

TERRITORIAL DISPARITIES CONCERNING THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TOURIST SERVICES QUALITY IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: The present study aims to achieve a spatial projecting of the disparities in the distribution of the touristic services in Romania, emphasizing the qualitative aspect of this economic activity. Special attention has been paid for the management of the quality of the touristic services and of the management system. These have been analysed by a systemic approach, thus allowing identifying the variable components, which let the decision factors to interfere by means of decisional impulses, which may permit the observance of the quality standards. Achieving the present study was due to the evolution of the touristic phenomenon in Romania. This evolution presents big differences from one region to another, in terms of comparable touristic resources.

Key words: quality of touristic services, quality management, territorial disparities, territorial management

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1. Introduction

Tourism represents today a distinct branch in the national economy, and the touristic activities are a viable alternative for ensuring the dynamic of the national economies. This component is essential for the functioning and the stability of the local economic system, at the level of some territorial systems, which dispose of important touristic resources.

At present, the tourism industry depends on some major aspects, on the one side the saturation of the touristic market, and on the other side the higher and higher exigency of the consumers of touristic services. In these conditions, new approaches of the

development strategies for this economic sector are necessary. These approaches must be based on the quality of the services provided.

Within the spatial projecting of the territorial disparities in the distribution of the touristic services, there were met some difficulties regarding the quantification of this process, due to the inexistence of some statistical entries, which could exhaustively show the qualitative dimension of the touristic phenomenon. There were used the following statistical indicators: the coefficient of using the accommodation capacity, the number of touristic nights, the number and structure of the accommodation locations.

Regarding the quality management, it represents a concept which has been recently introduced in the specialized literature, the first attempts appearing once with the industrial revolution. The level of civilization to which the society and the human communities have evolved up to now allows the clients, especially to the touristic clients, to choose and request services of high quality standards. When approaching the quality management, its nuclei appeared in the United States of America, and here we can mention Eli Whitney, who brought certain improvements for the assembling lines of the weapons (muskets/guns) manufactures from that period. The next step in the field of quality was made by Frederick Winslow Taylor, a mechanic engineer, who thought to improve the industrial efficiency. Not by chance, most of the time he is surnamed "the parent of the scientific management". He was one of the intellectual leaders of the Efficiency Movement and part of his preoccupations was to substantiate the quality management, inclusively aspects like standardization and adopting improved practices. In the United States also, the contributions of Henry Ford were important, in the foundation of the quality management, too. As regards the foundation of this concept in Europe, Karl Friederich Benz, the one who was surnamed the inventor of the motorcar, brought his contributions in the field of production, although real mass production had been initially introduced by those from Volkswagen, after the Second World War. Starting with that period, North American companies focused on the production without low costs, but maximum efficiency.

Walter A. Shewhart made a major step regarding the quality management, in the year 1924, by creating a method of quality control, using statistical methods. This represented the beginning for the foundation of the later statistical control of the quality.

W. Edwards Deming later applied the control methods by statistical processes in the United States, during the Second World War, and this way he considerably improved the quality regarding the guns manufactures and other products which were important from the strategic point of view. He is well known due to the management philosophy, establishing the positions of the quality, productivity and competitiveness. Among others, he set 14 points which managers should take into account, these points representing a high level generalization of most of his ideas. These should be interpreted understanding the following:

- The breaking up of the barriers between compartments
- Management should be aware of its responsibilities and should develop its leader qualities
- A constant improving
- Appointing a program of education and self-improvement

The concept of quality has radically changed after the Second World War, when Japan decided to make a national imperative out of improving quality, as part of the reconstruction of the national economy, decimated by the two wars, and among others it was based on the previous experiences of Shewart, Deming and Juran.

In the years '50 and '60, the goods coming from Japan were considered to be expensive and of a doubting quality, but as the time was passing by, their qualitative aspect began to improve, and starting with the year 1970, Japan became to have the best quality goods. This fact can be proved in at least two fields, the auto field and the Hi-Fi electronics field.

Most part of the clients recognize the fact that the most important thing when speaking about a product, but especially of a service, is that related to their quality, whereas the producers or the services providers admit the fact this important aspect makes the difference, most of the times, and it leads to the increase of competitiveness on a certain segment of market or it may even forestall the whole outlet.

