

CULTURAL-RELIGIOUS POTENTIAL OF NEAMT DEPRESSION AS ESENTIAL PREMISE FOR LOCAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The characteristic mark of Neamt Depression is done by the multitude of orthodox Christian halidoms, which have been favouring the development of religious tourism in this region. The touristic attractiveness is increased by the coherence of monachal landscape and by the developing degree of touristic infrastructure. The perfect interference between the rural landscape and the cultural-monachal landscape constitute the premise for development of touristic activities in this region, offering new opportunities for manifesting different types of tourism, besides the touristic pilgrimage and the religious-cultural one: rural tourism, eco-tourism, agro-tourism, all viewed as efficient instruments to promote the natural and antropic values of this region.

Key words: tourism, religion, pilgrim, infrastructure, cohesion

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World Tourism Organization defined the cultural tourism in 1985 as “persons who travel for cultural purpose as: study travels, artistic tours and cultural travels for taking part at cultural manifestations, visiting sites and monuments, but also travels for discovering nature, studying folklore or art and pilgrimage”.

Greg Richards, the coordinator of ATLAS association proposes in 2000, a wider acceptance “whole amount of persons’ travels who satisfy their needs for diversity as an inherent thing for human nature and follow the increasing of human cultural level offering new occasions for knowledge, experiences and meetings” (Richrds, Cultural Tourism in Europe, 2000).

Religious tourism is a segment of cultural tourism being in full development, which is difficult to define in the present context, as its multiple valences obtained in a short time spread its sphere extent, opens wide discussions concerning the categories of probationists and followed purpose. The researches reveal that religios tourism is motivated by faith and religious causes (Sharpley R.& Sundaram, 2005) involving a travel to holy places, buildings used for religious purpose, or those have a religious theme, sacred places (Shackley, 2003) that is practiced by two different categories: pilgrims (unifunctional and veneration purpose) and visiter tourists (Cohen, 1998).

Neamt Depression as home of old Romanian spirituality, should be considered as to Blaga's theory like a „stylistic matrix of *Mioritic Space*” where, the numerous halidoms, overlaped the natural background which is favourable for dwelling, determined a distinct specification of this geographical space, for the structure of components, its interrelationship and functionality levels (figure 1).

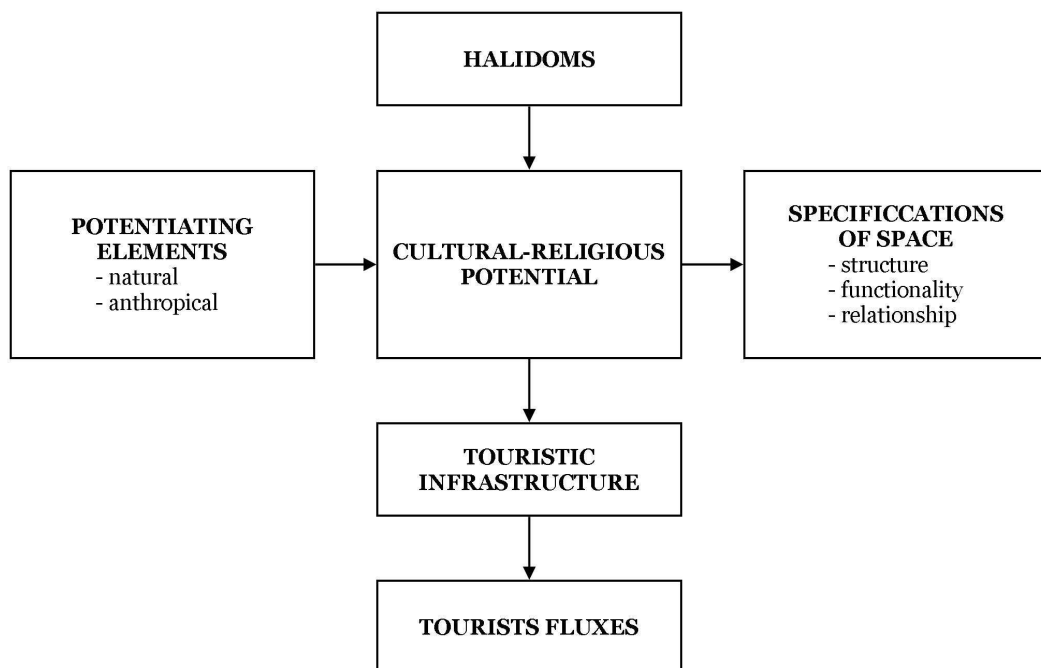


Figure 1

Cultural-religious potential is conferred by the multitude of monastic halidoms (21) settled on the northern and western parts of the depression (figure 2), by the multiple valences developed and potentiated in time by different anthropical elements.

