

THE TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE OF SĂLAJ COUNTY

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ABSTRACT. – **The Tourism Infrastructure of Sălaj County.** The paper represents the third part of a larger study concerning tourism in Sălaj County, taking into consideration the tourism infrastructure in the county. The paper analysed statistical data regarding the accommodation establishments and their capacity, available online from the National Institute of Statistics (TEMPO-ONLINE database) for a period of 33 years, between 1990 and 2022. The total number of accommodation establishments dropped from 23 in 1990 to 16 in 2007, but then increased significantly, reaching 127 accommodation units in 2022. Most of these recently emerged units, such as bungalows and guesthouses, have however a small capacity. Therefore, the evolution in terms of the total number of available beds in certified accommodation units has not been equally spectacular. There was the same decreasing trend, from 1922 beds in 1990, to 754 beds in 2008, followed by an increase, which nevertheless reached a maximal value of 1923 beds in 2016. Since then, the overall capacity has slightly decreased. Most of the beds are currently available in accommodation establishments located in towns (mainly in Zalău) and spa resorts, especially in hotels, hostels, and guesthouses. The general trend in recent years has been to improve the degree of comfort, which in Zalău gave rise to several 4-star hotels, in addition to the existent 3-star hotels. Recreational facilities are mainly available in the two spa resorts, Băile Boghiș and Bizușa-Băi, but there are some similar facilities in Zalău, Jibou and Șimleu Silvaniei, while most of the seats in public catering facilities are located in Zalău, Boghiș and Ip. The positive trend in terms of tourism infrastructure is expected to be maintained in the following years, as tourism is the economic activity most likely to be strategically important for the sustainable development of Sălaj County in the future.

Keywords: *Sălaj County, tourism infrastructure, accommodation units, recreational facilities, Romania.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism potential of Sălaj County, whose main attractive features made up the object of study for two previously published papers (Rusu *et al.*, 2020; Rusu *et al.*, 2021), is a part of the primary tourism supply which includes the whole range of material or non-material components belonging to the natural environment or created by man, and represents the fundamental factor in the emergence and development of tourism, in the absence of which tourism would not exist, because of the lack of its object of activity. On the other hand, the tourism infrastructure, with all its range of components, the quantitative and qualitative level of the services and their diversity, including the number and quality of the staff employed in the field, make up the secondary tourism supply (Dezsi, 2006). The tourism infrastructure or the tourism material resources account for the totality of assets and means that facilitate the tourism capitalization and operation of the attractive resources grouped in a certain territory, or the set of facilities and equipment providing accommodation, leisure, sporting activities, and so on (Cocean and Dezsi, 2009). It represents the decisive factor for the shaping of tourism as a concrete spatial phenomenon, as a result of the transformation of the attractive components into a capitalizable tourism product and the provision of the comfort necessary for the optimal development of a complete and complex act of tourism (Dezsi, 2006).

The provision of a proper setting for the development of recreational, curative, and cultural activities in Sălaj County, and to meet the tourism demand for all these, required the emergence, design and construction of a variable number of facilities providing accommodation, food, special transportation, leisure, spa treatment, and specific services, all generically named tourism reception structures with a function of accommodation (Răcășan, 2018; Romanian Government Decree no. 58/1998 regarding the organisation and development of tourism activities in Romania).

The accommodation establishments, equated with the tourism reception structures with a function of accommodation, represent the logistic support for the tourism activities and the necessary condition for the “attachment” of the tourism demand on the existing offer (Ciangă and Dezsi, 2007). At the same time, the accommodation infrastructure also represents a real indicator regarding the direction of tourism activities in a certain territory, constantly found in a relation of interdependence with the intensity of tourism flows and the emergence of new forms of tourism, as well as the permanent diversification and adaptation to the practice of some of the existent forms of tourism (Ciangă, 2007). The quantitative and qualitative features of their elements (size, comfort,

functionality, period of use, type or form of tourism serviced) allow for their classification into main accommodation establishments (such as hotels, motels, chalets, villas and inns) and secondary ones (Cocean and Dezsi, 2009).