The higher and higher importance of the services quality led to the release of several concepts regarding quality. An ample definition of the quality concept is given by J.M.Juran (1993), who considered quality as an assembly of characteristics of a product which satisfy the clients' necessities and, consequently, make the product to be satisfactory.

According to Law nr.11/1994 (published in MO nr.74/1994), quality represents the assembly of properties and characteristics of a product or service which confer it the ability to satisfy the expressed or implied¹ necessities.

In the paper *Tourism Economy* (2001), Oscar Snak, Petre Baron and Nicolae Neacșu identify within services industry a tight connection (of quantification/determination) between productivity, quality and profitability; when the consumers identify differences in the quality of the offered services, these differences will certainly reflect at the level of the profits of the providers of the services, too. According to the authors above mentioned, when speaking about the opinion of the services consumers, there appear three aspects in evaluating the quality of the services, grouped in the order of the evaluation difficulty: *the searched quality* (the characteristics of the services quality which the client may evaluate before consuming them), *the experienced quality* (the characteristic of the services which the client may evaluate after buying or consuming them), and *the credible quality* (the characteristic of the services towards which the client manifest high confidence).

According to the ISO standard 8402/1994, quality represents "the assembly of the characteristics of an entity, which confer it the aptitude to satisfy the expressed or implicative needs". The introducing of the standard ISO 9000/2000 brings significant insertions regarding quality, which is defined as "the measure in which a set of intrinsic characteristics comply with some requests". The same standard defines quality management and the system of quality management by means of the organizations' capacity of respecting the quality standards.

The ISO standard 9000:2005 offers information, fundamentals and the vocabulary used in the system of management quality. ISO 9004:2000 offers a guide regarding the improvement of the methods. None of these two standards can be used in certifying purposes, as they offer only guiding measures and not recommendations or special conditions which should be respected. In this respect, in the United States of America there is „The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award”, which is exactly a competition for identifying and recognising the top companies of the United States regarding the quality field. This model presents a set of criteria regarding quality, including, among others, commercial success and the capacity of corporative leader. Once the organisation was awarded in this competition, it must wait for a few years in order to be eligible to apply for another competition again. *The quality management* represents the totality of the "activities coordinated in order to shape and control the organisation regarding quality". *The quality management system* is the institutional framework by means of which an organisation is oriented and controlled, regarding quality.

At European level, there is the European Foundation for Quality Management – EFQM Excellence Model, a competition based on the same set of principles as that from the North-American continent. The Alliance for Excellence in Performance represents a network of organisations at state, local and international level, which uses the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria and model at a basic level, with the purpose of

¹ A comprehensive approach to managing service quality is achieved by Oscar Snake, Petre Baron and Nicolae Neacșu in *Economia Turismului* [Economy of Tourism], chapter 24, edition 2001

improving the organisations' and local economies' performance. NetworkforExcellence.org is the Alliance web-site, and the net browsers may search for and also offer information about its members in their states and the last news and events about Baldrige community.

The systemic approach of the touristic phenomenon offers a comprehensive picture about the territorial disparities in the distribution of the quality of touristic services, starting from the identification of the determinants of the touristic phenomenon (the quality of the natural and anthropic resources and their proper promotion).

The quality of the natural touristic resources (QNTR) and the quality of the anthropic touristic resources (QATR) (evaluated by means of the attractiveness indicator) represent components with direct action upon the quality of touristic services. These components determine the touristic phenomenon, more exactly they determine the existence or the absence of the touristic phenomenon. With the capitalization of touristic resources within an area (CNTR – capitalization of natural touristic resources, CATR – capitalization of anthropic touristic resources), one can speak about touristic services of a certain quality (TSQ – touristic services quality). Within this interdependence relationship, the management of touristic resources (MTR) is the one which ensures the optimum balance between efficiency, quality and profitability (figure no. 1).

The detailed analysis of the quality of touristic services underlines two major structures with an important role in the qualitative evolution of the touristic activities (figure no. 2), *the main components* (MC) (transport systems – T, accommodation – A, food services – FS and recreation – R) and *the secondary components* (medical services – MS, treatment – Tr, etc).

