tourist pensions in the South-West Oltenia are located in Vâlcea County.
- Tourism accommodation capacity from Vâlcea County accounts for 59.21% of all existing in the South-West Oltenia region. In the period 2007-2014, tourist accommodation capacity in the County of Vâlcea had an upward trend, the number of beds increasing by 5.25% in 2014 compared to 2007.

Table no 2 Tourist Accommodation units by type and location in Vâlcea County (2014)

| Location of tourist accommodation | Total | Hotels | Pensions | Halts | Others |
|--|--------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| South-West Oltenia region | 436 | 101 | 216 | 6 | 113 |
| Vâlcea County, from which: | 233 | 42 | 118 | 5 | 68 |
| Râmnicu Vâlcea Municipality | 26 | 7 | 12 | 1 | 6 |
| Drăgășani Municipality | 7 | 3 | 3 | - | 1 |
| Băbeni City | 1 | 1 | - | - | - |
| Băile Govora City | 12 | 4 | 3 | - | 5 |
| Băile Olănești City | 41 | 14 | 12 | 1 | 14 |
| Berbești City | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Brezoi City | 7 | 1 | 2 | - | 4 |
| Călimănești City | 44 | 9 | 15 | 2 | 28 |
| Horezu City | 15 | 1 | 11 | - | 3 |
| Ocnele Mari City | 4 | - | 1 | - | 3 |
| Bărbătești Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Budești Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Bujoreni Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Câineni Commune | 5 | - | 4 | - | 1 |
| Costești Commune | 4 | - | 4 | - | - |
| Dăești Commune | 2 | - | 2 | - | - |
| Fîrtățești Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Golești Commune | 4 | - | 3 | - | 1 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----|---|----|---|---|
| Lungești Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Măciuca Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Mălaia Commune | 16 | - | 13 | - | 3 |
| Măldărești Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Milcoiu Commune | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Nicolae Bălcescu Commune | 2 | - | 2 | - | - |
| Racovița Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Sălătrucel Commune | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Tetoiu Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Tomșani Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Vaideeni Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Vlădești Commune | 1 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Voineasa Commune | 28 | 2 | 18 | 1 | 7 |

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, online database Tempo

Table no 3 Tourist accommodation capacity in the South-West Oltenia (2014)

| Region/County | Total (beds) | Weight % |
|---------------------------|--------------|----------|
| South-West Oltenia region | 18.815 | 100,00 |
| Dolj County | 2191 | 11,93 |
| Gorj County | 2810 | 19,95 |
| Mehedinți County | 1804 | 10,32 |
| Olt County | 869 | 4,36 |
| Vâlcea County | 11.141 | 53,44 |

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, online database Tempo

In the analyzed period (2010-2014), the statistics show an increase of the total volume of tourism activities in Vâlcea County. The number of beds/day in operation and the number of accommodated tourists increased by 44.92% to 23.77% respectively. In the period 2010-2013, it is observed that the number of foreign tourists accommodated in tourist accommodation establishments doubled. Number of overnight stays in tourist accommodation establishments increased by 25.30% over the same period.

According to data from the National Tourism Authority, in Vâlcea County are approved seven ski areas, all located in Voineasa Commune.

Table no. 4 Ski areas approved in Vâlcea County

| Data of issue | Name of the ski area | Location | Length (meters) | Level of difficulty |
|---------------|------------------------|----------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 12.11.2013 | Gondola lift | Voineasa | 2257 | Medium |
| 12.11.2013 | Gondola lift version | Voineasa | 410 | Medium |
| 12.11.2013 | Gondola lift N | Voineasa | 363 | Difficult |
| 12.11.2013 | Gondola lift version N | Voineasa | 200 | Difficult |
| 12.11.2013 | Chairlift | Voineasa | 1232 | Easy |
| 12.11.2013 | Lift | Voineasa | 730 | Easy |
| 12.11.2013 | Lift beginners | Voineasa | 350 | Easy |

Source: The National Tourism Authority, <http://turism.gov.ro/informatii-publice>

In the year 2013 the number of overnight stays in tourist accommodation structures from Vâlcea County represented 66.96% of total overnight stays in the South-West Oltenia region. Of the total number of foreign tourists who spent the night in the South-West Oltenia (100.793 people), approximately 12.16% were recorded in Vâlcea County.

