

Gorj Village in Danger of Extinction, in the Conditions of Decarbonization of the Mining Areas

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ABSTRACT

One of the biggest risks faced by the Romanian rural demography is the aging and depopulation of villages. With an often-precarious infrastructure, with a low level of education and health insurance, the rural population of Gorj County is faced with a new risk, that of dismissal of miners by reducing the activity of the Oltenia Energy Complex and the closure of the Motru-Rovinari coal mining operations. The lack of job offers, the insecurity of retraining and professional reconversion can generate a demographic exodus to the Romanian urban area or to other European countries. In these conditions, we propose some solutions to revive the economic activity in the area, offering the chance to preserve traditional agricultural activities, to develop rural tourism and to ensure good living conditions for the inhabitants of Gorj villages.

1. Introduction

One of the biggest risks faced by the Romanian rural demography is the aging and depopulation of villages. With an often-precarious infrastructure, with a low level of education and health insurance, the rural population of Gorj County is faced with a new risk, that of dismissal of miners by reducing the activity of the Oltenia Energy Complex and the closure of the Motru-Rovinari coal mining operations. The lack of job offers, the insecurity of retraining and professional reconversion can generate a demographic exodus to the Romanian urban area or to other European countries. In these conditions, we propose some solutions to revive the economic activity in the area, offering the chance to preserve traditional agricultural activities, to develop rural tourism and to ensure good living conditions for the inhabitants of Gorj villages.

2. Demographic radiography of the rural area in Gorj County

The population of Gorj County had, on January 1, 2020, 311918 inhabitants, which represents 16.3% of the population of the region and 1.6% of the country's population. The urban population represents 45.5% of the county's population, and the rural population 54.5%. Gorj County is facing a decrease in the number of

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inhabitants, a trend manifested in recent years. In addition, Gorj County also experienced a decrease in the active population, registering in 2019 the lowest value in the last 5 years (61.7 thousand people).