The Romanian legislation in force identified and defined a number of accommodation unit types, classified according to certain methodological norms (Order of the president of the Tourism National Authority no. 65/2013 regarding the approval of the methodological norms for the issuing of classification certificates to tourism reception structures with function of accommodation and public food service, and of tourism licences). The following types are included: hotels, tourist villas, tourist and agro-tourism guesthouses, reception structures with accommodation on floating pontoons, maritime or fluvial boats, possessing all the comfort categories (classified between 1 and 5 stars, or 1 to 5 daisies in the case of guesthouses); apartment-hotels (between 2 and 5 stars); campings, camping-type cottages and tourist stops (between 1 and 4 stars); motels, hostels, bungalows, chalets, apartments and rooms to rent in family homes (classified between 1 and 3 stars); holiday villages (2 or 3 stars graded comfort).

2. METHODOLOGY, DATA AND MATERIALS

The present paper is the third part of a larger study concerning tourism in Sălaj County. The first two parts (Rusu *et al.*, 2020; Rusu *et al.*, 2021) considered the natural and anthropogenic tourism potential of the county, while this paper has in view the tourism infrastructure of the county. The relevant scientific literature has been carefully reviewed, taking into consideration both theoretical studies (Ciangă, 2007; Ciangă and Dezsi, 2007; Cocean and Dezsi, 2009) and applied studies that considered Sălaj County (C.C. Pop, 2008, 2011; Pîrvu and Gheorghe, 2014; C.C. Pop and C.D. Pop, 2015; Moigrădean, 2019; Benedek, 2021) or areas nearby (Dezsi, 2006; Răcășan, 2018). The relevant national legislation that had an impact on the development of tourism in Sălaj County has also been taken into account, as well as other strategic documents, such as the Development Strategy for Sălaj County between 2021 and 2027 (CMPG Consultancy, 2021).

The next step was the acquisition of statistical data regarding tourism infrastructure in Sălaj County. Most of the available online data regards the accommodation establishments and is provided by the two official sources of data in the field of tourism, the National Institute of Statistics (<http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>) and the Tourism National Agency (<https://turism.gov.ro/web/autorizare-turism/>).

The main results of the study are based on the analysis and interpretation of the statistical data provided by these two sources. Because data are available only since 1990, the evolution of the tourism infrastructure has been assessed for a 33-year period between 1990 and 2022. The analysis focused on the main changes that occurred in the structure and typology of accommodation establishments during this time period, and stressed the main current features of the tourism infrastructure in Sălaj County. The statistical data acquired from official sources had also to be checked in the field, because sometimes there are some discrepancies between the official sources and the reality in the field, not to mention the inconsistencies that exist between the different sources of official data, which eventually led us to use only one source of official data, that from the National Institute of Statistics (the TEMPO-ONLINE database), which seems more accurate and reliable.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The accommodation units in Sălaj County are quite diverse from the point of view of structure, typology and size. Most of the tourism reception structures are found among those extant in Sălaj County: hotels, hostels, guesthouses, bungalows, cottages, chalets and villas.

The analysis of the evolution of accommodation units and tourism reception structures between 1990 and 2022 (the table below) reveals their significant increase in numbers and diversification after 2007.

Table 1. Dynamics of the certified accommodation units according to the type of structure between 1990 - 2000, 2001 - 2011 and 2012 - 2022

Type / Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Total	23	22	20	19	20	20	20	20	18	25	17
Hotels	10	11	9	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	5
%	43.5	50	45	31.6	30	30	30	30	27.8	20	29.4
Hostels	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Motels	-	-	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2
%	-	-	5	10.5	10	10	10	15	11.1	8	11.8
Villas	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	1
%	13	9.1	10	10.5	15	15	15	10	11.1	8	5.9
Chalets	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-	-	-
%	8.7	9.1	10	10.5	10	10	10	10	-	-	-