The chronological and special anlyses of halidoms stand out the following aspects:

- Constant increasing of halidoms number and monasteries in the time, with an explosive period during the XX-th century when 8 halidoms were set up (37 % of all), with half of them in postdecember period (Fig. 3).
- The general tendency of the hermitages to swarm with the higher areas, retired, protected by disturbing factors, having middle accesibility (exception of Agapia Monastery which got down to a lower area with more stability against the gravitational processes moving the monks from Old Agapia Monastery).
- Enriching during the time with potentiating elements concerning tourism atraction for many halidoms as: belonging to a protected area (Vanatori Neamt National Park - VNNP), bordering with some anthropical touristic objetives (memorial houses, scultures, museums), many of them being declared in 2008 as Sacred Natural Sites (SNS).
- Enriching the halidoms with multiple valences: religious valences of austere rules, archeological valences, but also historical-cultural, artistic, educational, touristic and economic rules.
- Active involvement of religious institutions in the economic life of the belonged area.

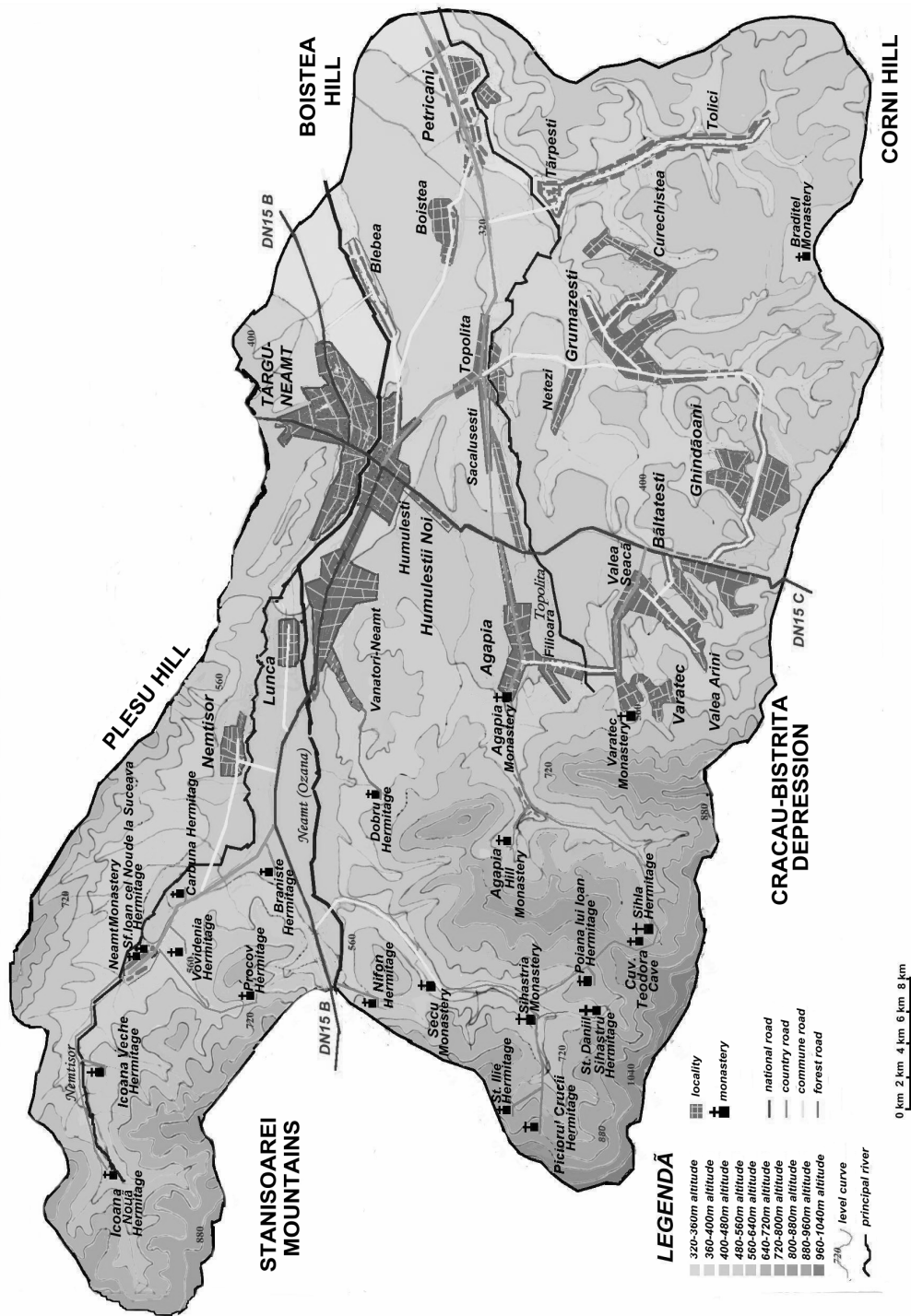


Figure 2. The map of monasteries and hermitages in Neamt Depression and its limitrophe mountain area

Table 1. Monasteries and hermitages in Neamt Depression and limitrophe mountain area

Nr. crt	Monasteries/ hermitages	Century	Touristic potentiating elements
1.	Neamt Monastery	XIV	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
2.	Agapia Hill	XIV	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