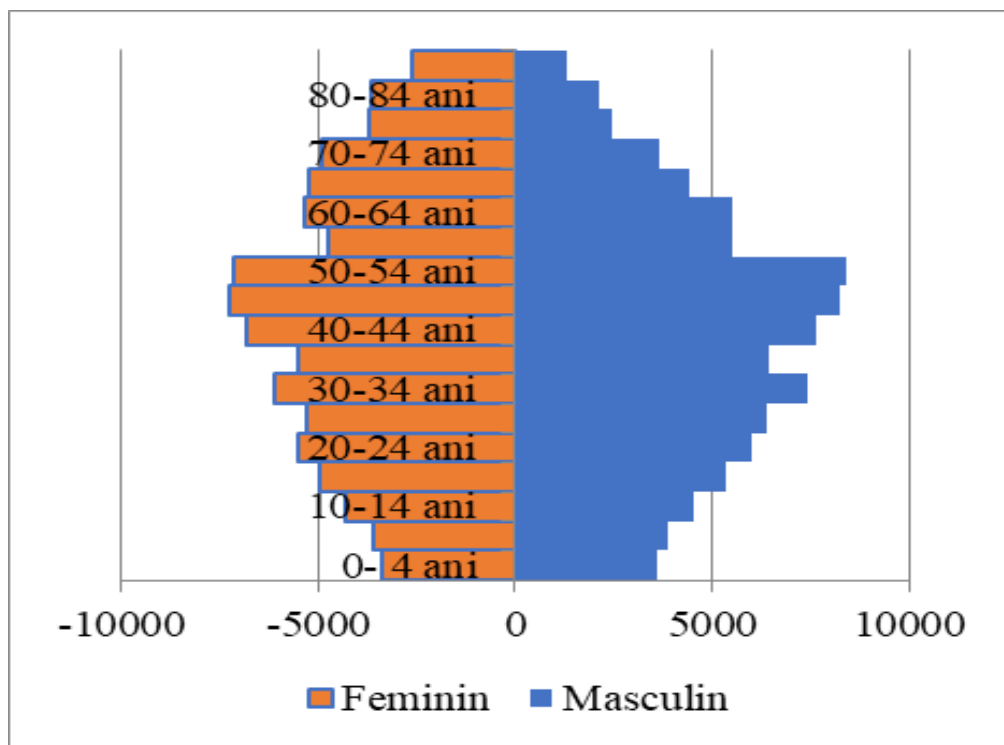


Fig. 1. The age pyramid in rural areas in Gorj County in 2020

Source: www.insse.ro, TEMPO Online

The rural environment in Gorj County has 61 communes and 411 villages, of which 35 villages belong to municipalities and cities, not being eligible for rural development funds. Compared to the number of inhabitants, the communes in the county are small. Thus, a number of 22 communes have between 2001-3000 inhabitants, 13 communes have between 3001-4000 inhabitants, 11 communes have between 1501-2000 inhabitants, 7 communes have between 4001-5000 inhabitants, and 3 localities have less than 1500 inhabitants (Arcani, Ciuperceni, Săcelu). The largest commune, according to the number of inhabitants, is Bâlteni with 7,560 inhabitants, followed by Bălești with 7,491 inhabitants.

The analysis of the evolution of the rural population in the period 2014-2020 shows that in 2020, compared to 2019, in 6 communes out of 61, the number of inhabitants increased, and in the rest, it had a decreasing evolution. In Gorj County, 11 communes were declared areas without cities within a radius of about 25-30 km, which require priority actions for the development of localities with the role of inter-municipal service (Berlești, Bustuchin, Căpreni, Crușeț, Dănciulești, Hurezani, Logrești, Stejari, Stoina, Turburea, Țânțăreni).

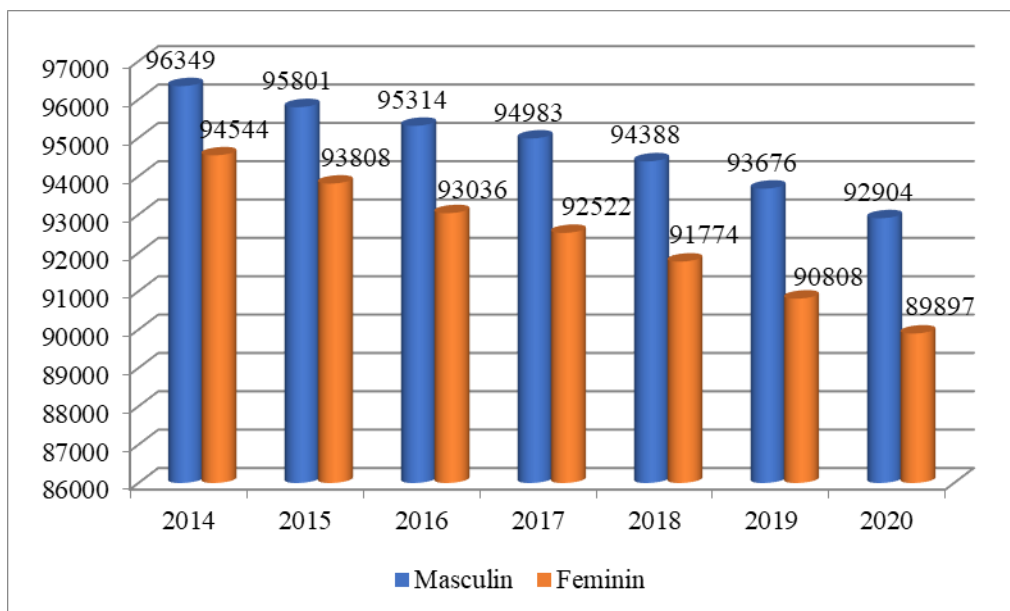


Fig. 2. Dynamics of the rural population in Gorj County during 2014-2020
Source: www.insse.ro, TEMPO Online

A detailed radiography of the rural population in Gorj County reveals the continuous decrease in the number of inhabitants for the period 2014-2020 in almost all rural areas (Annex 2.2.2.2.), With the exception of Bălțești communes (increase by 1.01% in 2020 compared to 2014), Călnic (increase of 1.03%), Dănești (of 1.01% more), Lelești (of 1.01%).