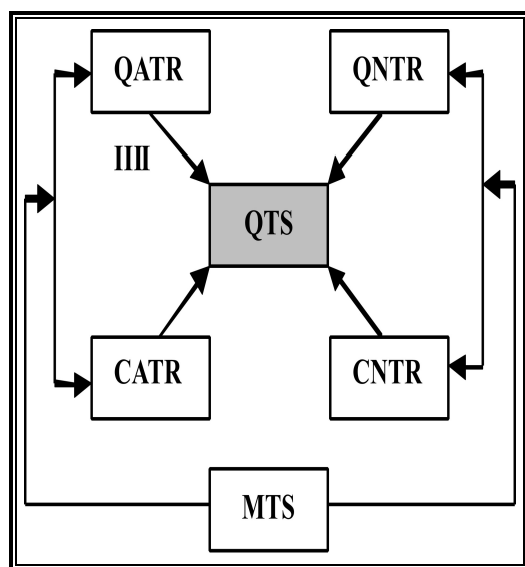


Figure 1. The determinative factors on the tourist service quality

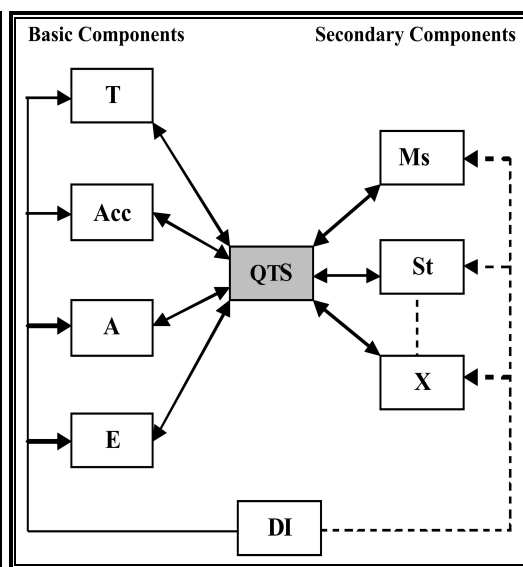


Figure 2. The components of the tourist service quality management system

The main components act as variable elements, upon which there can be acted by decisional impulses, with a sufficient loading for attaining the quality objectives. Two important stages are understood within the process of the quality of management services (QMS), a first stage in which the increase of the quality of touristic services is due to decisional impulses (DI) from outside the system, and a second stage in which the superior quality obtained in the first stage brings the incomes necessary for self-supporting, in order to ensure the quality standards (figure no. 3).

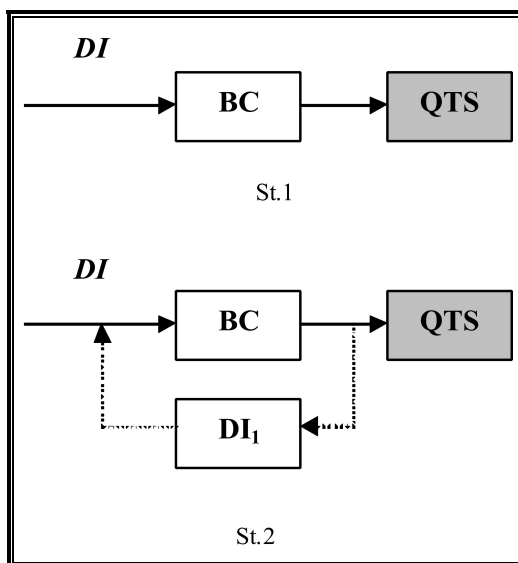


Figure 3. Stages in the tourist service quality management

At the level of the basic components, the decisional impulses are oriented towards one or several elements. In the decisional process, an important role is held by the graduation of the impulse depending on the quality objectives which were established.

2. Territorial disparities in the distribution of the quality of touristic services

In Romania, the quality of touristic services presents important differences within the territorial profile. These differences are due to several factors:

- the quality of the transport and communication infrastructure;
- important differences within the territorial profile regarding the quality of the natural touristic resources and the anthropic touristic resources, as well as within the degree of capitalization;
- the lack of an institutional system which could ensure the implementation of the quality standards in the tourism field;
- the lack of a coherent and realistic strategy regarding tourism development in Romania;
- the lack of a strategic management system regarding tourism development in Romania.