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Guesthouses (urban)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Agro-tourism guesthouses	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Camping sites	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	-
%	8.7	9.1	5	10.5	10	10	10	10	5.6	4	-
Bungalows	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Camps	-	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	3
%	-	22.7	25	26.3	25	25	25	25	22.2	16	17.6
Cottages	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other units	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	11	6
%	26.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22.2	44	35.3
Type / Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total	20	17	19	20	17	17	16	24	41	44	48
Hotels	5	4	4	4	3	2	2	3	7	8	10
%	25	23.5	21.1	20	17.6	11.8	12.5	12.5	17.1	18.2	20.8
Hostels	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
%	-	-	-	-	5.9	5.9	6.3	4.2	2.4	2.3	2.1
Motels	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
%	10	11.8	10.5	5	5.9	5.9	6.3	-	-	-	-
Villas	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
%	5	5.9	5.3	15	17.6	17.6	18.8	8.3	7.3	6.8	6.3
Chalets	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.3	2.1
Guesthouses (urban)	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	8	12	12
%	10	11.8	15.8	15	17.6	23.5	25	16.7	19.5	27.3	25
Agro-tourism guesthouses	6	6	6	6	3	3	3	4	12	9	9
%	30	35.3	31.6	30	17.6	17.6	18.8	16.7	29.3	20.5	18.8
Camping sites	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.2	2.4	2.3	2.1
Bungalows	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7	7	9
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29.2	17.1	15.9	18.8
Camps	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
%	15	11.8	10.5	10	11.8	11.8	6.3	4.2	2.4	2.3	2.1
Cottages	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
%	5	-	5.3	5	5.9	5.9	6.3	4.2	2.4	2.3	2.1
Other units	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Type / Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	57	58	55	103	111	120	118	115	113	125	127
Hotels	11	11	10	10	12	10	10	10	8	9	9
%	19.3	19	18.2	9.7	10.8	8.3	8.5	8.7	7.1	7.2	7.1
Hostels	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
%	1.8	1.7	1.8	1	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.6
Motels	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Villas	4	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3
%	7	6.9	3.6	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7	2.7	2.4	2.4
Chalets	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
%	1.8	1.7	1.8	1	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8
Guesthouses (urban)	16	17	16	16	15	17	16	16	16	17	16
%	28.1	29.3	29.1	15.5	13.5	14.2	13.6	13.9	14.2	13.6	12.6
Agro-tourism guesthouses	12	12	14	20	26	35	34	31	30	40	43
%	21.1	20.7	25.5	19.4	23.4	29.2	28.8	27.0	26.5	32.0	33.9
Camping sites	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	1.8	1.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bungalows	9	9	9	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
%	15.8	15.5	16.4	48.5	45	41.7	42.4	43.5	44.2	40.0	39.4
Camps	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
%	1.8	1.7	1.8	1	0.9	0.8	0.8	-	-	-	-
Cottages	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
%	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.7	2.6	2.7	2.4	2.4
Other units	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source of data: National Institute of Statistics (TEMPO-ONLINE database, 2022).

The statistical situation in the year 1990 reflects, to a certain degree, the situation of the accommodation establishments at the end of the socialist period. At that time, there were 23 tourism reception structures in Sălaj County, of which almost half, more precisely 10 (45.3%) were hotels, located predominantly in the urban areas (5 in Zalău and 1 in both Cehu Silvaniei and Jibou) and resorts (one in Ileanda commune, actually in Buzușă-Băi, and one in Nușfalău commune, actually in Băile Boghiș, which belonged to Nușfalău then). There was one more hotel near Zalău, in Meseșenii de Jos.

The other accommodation units were represented by 3 villas, of which 2 in resorts (1 in Ileanda commune and 1 in Nușfalău commune) and a third one in Bobota commune, 2 chalets (in Zalău and Șimleu Silvaniei), 2 camping sites (in Jibou and Nușfalău – actually also in Băile Boghiș), and 6 other units, of

which 5 may be identified with the summer camps which emerged as a separate category since 1991 (2 in Zalău, and one in each of the communes of Nuşfalău, Sâg – the summer camp in Tusa, and Valcău de Jos).

Between 1990 and 2007 the trend was descending in terms of the total number of accommodation units, with some insignificant variations: the number of units decreased from 23 in 1990 to 18 in 1998 and only 16 in 2007, when the lowest number of units for the entire analysed period was reached. In 2007, in Sălaj County, out of the 10 hotels which had existed in 1990, there were only 2 – one in Zalău and another one in Ileana commune (Bizuşa-Băi). On the other hand, there was already a more diversified offer: one youth hotel (later renamed hostel) in Zalău; one motel (in Boghiş) – this was the last time that a motel was registered in Sălaj County; 3 villas (2 in Zalău and 1 in Boghiş), cottages (the former camping site in Jibou), only one summer camp (in Tusa, Sâg commune), 4 urban guesthouses (3 in Zalău and one in Jibou) and 3 agro-tourism guesthouses (in the communes of Cuzăplac, Gâlgău and Ileana).