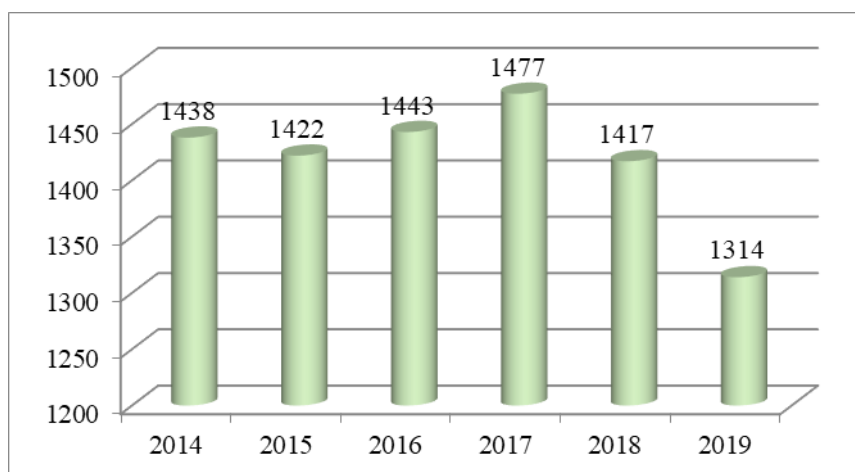


Fig. 3. Dynamics of newborns in rural areas in Gorj County during 2014-2019
Source: www.insse.ro, TEMPO Online

The largest decrease in the number of inhabitants for the analyzed period (2014-2020) is found in Dănciulești commune (12.65%), followed by Săcelu commune (10.6%), Slivilești and Urdari (each with 9.9%). By gender, in most communes there is a slightly higher share of the male population than the female one, with the exception of the communes of Crasna, Crușet, Dănciulești, Drăguțești, Polovragi, Schela, Turburea, Turcinești.

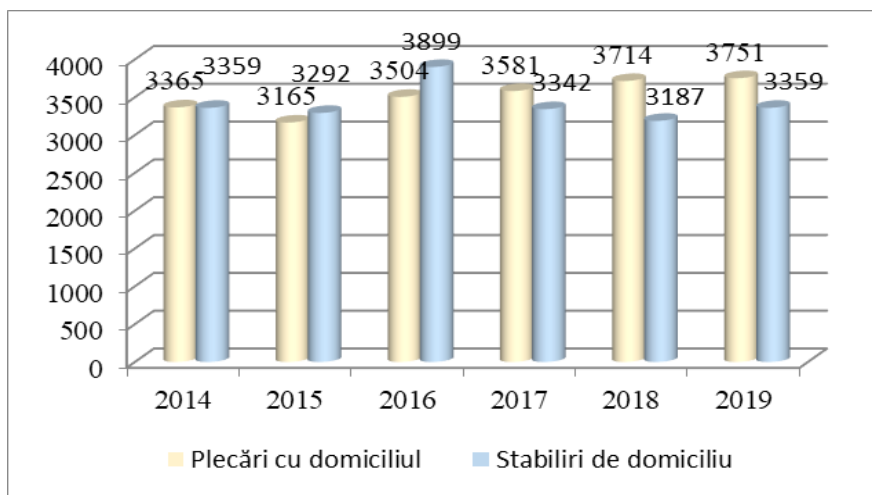


Fig. 4. The evolution of the departures and domicile establishments of the people from the rural area of Gorj county in the period 2014-2019

Source: www.insse.ro, TEMPO Online

The migratory balance in Gorj county has remained constant negative in the last 5 years (-2790 people in 2019), as a result of a similar trend followed by both departures and arrivals from urban (-1272 people in 2019) and rural areas (-1518 people in 2019).