The degree of concentration of the touristic services was analysed starting from a set of indicators which show, directly or indirectly, this aspect: the number of accommodation units, the evolution of the number of accommodation units/comfort types, the evolution of the number of tourists, the coefficient of accommodation capacity use.

At the level of the main touristic areas, one can notice a decrease of the number of touristic welcome structures. In the balneary resorts, the decrease is significant, from 532 units in 1994 (19% out of the total of the touristic welcome structures) to 377 units in 2008 (8% out of the total of the touristic welcome structures).

Important increase of the number of accommodation units are in Bucharest and in towns which are county seats, as well as in the resorts from the seaside area and the Danube Delta, where the accommodation structures were insufficient for the touristic flows which are continuously increasing.

It is to be noticed the increase in the number of accommodation units of three and four stars, very requested in all the touristic regions. Numerous hotel chains have opened or are to open accommodation units of superior comfort categories. In the period 2009-2010, the Golden Tulip chain plans to open a number of 6 hotels, the first three ones in Bucharest, Cluj and Moeciu de Sus, all having the four stars category.

The evolution of the accommodation capacity in function, on types of destinations, emphasizes Bucharest and county residence towns, which register the most important increase, from 13,7 million seats-days in 1994, to 20,5 million seats-days in 2008, an evolution which was determined by the construction of accommodation structures of large dimensions of the type of hotels opened all year round (figure no. 4). For example, RIN Grand Hotel, opened in 2007, has got 1436 rooms and 23 apartments.

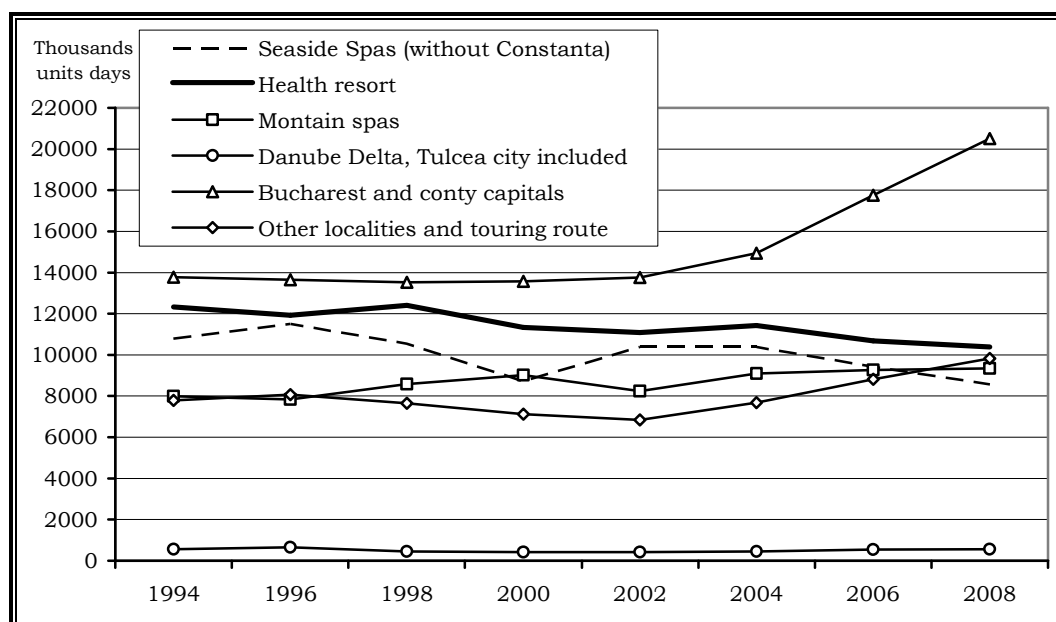


Figure 4. The evolution of the accommodation capacity by destination types (1994-2008)

Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

The dynamic of the number of tourists who were provided accommodation, at the level of the touristic areas, highlights the capital and the county residence towns, which, after a decrease of the number of tourists from 1994 (3,4 million) and until 2000 (2,2 million), register a constant increase after this period, in 2008 registering a number of 3,3 million tourists. The increase of the number of tourists determined a deficit of accommodation seats at four and five stars, which reduces gradually after 2007. The number of tourists from the year 2008 represents 47% out of the total number of tourists registered at the country level, out of which 33% were foreign tourists. From the foreign tourists, 51% chose accommodation units of five and four stars.