This low number of tourism reception structures may be explained by the necessary adaptation to the demands of the tourism market, which was in an obvious decrease during the 1990s and the first part of the 2000s, when Romania was confronted with deep economic issues specific for the transition period from the centralised economy of the socialist period to the capitalist market economy, ending up with the accession to the European Union in 2007. On the other hand, the opening up of the borders and the abolition of visas for the Romanian citizens determined many Romanians to give up their domestic holidays, as they preferred to visit foreign countries, difficult to access or even “prohibited” before.

This period between 1990 and 2007 corresponded also with an important wave (or several waves) of Romanian external migration, especially to Western and Southern European countries. Mainly young people or young adults migrated, but some of them later returned with a consolidated financial situation, while some others financially helped their relatives who remained in Romania. This situation had multiple economic consequences, but in terms of tourism it generated the emergence of the first guesthouses and the gradual development of new forms of tourism, associated with cultural tourism and especially rural tourism, addressed mainly to people living in urban centres, in Romania or abroad, who wanted another sort of tourism experience.

As a result, the first guesthouses unofficially emerged even since the end of the 1990s, while officially they appeared in the data published by the National Institute of Statistics for the first time in 2001, divided into two categories: (urban) tourism guesthouses and agro-tourism guesthouses (only in rural areas).

Although Sălaj County is not among the counties that have a high number of rural tourists, the total number of guesthouses (including both categories) increased steadily from 8 (in 2001) to 59 (in 2022).

The (urban) tourism guesthouses represented a cheaper alternative to the hotels in urban areas. However, their number remained rather low, even if one may point out a significant increase from 2 in 2001 to 16 in 2012. Since 2012, their number remained more or less constant. They are located in the four urban centres of the county: 6 in Zalău, 4 in Șimleu Silvaniei, 3 in Jibou and 3 in Cehu Silvaniei, as of 2022. Therefore, they meet a good deal of the tourist demand in these towns, where the other types of accommodation units have either disappeared completely (Cehu Silvaniei and Șimleu Silvaniei) or have drastically been reduced (6 hotels, 1 hostel and 3 villas in Zalău, and cottages in Jibou).

The agro-tourism guesthouses experienced an even more important increase in numbers, but a little bit later than the urban guesthouses: from 6 in 2001 to only 9 in 2011, but then the process intensified, reaching a total of 43 rural guesthouses in 2022, an almost five-fold increase in 11 years. Even more, the urban guesthouses initially outnumbered the rural guesthouses in Sălaj County, but the situation has reversed since 2015, and in 2022 the number of rural guesthouses has been almost three times higher than the urban ones, because their number has continued to grow, while the number of urban guesthouses remained largely the same.

It is on one hand the merit of the investors located in the rural areas of Sălaj County, but also a reflection in reality of the gradual process of reorientation of the domestic and international tourism in Romania towards the rural areas, a “return to the origins” for many urban dwellers. One should also mention the successful development models and the best practice taken over (and then implemented) by the people in Sălaj County from the neighbouring counties, which have a longer tradition in the fields of rural, cultural and ethno-religious tourism, such as Maramureș County – including both Maramureș Basin proper, as well as Lăpuș Land, Cluj and Bihor counties – with the development of tourism in Apuseni Mountains. European funds also played an important role in triggering the development of rural guesthouses.

An analysis of the territorial distribution of the rural guesthouses reveals their concentration in the Western Hills, the suburban areas of Zalău City, in Almaș-Agriș Basin and along the Someș Corridor. There is a high number of guesthouses (6) in Boghiș commune, providing an alternative accommodation to those coming to Băile Boghiș resort. In the area of the Western Hills, there are also guesthouses in Sărmășag (3), a large commune, also located on the European road E81, and one guesthouse in each of the communes of Camăr, Crasna, Horoatu Crasnei, Pericei, Plopiș and Valcău de Jos (as of 2022).

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Also, there is an ever higher number of rural guesthouses in the areas close to Zalău, by far the largest town in the county. These guesthouses provide accommodation in addition to other services (food, organization of various events, and outdoor activities). They are located in the communes of Meseşeni de Jos (3), Românaşi (3), Hereclean (3), Crişeni (2), Mirşid and Dobrin. Some of them (in Românaşi or Hereclean) are located on or near the European road E81 (Cluj-Napoca – Zalău – Satu Mare) and count on a higher number of tourists, because of the large number of people in transit on the road. The future A3 motorway (in construction in 2022) might take away some of this transit tourists.