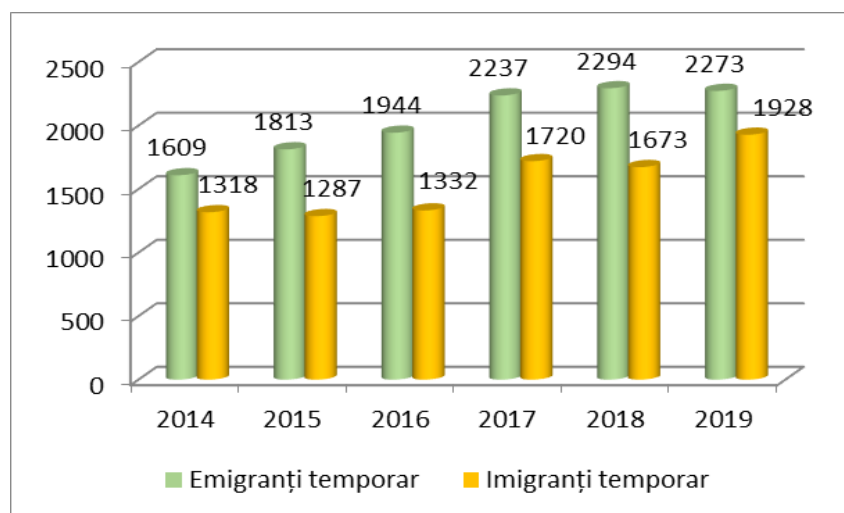


Fig. 5. The evolution of emigrations and temporary immigrations of people from the rural area of Gorj county in the period 2014-2019

Source: www.insse.ro, TEMPO Online

The economic activities in the rural area of Gorj County concentrated a number of 8,850 economic agents, representing 37.85% of the total economic agents in the county and a turnover of 1.2 billion lei, representing 13.19% of the total turnover from the county.

By categories of activities of the national economy, in the rural area of Gorj county predominates, depending on the number of employees, trade, construction works, forestry and forestry, road transport of goods, bakery manufacturing and

activities in rural tourism, - there is a low level of diversification of economic activities (Alexe Iris et al, 2012).

3. Solutions to revive economic activity in the rural area of Gorj

In several communes of the county there were traditional craft centers that have lost their importance in the last 20 years and can be revived by involving the nuclei of folk craftsmen who still produce traditional items: Tismana - fabrics, Pocruia - fabrics, Călnic - Găleșoia - pottery, Padeș, Polovragi, Baia de Fier - braids, Telești wooden household objects.

The peasant household specific to certain localities has individualized over time, depending on the historical and socio-economic conditions (Tchotchua Giorgi, 2017). There are many examples of peasant houses made with artistic mastery, true architectural monuments in wood and masonry. Oak wood was the main building material, and the high pedestal, columns and arches are made of stone and brick.

The competitive advantage of *rural tourism, agrotourism and ecotourism* is related to authenticity / originality (Glăvan V., 2003). In Gorj county these forms of tourism are practiced especially in the area at the base of the mountain range in the northern part of the county, being closely related to the detachment from the accelerated life of the present, by accessing the slow and relaxing time of the Romanian Gorjean village and by reconnecting with the healthy roots of humanity (Șumovschi, D. C., Moraru R. A., 2015). The existence of the forests of edible chestnut and wild bat from Pocruia, Tismana, Peștișani, Lelești gives this sector a special specificity of the landscapes. The development of ecotourism is carried out along forest roads that provide access to several points of interest in the mountain area along the valleys and gorges of Oltet, Galben, Gilort, Sohodol, Motrului, the upper basin of the Cerna valley, or in mixed reservations - Piatra Cloșanilor, with a landscape and forestry role - Gorganu forest. The rich forest and landscape fund is completed by Dumbrava Tismana, Cioclovina Reservation, Cotul cu Aluni, Cornetu Pocruiei, Izvoarele Izvernei and Răchitea forest, beech and spruce forests from Măcăria-Novaci and Bărcului-Cernădia, Gornatel and Chitu-Brăele declared nature reserves). Some of these roads have special landscapes along them, as well as numerous tourist paths. In the defined tourist areas, we meet two types of beneficial bioclimate: one tonic and stimulating in the mountain area, the other sparing, sedative specific to hilly and delve units.