In 2010-2013 it is observed that the number of foreign tourists accommodated in tourist accommodation establishments doubled. Number of overnight stays in tourist accommodation establishments increased by 25.30% over the same period.

Table no. 5 Main indicators of tourism activity in the region and SV Oltenia Vâlcea (2010-2014)

| | SV Oltenia | Vâlcea | SV Oltenia | Vâlcea | SV Oltenia | Vâlcea | SV Oltenia | Vâlcea | SV Oltenia | Vâlcea |
|--------------------------------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|
| No. of beds | 16.410 | 10.719 | 18.274 | 11.526 | 19.947 | 12.540 | 18.446 | 11.158 | 18.815 | 11.141 |
| No. of beds /days in operation | 354.075 | 196.614 | 418.571 | 230.153 | 449.918 | 242.373 | 487.246 | 278.499 | 489.229 | 284.944 |
| No. of accommodated tourists | 337102 | 184264 | 426845 | 225997 | 454676 | 206963 | 460026 | 211053 | - | 228.212 |
| From which foreign: | 16614 | 3201 | 27536 | 3585 | 46490 | 4993 | 44319 | 6609 | - | - |
| No. of overnights | 1290263 | 960520 | 1486267 | 1046532 | 1565613 | 1052577 | 1567021 | 1049399 | | 1024176 |
| From which foreign: | 39981 | 9786 | 72269 | 7748 | 103224 | 10121 | 100793 | 12262 | | |

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, online database Tempo (dates for 2010-2013)

Statistical Bulletin of Valcea County, December 2014, Department of Statistics Valcea

Net use index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, recorded in December 2014 was 16.6%, 3.2 percentage points lower than that registered at the national level, and compared to December 2013, lower by 3.3 percentage points.

Based on the analysis of tourism potential and touring indicators, we have developed a SWOT analysis that serves as a tool that highlights the strengths, enables the establishment of ways to limit the weaknesses, exploit the opportunities and potential reduction of the impact that the threats may have on the tourism activity in Vâlcea County.

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|
| <p>The diversity of attractive resources for a broader range of tourist activities, for practicing varied forms of tourism throughout the year: cultural, religious (monachal), balneary, mountain, rural tourism and agrotourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, uval (viticulatural); tourism;</p> <p>Moderate temperate-continental climate without special extremes, which promotes tourism activities throughout the year;</p> <p>The existence of a historical cultural heritage diversified, able to motivate and support various segments of the cultural tourists;</p> <p>The large number of tour operators with expertise;</p> <p>The mineral and geothermal springs recognized nationally and internationally for curative potential and value;</p> <p>Implementation of EU-funded projects for the development and promotion of tourism;</p> <p>The development of tourism through the establishment of ski areas (eg Voineasa Vidra);</p> <p>The existence of the national parks Cozia and Buila-Vânturarița, natural reservations, caves, saline fitting from Ocelele Mari;</p> <p>The presence of numerous tourist routes;</p> <p>The increasing number of tourist structures, the increasing of the accommodation capacity, building new modern bases with competitive comfort (Vâlcea County ranks the 3rd in the country in terms of accommodation capacity and</p> | <p>Poor infrastructure in some balneary resorts;</p> <p>Deficient covering numerically speaking with institutions essential for information and organizing tourism activities;</p> <p>Capitalization of tourism interest is done at the resorts and villages known level;</p> <p>Lack of qualified personnel in tourism, its fluctuation;</p> <p>The presence of a small number of villages that have an accommodation capacity capable of supporting an event generator tourists;</p> <p>Low offer of recreational opportunities in areas where rural tourism and agrotourism is practiced;</p> <p>Weaknesses and failures in the tenders, programs and existing tourism products, insufficiency of their material of tourism promotion;</p> <p>The absence of a touring "brand" and the poor support of the targets with tourist potential brand;</p> <p>The accessibility of tourists in the county is greatly hampered by the lack of a highway;</p> <p>Low participation in international fairs and exhibitions of tourism products designed to bring added-value for the tourism in the county;</p> <p>Low net use index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, compared with the</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>2nd in the country in terms of number of overnight stays); The high number of resorts (Călimănești, Baile Govora, Baile Olanesti, respectively 3 of the 9 resorts in the country recognized for the potential and curative value), national interest and international but also of local interest (Horezu, Voineasa) ; The existence of school camps, holiday villages and camping sites; The interest of the NGOs to develop and promote tourism; Major investments in tourism, in particular from the private operators; Diversification of tourist services; The emergence of service wellness/spa and select restaurant units and/or specific; Steadily increasing volume of tourists every year; Functioning of the Tourism Technology High School in Călimănești with specialization in tourism and tourism boards classes at high schools in the county, which provides the skilled workforce necessary to sustain tourism; Crossing County Transalpina - the highest road in the country, in an area of great biodiversity.</p> | <p>existing tourism potential; Lack of an integrated waste management system in tourist areas; Insufficient cooperation between different tour operators and trade associations (such as ANTREC, ANAT, AJT, AER);</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>The hydrographic network has the potential to develop tourism; Promote tourism through funding; Cultural events and traditions offer significant potential for tourism development; The existence of funding programs for resource development in tourism domain, investments development and promotion of tourism; Rehabilitation of the infrastructure in order to increase accessibility to tourist areas and objectives; Opportunities for development of tourism market niche and alternative conjunction with increased interest in tourism in natural parks (Vâlcea county has 33 protected natural areas), rural areas and cultural sites, events of a religious (pilgrimage) and cultural; Growing demand from winter sports practitioners, rural, ecological and cultural, business tourism, congresses and meetings; OENO-gourmet; "City-break" type; Scientific and forms of adventure tourism and extreme sports and hunting (climbing, climbing, paragliding, cycling, river rafting, water sports for example on the Olt River, the lakes Turnu and Calimanesti, motocross, galas sports</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>Climate change has adverse effects on tourism activities, reducing the number of tourists; The high cost of road infrastructure rehabilitation; The migration of the personnel from the tourism sector; Low competitiveness of the touring offer internationally; The lack of clear commitment of the partnership members created in the spirit of tourism development in implementing the measures undertaken; The degradation of rural architectural heritage by depopulation and rural communities Natural disasters (floods, land slips, etc.);</p> |