The Danube Delta represents another touristic region where the number of tourists increased significantly after 2000 (when there were registered 34.000 tourists) with over 100% in 2008 (96.000 tourists).

The evolution of the number of accommodation structures on categories of comfort between 1994-2008 (figure no. 5) shows an increase of the units number for the categories of four and five stars, more accentuated in the last two years, due to the increase in the number of requests for superior categories of comfort.

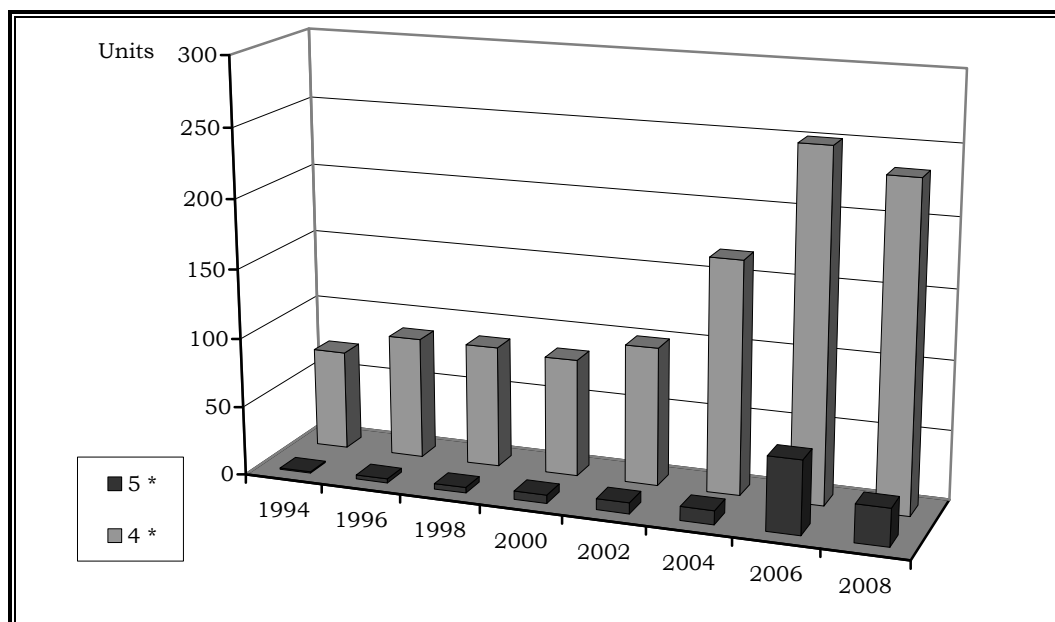


Figure 5. The evolution of the accommodation units by comfort categories (1994-2006)

Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

If in 1994 there was only one unit classified at five stars, in 2006 their number increased to 53. The increase in the number of accommodation units classified at four and five stars is especially due to the bigger and bigger request for accommodation structures with a high comfort degree and the associated subsidies (conference halls, seminars), conditions which were complied with by these two types of accommodation units.

We can say that the weight of these accommodation structures, although pretty low today (about 1% for those of five stars and approximately 8% for those of four stars), significantly increased (from 0,04 % in 1994 to about 1% in 2008 for the five stars units; from 2,54 in 1994 to approximately 8% in 2008 for the four stars units), and the tendency is actual, there is nowadays a deficit of accommodation seats, especially in big towns from the countryside which attracted foreign investments, in the seaside area and on the Prahova Valley.

The evolution of the accommodation capacity which is in function today, grouped on the two categories of comfort, shows an increase from 5000 seats-days in 1994 to 1,4 million seats-days in 2008, for the five stars category. The accommodation capacity in four stars units increased from 1,4 million seats-days in 1994 to 7.391 million seats-days in 2008 (figure no 6). It is to be noticed that out of the total of the accommodation capacity in use, in the year 2008 the two categories of comfort had a weight of about 15%.

At the level of the year 2008, on categories of comfort, there can be noticed that most of the tourists preferred the units classified with two and three stars (70% out of the total), the lowest weight being registered for the unclassified ones (2%). The situation is different for foreign tourists where 58% preferred the units classified at five stars (51%) and four stars (7%), units with high levels of comfort (figure no. 7).