3.	Secu Monastery	XVII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
4.	Agapia Monastery	XVII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
5.	Sihastria Monastery	XVII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
6.	Nifon Hermitage	XVII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
7.	Procov Hermitage	XVIII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP;
8.	Vovidenia Hermitage	XVIII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP;
9.	Sihla Hermitage	XVIII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
10.	Varatec Monastery	XVIII	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
11.	Icoana Veche Hermitage	XIX	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP;
12.	Sf. Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava Hermitage	XIX	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP;
13.	Dobru Hermitage (old style)	XX	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
14.	Braditel Monastery (old style)	XX	Valuable cultural artistic edifice;
15.	Daniil Sihastru Hermitage	XX	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
16.	Icoana Nouă Hermitage	XX	Historical-archeological and valuable cultural artistic edifices belonging to VNNP, SNS;
17.	Poiana lui Ioan Hermitage	XX	Belonging to VNNP;
18.	Piciorul Crucii Hermitage	XX	Belonging to VNNP and SNS;
19.	Sfantul Ilie Hermitage	XX	Belonging to VNNP;
20.	Braniste Hermitage	XX	Belonging to VNNP;
21.	Carbuna Hermitage	XXI	Belonging to VNNP;

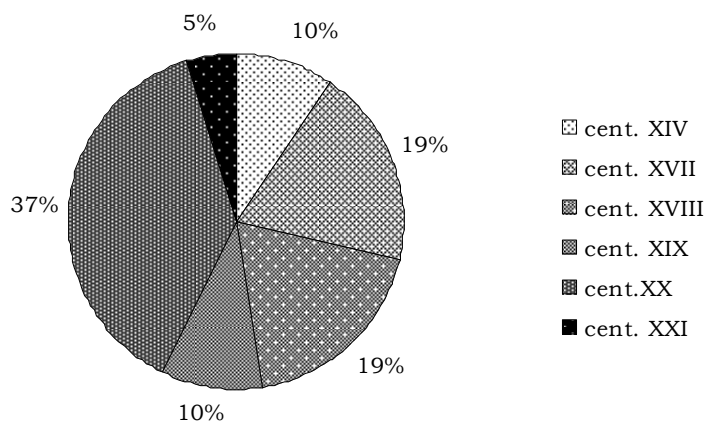
**Figure 3.** Monasteries and hermitages chronology in neamt Depression and limitrophe mountain area