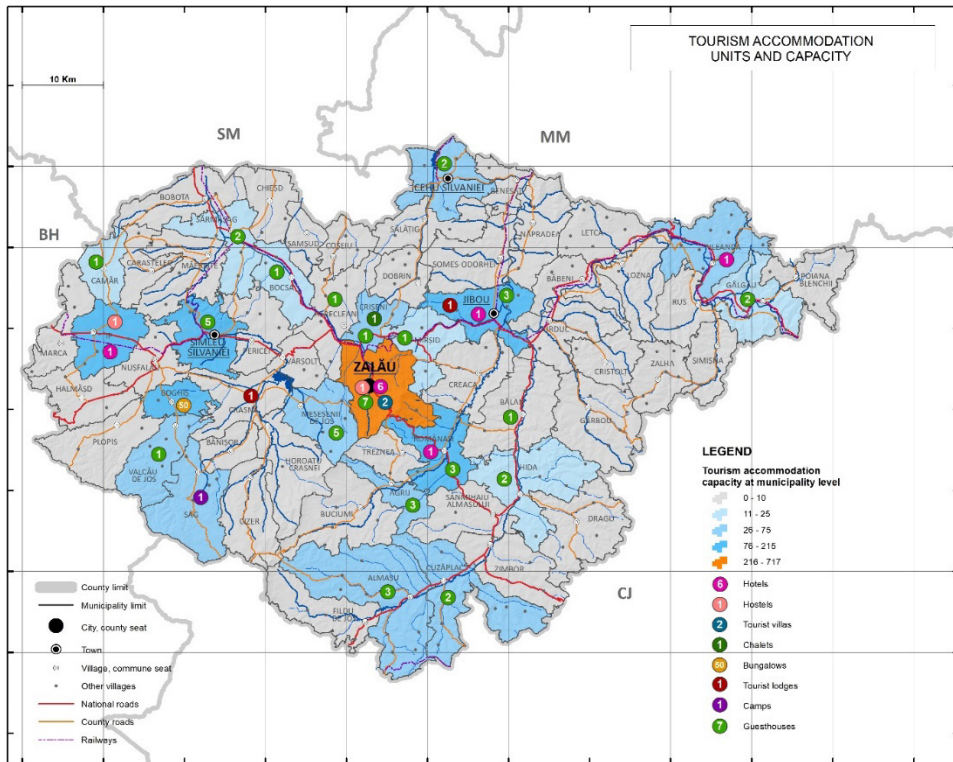


Fig. 1. Accommodation units and their capacity at the level of local administrative units in Sălaj County.

Source: the authors, according to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (TEMPO-ONLINE database, 2022).

The number of guesthouses has also increased in Almaş-Agrij Basin. They are located mostly in the southern part of the basin, in the communes of Almaşu (3), Buciumi (2), and Cuzăplac (2), as well as in Zimbor, Agrij, and Bălan

(one guesthouse each). Along the Someș Corridor, there are some communes that have had a low number of guesthouses in 2022, such as Gâlgău (2), Rus (1) and Năpradea (1). The guesthouses in Gâlgău and Rus also benefit from their location on or near the European road E58 (Dej – Baia Mare) or the county road leading to Lăpuș Land in Maramureș County. Outside these areas, there is only guesthouse in Cristolț commune.

After 2007, the highest growth was registered in the case of the bungalow-type of tourist reception establishments. Bungalows had not existed in Sălaj County before 2008. They were recorded for the first time in 2008 in Boghiș commune (practically in Băile Boghiș resort) and their number increased from 7 (2008-2010) to 9 (2011-2014), and then there was a significant leap, up to 50 bungalows in 2015. Since then, the number of bungalows remained constant, while the resort has received a new status on the tourism market and has become once again an element of reference for the spa tourism in the North-West part of Romania, competing with better known resorts such as Băile Felix (near Oradea) or Tășnad (Satu Mare County), which also developed significantly in recent years.

The analysis of the dynamics of the number of beds in accommodation units in Sălaj County (table 2) reveals however a completely different image as compared to that of the tourist reception structures (accommodation establishments). In the case of the tourist reception units, their total number increased consistently by more than five times in 2022 compared to the 1990s or the period before 1990, which is partly reflected in the data concerning the year 1990. This is not the case of the total number of available beds in accommodation establishments.