Representatives are also the museums or ethnographic collections of villages - Bărbătești, Borăscu, Vladimir, Lelești, Arcani, Călugăreni, Tismana (center of folk art, folk costume and especially woven Gorj carpets), Dobrița etc., the small nuclei where it is practiced old crafts of folk art and creation: Tismana - fabrics, Găleșoia and Glogova - pottery, Telești - processing of wooden household objects. The localities near the mountain, such as Polovragi, Gureni, Boroșteni, Runcu-village (shepherds and fruit growers), the Novaci delve with pastoral specificity and wood processing; Baia de Fier delve with pastoral and fruit specificity; Arcani - viticultural locality, Lelești - fruit and viticulture, Suseni, Bâlta, Valea Mare - have a high potential for the

development of rural tourism and agrotourism, some of which are important centers for animal husbandry. The locality of Novaci became known in the country through a popular holiday of old tradition: Catching the mountain (Climbing the sheep in the mountains / Shepherds' Day), organized in the Hirizești forest, where shepherds from both sides of the Carpathians gather here. In Polovragi, every year, on the 20th of July, there is a big event, where people from Gorj, Vâlcea and Transylvania gather. The commune has a famous artistic formation of whistlers, popular rhapsodists, vocal soloists, a female vocal group, singers from old folk instruments. In Dobrița and Arcani localities, you can visit exhibitions about the past and present of the area. In many localities are preserved elements of traditional life and crafts related to wood processing (Buduhala-Telești), vegetable fibers, wool, animal husbandry. At Curpen, Rugi, Vaidei, choirs are still held according to old customs, and people still dress in the old port, made up of woven and sewn clothes in houses. The villages of Găvănești, Seuca, Pârâu de Vale, Boboești, Vârtopu are settlements where you can still see houses from the last century, built entirely of sessile wood, covered with shingles, floored with planks or glued with earth, with wooden beds with barks. or mats, dowry box, icons, brick stoves and Oltenian test. Pottery is an ancient craft, which is preserved as a true art, in localities such as Glogova, Găleșoaia, Vârtop and Ștefănești. In the field of decorative art on glass, the works made by the sculptor Mihai Topescu are well known, including international recognition in countries such as Germany, Greece, the United States, Japan, Denmark and the Netherlands. Rural architecture ensembles are also found in Alimpești, Săcelu, Bengești and folk crafts and events in Albeni, Bălcești and Alimpești.

The Jiu Gorge is one of the most spectacular and wild gorges in the Carpathians. The road and the railway that cross deep valley sectors, passing through several sectors with viaducts and tunnels are themselves a tourist attraction, as are the two natural monuments: the Rafaila Rocks and the Sphinx of the Plains.

The practice of *gastronomic and oenological tourism* in Gorj County is ensured by the existence of numerous locations and points of tourist attraction that offer interested visitors the opportunity to taste the traditional cuisine developed in the South-West Oltenia Region (Tudoroiu, 2017). Traditional dishes are offered in the tourist pensions built in the areas where agro-tourism and ecotourism are practiced: Baia de Fier, Novaci, Rânca, Polovragi etc.

4. Analysis of tourist indicators for the rural area of Gorj

The share of foreign tourists in the total number of tourist arrivals in Gorj County in 2019 was only 3.7% (in the South-West Oltenia Region it was 5.4%), down from 4.2% in 2014 (in the South-West Oltenia Region it was 8.4%).

Table 1. Number of reception structures with accommodation function in the rural area of Gorj county (number of units)

Reception structures with accommodation function	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total county, of which:	87	85	87	102	144	160
Arcani	2	2	3	4	5	6
Baia de Fier	18	14	17	21	27	27
Bumbești - Pitic	:	:	:	:	:	1
Câlnic	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cătunele	1	1	1	1	1	2
Crasna	1	1	2	2	2	4
Drăguțești	:	:	:	:	:	1
Glogova	:	:	:	:	1	1
Godinești	:	:	:	:	1	1
Mușetești	1	2	2	3	5	5
Negomir	:	:	:	:	1	1
Padeș	3	3	:	:	1	1
Peștișani	3	3	4	3	4	3
Plopșoru	:	:	:	1	1	1
Polovragi	2	2	2	2	4	7
Runcu	3	3	3	6	12	12
Săcelu	3	3	3	2	2	2
Scoarța	:	:	:	:	1	2
Stănești	:	:	:	:	1	4
Stejari	:	:	:	:	1	1
Telești	:	:	:	:	:	1
Turcinești	:	:	:	:	1	1