Table 2. Touristic infrastructure in monastic area in 2008

Positive aspects		Negative aspects	
Road and railway infrastructure			
- Existence of two national roads: NR 15C and NR15 B; Existence of one main road intersection in Targu Neamt where there are crossing national roads: DR 15 B (east-west direction, Pascani -Targu Neamt - Poiana Largului) with NR 15 C (north-south direction, Falticeni-Targu Neamt–Piatra Neamt) both join with European Road E 85;		- Non-existence of an European Road in this depression; asphalted roads with middle degradation (Sacaluseseti-Agapia-Filioara-Varatec-Valea Seaca-Arini); absence of railways excepting one Targu Neamt – Pascani as an electric one; long distance to the airports in Moldova area (Suceava, Iasi, Bacau) for foreign tourists;	
Utilities infrastructure			
- Increasing of drinking water supply services for the communes where are halidoms Agapia (14,7 km) and Vanatori (22 km);		- Absence of utilities infrastructures in rural localities (natural gas, sewerage);	
Educational infrastructure			
- Theological Seminar at Agapia and Neamt Monasteries;		- Vocational schools are in restricting and lack of adaptation of profiles to the new specialities: tourism and marketing;	
Utilities infrastructure in telecommunication field (telephone, internet, TV, radio, fax)			
- High degree of covering of mobile telephone, network and great diversity of offers;		- Low quality of signal in recepting the mobile telephone and internet (network);	
Accomodation infrastructures			
Accomodation units	No	Categories	Accomodation places
Monasteries	5	Social centre (“Saint Paisie” at Neamt Monastery)	100
Harmitages	1	Sihla Hermitage	70
		Arhondarices: Neamt Monastery	50
		Secu Monastery	100
		Sihastria Monastery	200
		Agapia Monastery	60
		Varatec Monastery	40
Total	6		620 places

A comparative study about accommodation units on touristic structures in Neamt Depression, at the monasteries there are the biggest number of accommodation places than the others: 620 places at monasteries (31 %), 546 places at hotels (29 %), 362 places at agrotouristic boarding houses (18 %), 200 places at school camps (10 %), 129 places at urban boarding houses (6 %), 53 places at hostels (3 %) and 16 places at chalets (1 %).

Among the monasteries accommodation units, the analyse of weight of accommodation places shows that: Sihastria Monastery is on the first place with 33 %, followed by Neamt Monastery with 24 % and on the last place is Varatec Monastery. The supremacy of Sihastria Monastery is not unexpectedly because the big number of monks who are great demanded mainly by pilgrims for spiritual advice and further more for remembering about great monastic personalities as Ilie Cleopa priest and Ioniche Balan priest, but also for the purpose that there is offered 1-2 accommodation nights for free for every pilgrim. The great impact of monastic personalities upon the pilgrims at Sihastria Monastery there is not only a monastic theme but also a geographic one for studying this phenomenon, as Ioana Josan did in her article „Pilgrimage – a rudimentary form of modern tourism, pg. 168” explaining big fluxes of tourists towards this monastery linked by local monastic personalities quoted above.

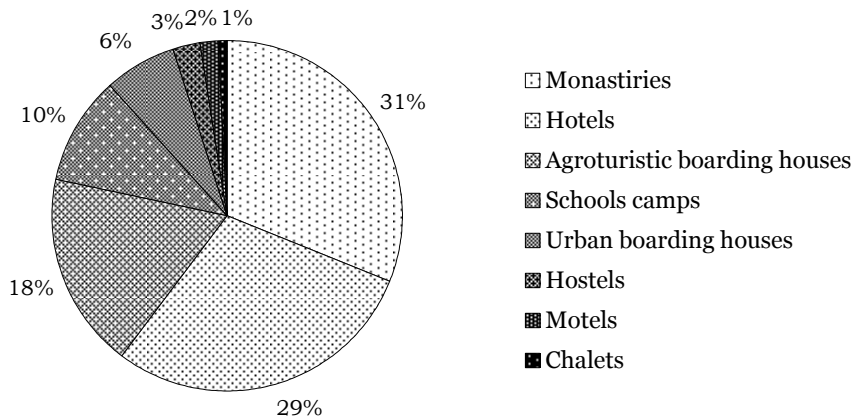


Figure 4. The structure of accomodation capacity in Neamt Depression in 2008
(Information source: Neamt Statistical Direction)