Table 2. Dynamics of the number of beds in certified accommodation units according to the type of structure between 1990 – 2000, 2001 – 2011 and 2012 - 2022

Type / Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Total	1922	1874	1642	1515	1477	1603	1406	1372	1237	1289	974
Hotels	568	797	516	408	413	413	399	414	380	378	376
%	29.6	42.5	31.4	26.9	28	25.8	28.4	30.2	30.7	29.3	38.6
Hostels	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Motels	-	-	48	74	74	74	74	107	83	85	75
%	-	-	2.9	4.9	5	4.6	5.3	7.8	6.7	6.6	7.7
Villas	319	139	292	247	204	330	147	67	99	123	72
%	16.6	7.4	17.8	16.3	13.8	20.6	10.5	4.9	8	9.5	7.4
Chalets	67	67	67	27	27	27	27	27	-	-	-
%	3.5	3.6	4.1	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.9	2	-	-	-

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Guesthouses (urban)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Agro-tourism guesthouses	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Camping sites	166	166	14	54	54	54	54	52	40	40	-
%	8.6	8.9	0.9	3.6	3.7	3.4	3.8	3.8	3.2	3.1	-
Bungalows	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Camps	-	705	705	705	705	705	705	705	605	605	405
%	-	37.6	42.9	46.5	47.7	44	50.1	51.4	48.9	46.9	41.6
Cottages	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other units	802	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	58	46
%	41.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.4	4.5	4.7
Type / Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total	1175	1028	1019	1044	1058	924	829	754	1263	1381	1509
Hotels	379	344	344	338	295	139	138	162	452	521	635
%	32.3	33.5	33.8	32.4	27.9	15	16.6	21.5	35.8	37.7	42.1
Hostels	-	-	-	-	62	62	62	62	56	56	56
%	-	-	-	-	5.9	6.7	7.5	8.2	4.4	4.1	3.7
Motels	75	75	75	27	28	28	26	-	-	-	-
%	6.4	7.3	7.4	2.6	2.6	3	3.1	-	-	-	-
Villas	335	293	294	362	378	338	336	50	70	72	70
%	28.5	28.5	28.9	34.7	35.7	36.6	40.5	6.6	5.5	5.2	4.6
Chalets	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	18
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.3	1.2
Guesthouses (urban)	21	21	40	40	39	101	101	146	224	280	284
%	1.8	2	3.9	3.8	3.7	10.9	12.2	19.4	17.7	20.3	18.8
Agro-tourism guesthouses	52	52	52	63	42	42	42	62	189	162	162
%	4.4	5.1	5.1	6	4	4.5	5.1	8.2	15	11.7	10.7
Camping sites	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	100	100	100
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13.3	7.9	7.2	6.6
Bungalows	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	56	56	56	68
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.4	4.4	4.1	4.5
Camps	299	243	200	200	200	200	110	102	102	102	102
%	25.4	23.6	19.6	19.2	18.9	21.6	13.3	13.5	8.1	7.4	6.8
Cottages	14	-	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
%	1.2	-	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.7	1.9	1.1	1	0.9
Other units	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Type / Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	1686	1723	1593	1710	1923	1918	1898	1797	1643	1836	1866
Hotels	656	656	639	639	769	667	667	667	469	513	513
%	38.9	38.1	40.1	37.4	40	34.8	35.1	37.1	28.5	27.9	27.5
Hostels	70	70	70	70	135	135	135	135	135	135	135
%	4.2	4.1	4.4	4.1	7.0	7.0	7.1	7.5	8.2	7.4	7.2
Motels	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Villas	102	102	32	32	32	34	34	34	68	68	68
%	6	5.9	2	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.9	4.1	3.7	3.6
Chalets	18	18	18	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
%	1.1	1	1.1	1.2	1	1	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1
Guesthouses (urban)	394	431	408	408	389	388	380	380	380	424	407
%	23.4	25	25.6	23.9	20.2	20.2	20	21.1	23.1	23.1	21.8
Agro-tourism guesthouses	214	214	294	364	401	499	487	423	433	538	585
%	12.7	12.4	18.5	21.3	20.9	26	25.7	23.5	26.4	29.3	31.4
Camping sites	100	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	5.9	5.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bungalows	68	68	68	108	108	108	108	108	108	108	108
%	4	3.9	4.3	6.3	5.6	5.6	5.7	6.0	6.6	5.9	5.8
Camps	50	50	50	45	45	43	43	-	-	-	-
%	3	2.9	3.1	2.6	2.3	2.2	2.3	-	-	-	-
Cottages	14	14	14	24	24	24	24	30	30	30	30
%	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.6
Other units	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source of data: National Institute of Statistics (TEMPO-ONLINE database, 2022).