municipality of Râmnicu Vâlcea etc.) requires to achieve adequate facilities to allow their assertion quotas "dictated" by the existing potential and interest thereof; the growing demand of students for the county school camps (recreation centers Cozia, Brădișor, Căciulata);

Stimulation of the health tourism, health and wellness, beauty and antiaging, forecasts indicating growing interest for these aging populations, increasing wear and biological stress at the active ages and increasing concern of the urban population for a healthy and active life, prophylaxis of diseases, etc.;

The existence of programs to promote tourism products and cultural resorts nationally like "Ruta orașelor termale", integrating also the resorts from Vâlcea;

Affirmation of the sport tourism and hunting tourism in the county to the existence of special resources and lack thereof (hunting wildlife) in Western European countries (large emitting tourist flows of this type);

"Strengthening" (by improving the management and the promotion) impact of cultural events and folklore held annually in different locations and initiating events and festivals also in other locations and times of the year;

The increase of the involvement of NGOs in the field of tourism;

Building the future highway on the route Pitești - Râmnicu Vâlcea - Sibiu;

Creating new tour packages depending on demand (tourism niches);

Revitalization/promotion of rural areas (including traditional culture);

The existence of rural areas with a treasure trove of great originality ethnographic and folklore, crafts, cuisine based on local natural products, traditional vintages;

The existence of picture elements that can become components of a local brand;

3. Conclusions

The SWOT analysis follows a series of measures and actions to increase tourist traffic in Vâlcea County, increasing employment of accommodations and average length of stay, with the development of sustainable tourism in the region.

A first measure relates to increasing access through public investment, the objectives of cultural and architectural heritage, which can be achieved through actions such as arranging access to sights and areas close to them, renovating and improving the safety of existing roads; creating a small public infrastructure, such as public gardens, leisure areas for children, youth and adults, all located near cultural attractions; upgrading roads linking of monastic ensembles, ethnographic villages, in order to achieve tours.

It is also necessary the support for initiatives to exploit the ethnographic and ethnic initiatives to integrate cultural offer and organization of package tours, such as: the inventory of intangible heritage specific to the Romanian culture and local, given the amount of ethno single-cultural specificity; supporting the local initiatives and county organization of festivals tradition and local crafts for exploitation of ethnic from a tourism perspective and valorization of local crafts, archiving elements ethnic heritage and ethnography, where they are integrated into the measures for recovery tourism; creating circuits that include cultural heritage, archaeological and ethnographic and ethnic places of interest and events.