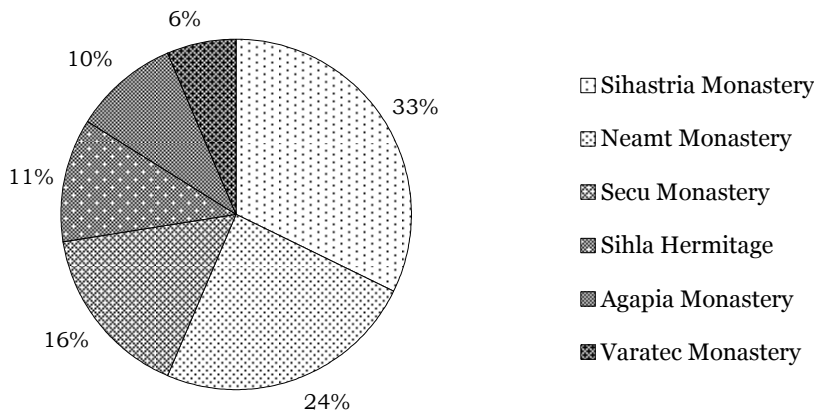


Figure 5. The weight of accomodation places in the monasteries in Neamt Depression during 2008
(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries)

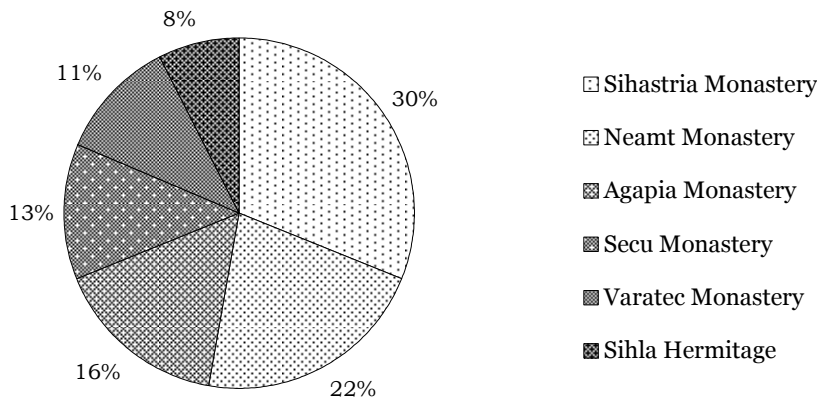


Figure 6. The weight of pilgrims in the monasteries of Neamt Depression during 2008
(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries)

Cultural-religious tourism can be classified according to the purpose in 2 categories:

- Religious pilgrimage, as a tourism with an unfunctional valence (having a precise spiritual purpose) involving those pilgrims who take part to religious rituals and asking 1-2-3 accommodation nights;
- Cultural-religious tourism, as a tourism with polifunctional valences (linking the religious purpose with the cultural one) involving those tourists who want to visit the religious edifices and having the status of excursionist or visitor.

According to Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries, in the whole space of depression, there were 48.066 tourists in 2008 among them 18.000 were pilgrims (38,2 %). The great attraction is recorded by Sihastria Monastery (30 %), followed by Neamt Monastery (22 %), Agapia Monastery (16 %), Secu Monastery (13 %), Varatec Monastery (11 %), Sihla Hermitage (8 %), (see Fig. 6 and 7).