Source: insse.ro, processed data TEMPO Online, 2020

The largest increases in tourist arrivals took place in the localities of Novaci, Baia de Fier, Arcani, Cătunele, Motru, Peștișani and Runcu, while significant decreases were registered in the localities of Țicleni, Tismana and Săcelu.

Thus, in 2019 the number of tourist arrivals increased compared to 2014 in the following types of reception structures: in hotels by 11.7%, especially in Baia de Fier by 63%, in Novaci a substantial increase by 546, 5%; in motels with 29.7%; in tourist villas it increased substantially by 381.1%; in tourist chalets with 38.7%; in tourist pensions increased by 94.3%; in agritourism pensions it increased substantially by 271.4%, especially in the localities of Baia de Fier, Novaci and Polovragi.

The largest increases in the number of tourists were registered in tourist villas, tourist pensions and agritourism.

Table 2. Number of tourist arrivals in the rural localities of Gorj County

Arrivals of tourists in tourist reception structures	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Arcani	58	91	832	1633	1986	2107
Baia de Fier	8338	10129	12526	22076	22929	20797
Bumbești - Pitic	:	:	:	:	:	82
Câlnic	73	53	37	131	149	122
Cătunele	38	90	130	103	146	204
Crasna	12	41	173	96	131	188
Drăguțești	:	:	:	:	:	198
Glogova	:	:	:	:	19	422
Godinești	:	:	:	:	152	40
Mușetești	190	165	39	170	433	515
Negomir	:	:	:	:	100	22
Padeș	:	:	:	58	36	37
Peștișani	101	134	527	503	399	357
Plopșoru	:	:	:	604	502	238
Polovragi	1859	1208	2020	2310	1983	1922
Runcu	431	511	293	4192	5681	3256
Săcelu	3505	1455	1906	475	:	:
Scoarța	:	:	:	126	100	113
Stănești	:	:	:	:	21	595
Stejari	:	:	:	:	237	233
Telești	:	:	:	:	:	80
Turcinești	:	:	:	:	2158	2652

Source: insse.ro, processed data TEMPO Online, 2020

Regarding the share of the number of tourist's overnight stays at county level in the total number of tourist's overnight stays in the South-West Oltenia Region, Gorj County had a share of 9.1% (compared to 14.2% in the case of the number of arrivals) in 2019, compared to 11% in 2014 (16.1% for the number of tourist arrivals) in 2014. Thus, in 2019 the number of tourist's overnight stays in the county increased by 21.4% compared to 2014. The lower share of the number of overnight stays, compared to the number of tourist arrivals, shows that during the reference period, tourists spent more nights in other counties in the region than in Gorj County, registering a decrease in both indicators of tourist traffic.

The number of tourist overnight stays in rural localities in Gorj County evolved between 2014 and 2019 as follows: at the level of Arcani locality increased substantially from 77 to 3471, as the number of arrivals in Baia de Fier increased by 109.8 %, in Câlnic increased by 88.6%, in Cătunele increased substantially, by 647.9%, in Crasna increased substantially from 36 to 712 tourists, in Mușetești increased by 130.2%, in Peștișani increased by 268.1%, in accordance with the number of arrivals, at the level of Polovragi locality it increased by 30.2%, and in Runcu it increased substantially, by 434.3%.

From the data analysis, it is observed that the total number of overnight stays in accommodation units has experienced an upward trend, starting with 2017 and

2018, after a decrease in 2015 and 2016. Thus, in 2019 the number of overnight stays increased compared to 2014 within the following types of reception structures: in motels with 90.3%; in tourist villas it increased substantially by 378.8%; in tourist chalets with 52.3%; in tourist pensions increased by 121.8%; in agritourism pensions with 150%.