Promoting the development of a sustainable tourism, responsible also for the quality is the priority objective that should be pursued in the future. In this regard, it takes a number of actions: a study to identify a tourism brand of the Vâlcea County; development and implementation of an unified system of marking tourist attractions in the county (billboards, tourist maps on the national and county roads, in the train stations, bus stations, along the road Transalpina etc.) in line with EU standards; a plan of tourism marketing at the county level, containing a strategy to promote the county in the medium and long term, considering the tourism potential of the region, the demand structure and cost/benefit ratio of possible promotional activities involving widespread traders in the county and public organizations, NGOs, professional associations in the region, national associations - ANAT (SV Oltenia subsidiary with headquarters in Râmnicu Vâlcea), ANTREC, AIR, AHR.

Promoting tourism offers in the county can be achieved by including them in the catalogs of Romanian tour operators, increasing the number of participants (companies, municipalities, prefectures) on the stock of national and international tourism (supporting their participation) by creating brands, advertising campaigns, support creating websites to promote circuits or groups of attractions and dynamic activity in the tourist information centers in major tourist destinations, creating and updating a web portal dedicated to tourism

(in the site at the county level), as a major tool promotion, information and making reservations.

Creating a diversified travel offer, integrated and competitive by supporting the development of local investments, leading to increase business and tourist traffic, create new jobs, improve living conditions by diversifying tourism services, enhancing the environment, beautifying cities, offering new opportunities for recreation and rehabilitation for residents and tourists Vâlcea County, is another specific objective that can be achieved through a number of measures supported by concrete actions to achieve.

The support for the establishment of small sustainable structures for accommodation in the rural areas and for the modernization and restructuring of existing structures may materialize through: encouraging investment required for the development of structures of tourist accommodation structures as agro tourist eco-pension; new models of best practices in ecotourism (ecolabel, ecotourism certification); investment for modernization and restructuring of the existing accommodation structures in rural areas through accessing European funds in the period 2016-2020.

In order to capitalize on the attractiveness degree of certain local points of interest, specific actions are needed: enablement of certain projects to highlight the creative handcraft, pottery art and woodworking; support for exploitation of natural and organic products; support for creation of production, display and marketing of handcrafted products, silk, flax and hemp textiles, wool and goat fur fabrics, ceramics etc. ; establishing and supporting small groups of local producers; promoting nationally recognized folk creative centers; supporting the establishment of spaces for exploiting handcrafts and other specific products created by the local community; financial aid for owners who chose to restructure / construct their building according to the local architectural traditional style; support for creating themed routes and their associated investment (guides, traffic signs, signs for shops / farms etc.); stimulating the expansion for the network of local travel agencies that distribute ecotourism and rural tourism products; activities of awareness of the national tour operators awareness on the benefits of ecotourism product distribution by organizing workshops and study visits; development of partnerships with foreign tour operators specializing in niche tourism agro tourism and ecotourism; development of partnerships with organizations specialized in promoting eco-tourism and rural tourism from abroad.

For better use of the recreational, SPA and medical balneary tourism potential a series of measure should be imposed: the integration of Valcea county blaneary resorts inside the "Ruta orașelor termale" (*Thermal cities route*) through the development of the program for European cultural routes in Romania; the modernization of technical-urbanistic network for all balneary resorts ensuring their uptake and treatment of wastewater; expanding the options for treatments through alternative, unconventional, herbal and fitness means; the rehabilitation of the accommodation and food facilities having historical monuments status and preserving the architectural and urban specifics of the balneary resort; establishing new accommodation units that would comply to the local architectural standards; the development of programs for balneary parks modernization inside the resorts and the extension of leisure tourism infrastructure.

Last but not least, the local authorities should take action on establishing Theme tours and mixed tours through actions like: cultural and religious development of tourism by integrating resources in the county regional tourism circuit promoting cultural and ethnographic tradition typical of the historical region of Oltenia; initiation of cultural, religious (Christian pilgrimages to monasteries - Cozia, Horezu, Bistrita, Arnota etc., pilgrimages for the followers of other religions, etc.), historical (Daco-Roman voivodes related etc.) theme touristic programs, in addition to the development of the appropriate tourist structures in the targeted settlements; the integration of folk events and festivities inside package tours; development of promotional materials for tourist objectives and circuits.

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