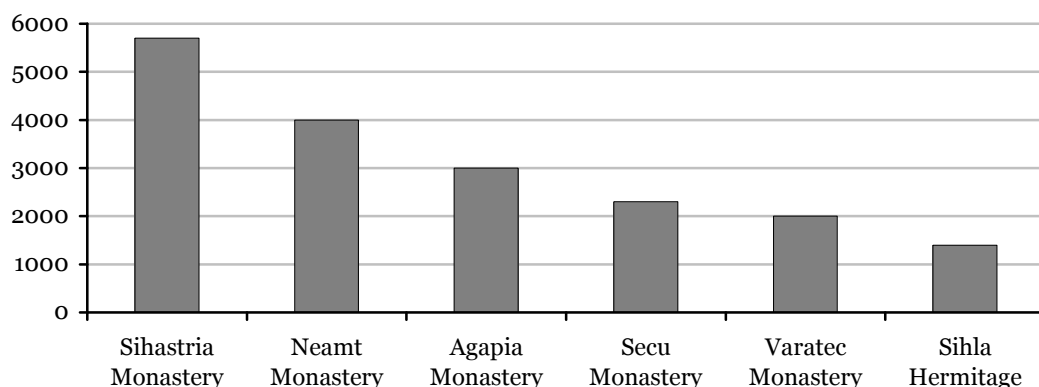


Figure 7. The hierarchy of the pilgrimage in the monasteries in Neamt Depression during 2008
(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries)

The monthly graph evolution of pilgrims (Fig. 8a) and the yearly one (Fig. 8b) indicate a main top in summer months (May-September, having a distinction July with 4920 pilgrims and August with 4860 pilgrims) and secondary tops during some special events (religious events, ecumenic conferences, sinaxes). The critical period is during cold months since the end of autumn to the beginning of spring.

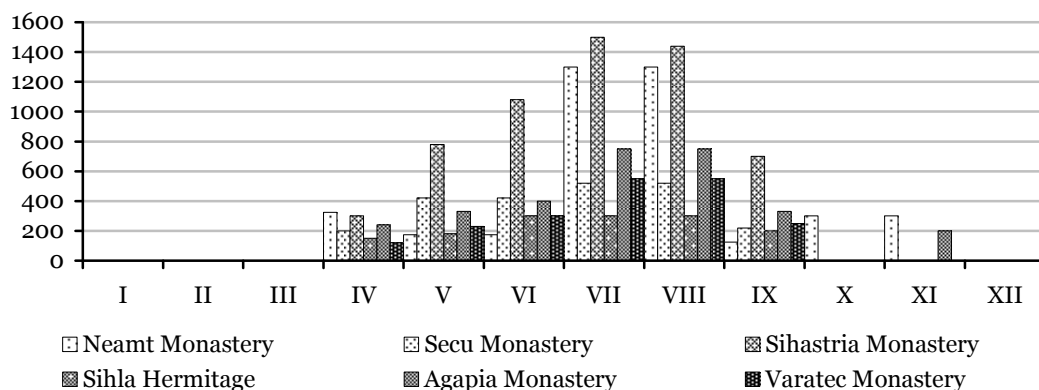


Figure 8a. The graph of mounthly evolution of pilgrims in the monasteries in Neamt Depression during 2008

(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries)

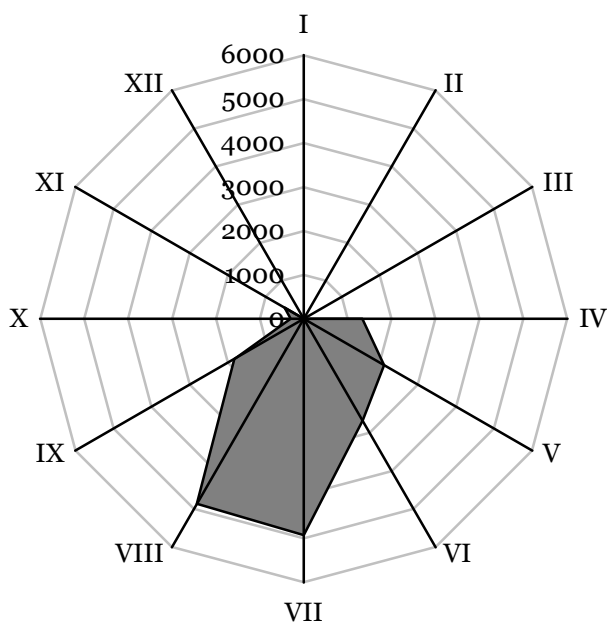


Figure 8b. The graph of yearly evolution of pilgrims in the monasteries in the Neamt Depression during 2008

(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries)

Excursionists or visitors are one day visitors who are not registered with only one accommodation night in one accommodation structure (according to EUROSTAT, Directive 95/55/EC on 25.XI.1995).