The allocation of the accommodation units at national level shows the highest values in the districts where the touristic resources present a high capitalization degree. Thus, on the first place there is Constanta county, with 988 accommodation units, where due to the presence of the Romanian seaside of the Black Sea, the accommodation base for the mass tourism in the past, maintains it on the first place. The counties Braşov and Harghita follow.

with 489, respectively 402 accommodation units, and at a larger distance Prahova county (222 accommodation units), Suceava (220 accommodation units) and Cluj (205 accommodation units), the latter ones forming the main touristic destinations for the mountain tourism, which is more and more practiced lately. The capital occupies a median position (102 accommodation units), as it is preferred for the business tourism and less for the touristic resources (especially anthropic) of which it disposes at present. On the last places there is the boundary counties of the country, from the south and east, the counties with the least touristic resources, but where the development degree is much lower, too (Mehedinți county – 18 accommodation units, Sălaj and Ialomița counties – 17 accommodation units each, Giurgiu county – 15 accommodation units, Botoșani county – 11 accommodation units, followed by the counties Vaslui, Teleorman and Călărași with 9 accommodation units each, on the last place being the Olt county with 8 accommodation units).

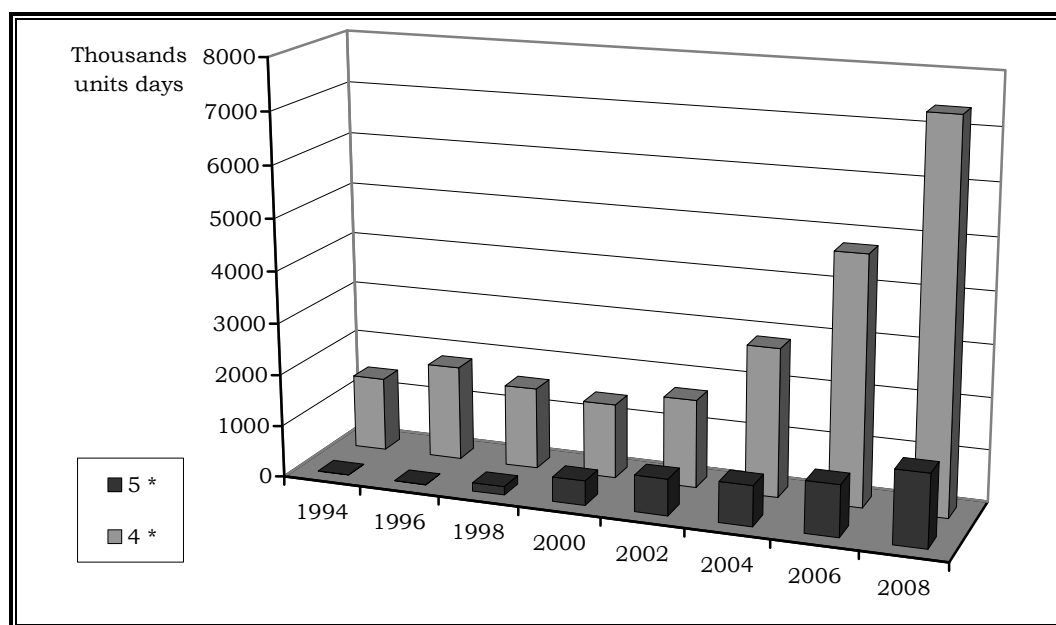


Figure 6. The evolution of the accommodation capacity by comfort levels (1994-2008)

Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

Regarding the structure of the accommodation units, these were divided into 4 main categories: hotels and motels, villas and touristic chalets, touristic pensions and other welcome touristic structures. The first category, that of the touristic hotels and motels, concentrates accommodation units with the highest comfort degree, but also with the largest number of seats per each accommodation unit. At national level, from the numerical point of view, detaches Constanta county, too (342 hotels and motels), followed at a large distance by Bucharest municipality with 72 hotels and motels, Brașov (67 hotels and motels), Prahova (65 hotels and motels), Timișoara (53 hotels and motels) and Cluj (52 hotels and motels). On the last positions (under 10 hotels and motels) there are the counties Ilfov, Teleorman, Călărași, Botoșani, Olt, Vaslui and Sălaj.