Taking as a point of reference the total number of beds in 1990 (1922 available beds), one notices the same decreasing trend in the first two decades after the fall of the socialist regime in Romania. This time, the lowest number of available beds was recorded in 2008, when there were only 754 available beds in accommodation units across Sălaj County, a little bit more than one third compared to the numbers in 1990.

After 2008, there was indeed a significant increase of the total number of beds in accommodation units, but they reached their highest value in 2016, when there were 1923 beds available in accommodation units across Sălaj County, only one bed more than in 1990. This was also the maximal value recorded in the analysed period, because there was a slight decrease after 2016,

which reversed in 2021. However, the 1866 beds available in 2022 are less than those registered in 2016. If the increasing trend is maintained, one may expect the 2016 value to be overtaken in the coming years.

Although the total numbers registered at the beginning of the 1990s and those of the current years are quite similar, a more detailed analysis at the level of the types of accommodation establishments reveals a completely different situation.

In 1990, most of the available beds were provided in accommodation establishments quite different from those of today, mainly in summer camps for school and pre-school children (41.7%), hotels (29.6%) and tourist villas (16.6%), with a lower degree of comfort.

Especially after 2001, the emergence of guesthouses and later that of the bungalows (numerically important in Sălaj County), as well as the significant reduction of other types of accommodation establishments such as camps (which have disappeared completely since 2019) and villas, determined a change in the structure of the tourist reception units, with a growing weight of the establishments that have a lower accommodation capacity, better adapted to the demands of the tourist market.

For instance, in 1990, the 1923 available beds were distributed across 23 tourist reception units, resulting an average capacity of 83.6 beds / unit. The average was influenced by the large number of beds available in camps (usually above 100 beds).

By contrast, in 2022, the 1866 available beds were distributed across 127 tourist reception units, resulting an average capacity of only 14.7 beds / unit, almost six times lower than in 1990. In this case, the low capacity is influenced by the bungalows (108 beds in 50 units, resulting an average of about 2 beds / unit) and the agro-tourism (rural) guesthouses, which totalled 585 beds in 43 units, resulting an average of 13.6 beds / unit in their case. The urban guesthouses had a higher average capacity in 2022, 25.4 beds / unit, due to the fact that many of these guesthouses function with a higher threshold of efficiency, somehow similar to a small hotel.

Currently, most of the beds are available in accommodation establishments located in towns and spa resorts.

The dynamics of the accommodation units according to their degree of comfort and the provided services shows a gradual evolution from accommodation units with a low or average degree of comfort (1 to 3 stars) in the 1990s to accommodation units that have an average or high degree of comfort (3 or 4 stars) nowadays. Currently, there are several 4-star hotels in Zalău (Brilliant Plaza, Grand Hotel Baroc, Griff, Boutique Aquarel), as well as a few 3-star hotels (Severus, Royal, Porolissum, Brilliant Meseş, Aria by Brilliant). Most of the

urban guesthouses are also classified as 3-star, such as Cabana Brădet in Șimleu Silvaniei. Among the agro-tourism guesthouses, in rural areas, one may find even 4-star (or 4-daisy) guesthouses, like Kemsilvanum Fort Silvan in Camăr, but the majority have 3 stars (daisies) or less, and there are some guesthouses that are not (yet) classified at all.

The recreational and sporting tourism structures are not so well represented, given the existing potential of Sălaj County.

Important investments were made in Băile Boghiș spa resort in the 2010s, with significant results in terms of tourism activities, which improved considerably. The accommodation units increased in numbers, their capacity also grew, as well as the level of comfort, reflected in the better classification. The resort includes a partly covered swimming pool with thermal water, hydromassage and four artesian wells, an area reserved for treatment and cure, protected from the sun, as well as an area for children and teenagers, with slides. There are several types of accommodation units (including bungalows), adapted to meet the ever-increasing demands of the tourists, as well as a number of restaurants and bars. In 2022 the private company that ran the resort became bankrupt, but the activities will most likely continue.

In Bizușa-Băi resort, the situation has also improved significantly in recent years, due to the private investments made in terms of accommodation units, public food service and treatment centre. For the moment, there is only one hotel (Ceres, 2-stars), but there are plans for the rehabilitation of some of the former accommodation units (villas and cottages) to diversify the supply. There are also two swimming pools, one outdoors, and the other one indoors.