According to statistical dates, the total number of visitors in 2008 was 205.565 persons who visited some touristic objectives in Neamt Depression, among them, 135.105 persons (66 %) visited monasteries or hermitages (Fig. 9). The high weight of halidoms proves a greater importance for tourists opposite to the lay touristic objectives, their attraction summing a set of values: spiritual, cultural, historical, artistic, archiological, ethnographical, being potetiated by environmental factors.

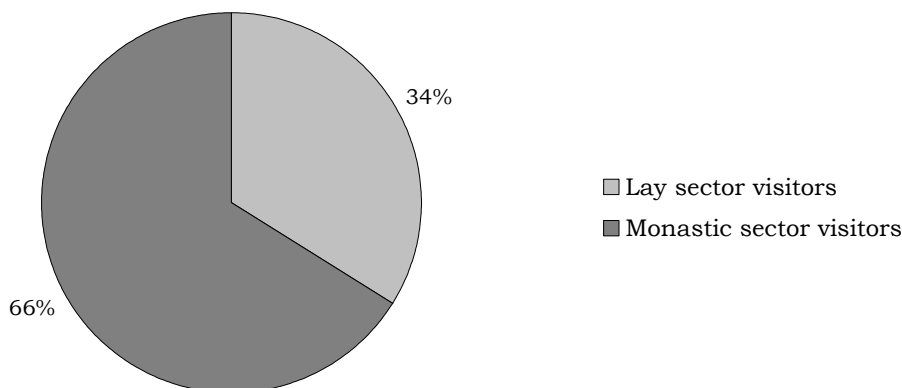


Figure 9. The weight of visitors in monastic and lay sectors in Neamt Depression during 2008

(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction)

The most attractive monasteries for excursionists or one day visitors are: Agapia, Neamt and Varatec with over 20 % due to a complex of factors which amplify the attraction besides the religious one, as: memorial houses, ethnographical centres, museums, monuments and the advantage of favourable position near to the main transport axis. In the opposite situation, with low attraction are the monasteries: Secu, Sihastria and Sihla with about 2 % due to their peripheral position in depression space, having not very high accesibility, some long distance from the main transport axis and lack of some complementary objectives (Fig. 10 and 11).

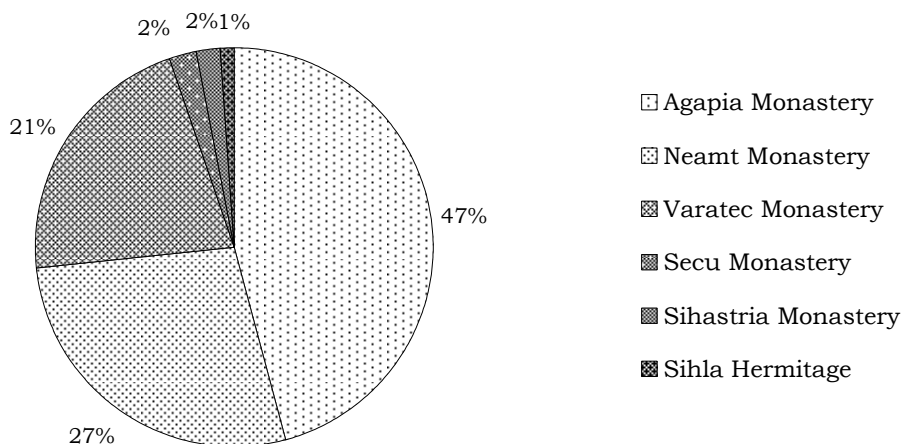


Figure 10. The weight of one day visitors in the monasteries in Neamt Depression during 2008
(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries)