Table 3. Number of tourist's overnight stays in the reception structures with accommodation function at the level of rural localities in Gorj county

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total county	168737	147156	149869	185057	203786	204872
Arcani	77	156	1489	2581	4029	3471
Baia de Fier	20753	21272	23262	37711	46974	43547
Bumbești - Pitic	:	:	:	:	:	164
Câlnic	132	99	82	139	177	249
Cătunele	48	128	212	115	155	359
Crasna	36	67	331	229	325	712
Drăguțești	:	:	:	:	:	475
Glogova	:	:	:	:	38	569
Godinești	:	:	:	:	304	40
Mușetești	497	428	94	277	1145	1144
Negomir	:	:	:	:	542	154
Padeș	:	:	:	78	108	126
Peștișani	285	459	1475	968	1217	1049
Plopșoru	:	:	:	6007	3570	1092
Polovragi	3359	1915	3769	4087	4127	4375
Runcu	1194	1039	618	9118	11218	6380
Săcelu	14077	7823	11683	2156	:	:
Scoarța	:	:	:	262	277	240
Stănești	:	:	:	:	42	1299
Stejari	:	:	:	:	597	591
Telești	:	:	:	:	:	380
Turcinești	:	:	:	:	3070	4092

Source: insse.ro, processed data TEMPO Online, 2020

A breakdown of the index of net capacity utilization highlights the poor results recorded in Gorj County. According to available statistics, almost three quarters of the operating capacity has not been used in recent years.

The analyzed data show that in 2017 the highest average degree of use of accommodation capacity was registered (15.93%). In some calendar months, the index of net use of tourist accommodation in operation registered higher values, for example, in February 2018 it was 20.1%, being higher by 0.5 percentage points than the index of use registered in January 2018 and by 0.3 percentage points higher than in February 2017. Higher indices of net use of accommodation in rural areas were registered in agritourism pensions (24.3%) and tourist chalets (22.8%).

The index of net use of tourist accommodation places in operation on total tourist accommodation structures in Gorj County, in March 2018 was 16.0%, being

4.1 percentage points lower than the index of net use registered in March 2018 and higher by 2.6 percentage points compared to March 2017. Indices of net use of higher accommodation were registered in agritourism pensions (24.3%) and tourist chalets (22.8%).

The index of net use of tourist accommodation in operation on total tourist accommodation structures in Gorj County, in April 2020 was 18.6% (registering an increase of 4.1 percentage points compared to April 2019), May high by 6.2 percentage points compared to March 2020.

The average length of stay is an indicator of tourist traffic, which means the average number of days tourists stay in a given tourist area. From the analyzed data it was found that in the reference period (2014-2019) the average length of stay decreased. In 2015, 2018 and 2019 the average length of stay was over 1.8 days. The highest value in the analyzed period was registered in 2015 (1.88 days), due to the large number of overnight stays in accommodation units.

The average length of stay decreased from 1.88 days in 2015 to 1.82 days in 2019. The average length of stay was higher in certain calendar months, for example, in February 2018 it was 1, 9 days (1.9 days for Romanian tourists and 2.8 days for foreign tourists). The average length of stay in April 2020 was 3.08 days (2.95 days for Romanian tourists and 8.84 days for foreign tourists).

5. Conclusions

Tourism represents for the rural area of Gorj county an economic sector that has a valuable development potential, not yet sufficiently exploited and which can become a source of attractiveness for both investors and tourists (Romanians and foreigners).

Contributing to the well-being of local communities, by preserving and promoting cultural authenticity can be achieved by reconverting the workforce in natural areas where the aggressive exploitation of the natural environment (mining, gravel pits) took place, by directing the workforce to the tourist area (Săvoiu, G., Tudoroiu, L., 2016). Another initiative aims to contribute to the creation of a platform dedicated to farmers interested in tourism entrepreneurship (to be integrated into the common online platform on sustainable tourism in the Carpathians, according to the Carpathian Convention).

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