Some bathing facilities similar to those in resorts also exist in Jibou, Șimleu Silvaniei and Zalău. In Jibou, a private investor took over the former public baths and redesigned them. In addition, a guesthouse, a restaurant, cottages and a camping place were also built, together with sporting grounds and facilities, setting up a comprehensive spa resort. The buildings providing therapy and treatment were also rehabilitated, in the same location. In Șimleu Silvaniei, there are bathing facilities in the place called "Broscărie", slightly outside the town. The thermal water contains sodium chlorite, bromine, iodine, and has therapeutic properties for people suffering from rheumatic, post-traumatic, neurological and dermatological diseases. The establishment is in private property and includes accommodation and camping facilities, a small lake for fishing enthusiasts, a restaurant and other recreational facilities. There are also public swimming facilities in Zalău, grouped in the area called "Tineretului", addressed mainly to the inhabitants of this city. There are three outdoor swimming pools, with different depths, according to age and swimming abilities. Investments have been made also in this area to increase the attractiveness.

Parks are properly designed and maintained in Zalău, where there are two larger parks, the City Central Park (4.5 ha), redesigned between 2007 and 2013 with European (Regional Operational Programme) funds, and Brădet Forest (19 ha), which is managed as a public park. By contrast, the other towns in the county are deficient in terms of green areas.

There is less data available regarding the tourist reception units providing public catering and food services. According to the data published in the “Sălaj County Development Strategy”, in 2015 there were 50 units providing public food services, with a total number of 6700 seats, of which 2500 in Zalău, 1000 in Boghiș, 1000 in Ip, 600 in Românași, 500 in Șimleu Silvaniei, 300 in Jibou, and the remaining in Cehu Silvaniei, Bocșa, Crișeni, Cristolț, Mirșid and Sărmășag. Most of these are restaurants supplying Romanian or international food. There are yet very few specialized restaurants, providing wild game, fish or bio / eco food. Also, these restaurants rarely buy ingredients from local producers and seldom promote Sălaj-specific products, such as *țuica* (brandy) or Șimleu sparkling wine. In many places, especially in Șimleu Basin, underground cellars or basements may be designed as wineries for wine enthusiasts to taste and enjoy the local products.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The tourism infrastructure in Sălaj County has deeply changed since the end of the socialist period. Some types of accommodation units, such as summer camps, disappeared completely, while guesthouses have emerged since the end of the 1990s both in urban and rural areas, proving to be better adapted to the market demands. Their number therefore increased steadily, especially in rural areas, where European funds also triggered their appearance and development. Some rural guesthouses are located in villages along the main roads, providing a wide range of services to transit tourists. However, most of the beds are currently available in accommodation establishments located in towns and spa resorts, because the agro-tourism guesthouses (in rural areas) are usually family-run businesses that have a low accommodation capacity. By contrast, the urban guesthouses have a larger capacity, similar to a small hotel, and they rely not just on accommodation, but also on other services, such as public catering and the organization of events. They replaced the hotels and most of the other accommodation establishments in the smaller towns (Jibou, Șimleu Silvaniei and Cehu Silvaniei).

The hotels and hostels remain important in the largest town of the county, Zalău, where one finds a very diversified supply in terms of accommodation. The general trend in recent years has been to improve the

degree of comfort, giving rise to several 4-star hotels, in addition to the existent 3-star hotels. A 2-star hotel also exists in Bizușa-Băi, one of the spa resorts of the county, which would need some investments to regain its former glory. The other spa resort, Băile Boghiș, has numerous types of accommodation units (including bungalows), for all sorts of tourists. The investments made during the 2010s changed the face of the resort for the better, with the resulting growth in the numbers of tourists, but the private company running the resort became bankrupt in 2022, raising doubts and concerns regarding the future of Băile Boghiș. Some recreational and bathing facilities are also available in the towns of Zalău, Jibou and Șimleu Silvaniei, while most of the seats in public catering facilities are located in Zalău, Boghiș and Ip. Unfortunately, local products, like *țuica* (brandy) or Șimleu sparkling wine, are not always available in the restaurants and other public catering facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected tourism activities in Romania (Rusu, 2022), but tourism infrastructure in Sălaj County proved to be resilient, and the number of accommodation establishments has even increased, with the resulting growth in terms of their overall capacity. The positive trend is expected to be maintained in the following years, as tourism is the economic activity most likely to be strategically important for the sustainable development of the county in the future.

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