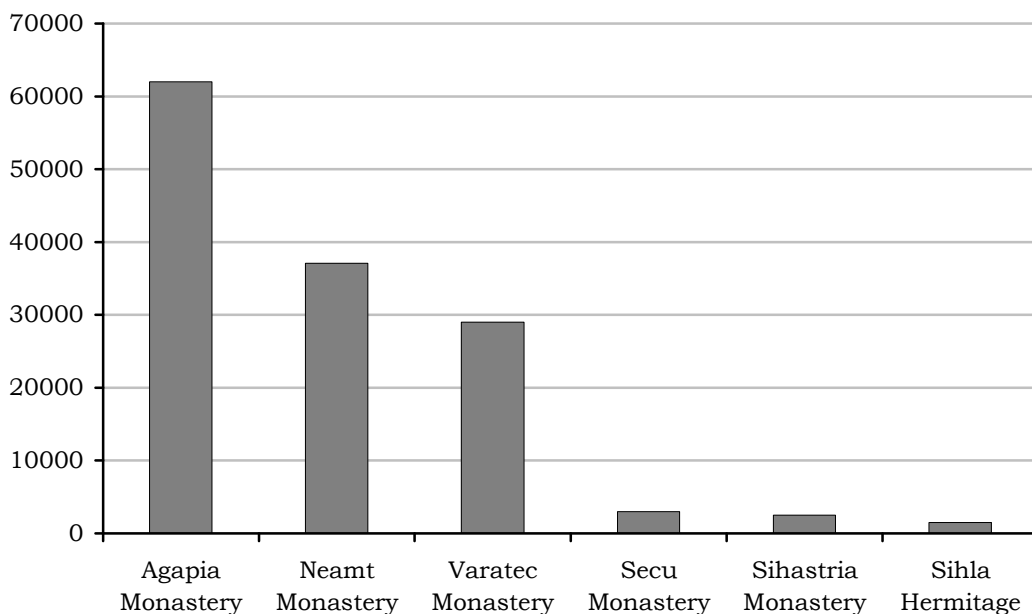


Figure 11. The hierarchy of the one day visitors in the monasteries in Neamt Depression during 2008
(Source: Neamt Statistical Direction and information collected from the monasteries)

Table 3. The analyse of main quatitative elements of tourism on monastic unities during 2008
(Source: Monasteries abbotness (on demand))

Monasteries/ Hermitages	Weight of accomodation places	Weight tourists		Indicator for net use of accomodation Capacity (13,43 total)
		Pilgrims	Excursionists/ one day visiters	
Neamt M-tery	24 %	22 %	28 %	13,23
Secu M-tery	16 %	13 %	2 %	9,00
Agapia M-tery	10 %	16 %	46 %	24,88
Sihăstria M-tery	33 %	30 %	2 %	12,28
Sihla M-tery	11 %	8 %	1 %	8,12
Varatec M-tery	6 %	11 %	21 %	16,91

CONCLUSIONS

- The spacial cohesion of natural components with rural and cultural-monastic structures determine a certain desposal and functionality for Neamt Depression giving characteristic features as creating a specific geo-cultural monastic space;
- The halidoms are so far the most important touristic anthropical objectives in Neamt Depression, because:
 - That is the most represented category in quatitative aspect, 21 monasteries and hermitages, devided into two teritorial groups: north and west;
 - A high degree of complexity emphasized by the qualitative aspects distributed on many fields: architectural, historical, cultural, artistic, educational, touristic and economic;
 - They hold the biggest procent (31 %) among all accomodation places in depression space, having a bigger value of indicator for net use of accomodation capacity (13,43 total) than the average of depression (11,32 %) but lower than the hotelier one (43,42 %);
 - They hold the biggest value for one day visiters (66 %);
 - They profit by some potentiating touristic elements as: National Park Vanatori Neamt, museums, monuments, statues, memorial houses, ethnographical centres;
 - A major impact upon the region economy through increasing the number of touristic structures (mainly for agrotouristic boarding houses, 25 total, 20 in Agapia commune and 4 in Vanatori commune and 1 outside of monastic space);
- Among the halidoms there are distinguished two poles of attraction:
 - Sihastria Monastery for pilgrims (with a weight of 30 %) having the biggest number of accomodation places;
 - Agapia Monastery for excursionists and one day visitors (with a weight of 46 %) recording the biggest value of indicator for net use of accomodation capacity;
- The tourism has a definite seasonality, having a main top in the summer and secondary tops during religious holidays (in spring and autumn);
- Neamt Depression is dominated by religious tourism, followed by balneary and climatical one, having real opportunities for other types of tourism: agro-tourism, eco-tourism, rural tourism, scientific tourism, the last has excelent conditions into the Natural Park Vanatori Neamt.

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