The category villas and touristic chalets is the one which dominates in all the country's counties, on the first place being Constanta county, too, with 512 such units, followed at a large distance by the counties Brașov, Tulcea and Prahova with over 50 units each, on the last places being most of the counties dominated by a plain relief, with a very reduced number of capitalized touristic resources.

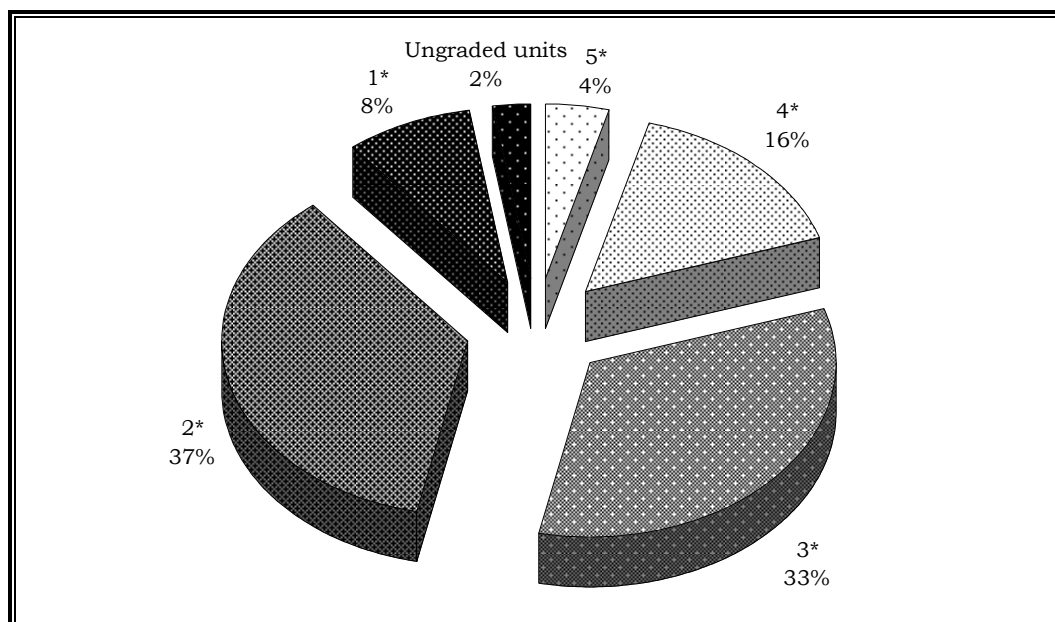


Figure 7. Incoming by comfort categories (2008)

Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

Touristic pensions dominate a number of 5 counties, where there are over 100 such units: (Harghita – 335, Braşov – 328, Suceava – 152, Maramureş - 111 and Cluj - 107). Mostly, these are situated in the rural areas, and they are based on the rich and enough varied offer of the rural tourism and agro tourism and they rival with touristic hotels and motels, from the comfort categories point of view. The lowest values are registered in the counties with modest touristic resources, too.

The category other accommodation spaces is dominated by Constanta county, with 61 units, including campsites, touristic huts, bungalows etc. A number of three counties present null values, among these there is even the capital, and this represents a completely normal fact, if we take into consideration the touristic clients in the capital (figure no. 8).

The capacity of touristic accommodation is shown by the number of seats from the units having as a function to provide accommodation for the tourists from a certain area or from a certain touristic destination. Regarding the number of accommodation seats in function at the level of the year 2005, on the first place there was Constanta county, with 10.479 seats. This value is due to the very high occupation degree from the summer period. With a value representing almost half of the previous one (4.527 seats in function) there is Brasov county, where the touristic offer is in accordance with the capitalization of the area. The capital presents a rather high value (3.945 seats), if we consider its main destination is to facilitate accommodation regarding some events with a national and also international character. Prahova county is to be mentioned, too, with a value of over 3.000 (3.075 seats), dominated by the homonym touristic area. The lowest values are those registered in the case of the plain counties, very poor in touristic resources, especially natural resources, but also touristic anthropic resources are poor, these counties being unable to polarize from the touristic point of view, and thus they have a reduced capacity of attracting touristic flows. Among these counties, we mention Sălaj – 240 seats, Teleorman – 219 seats, Giurgiu – 205 seats, Vaslui – 202 seats, Călăraşi – 199 seats and Olt – 138 seats (figure no. 9).

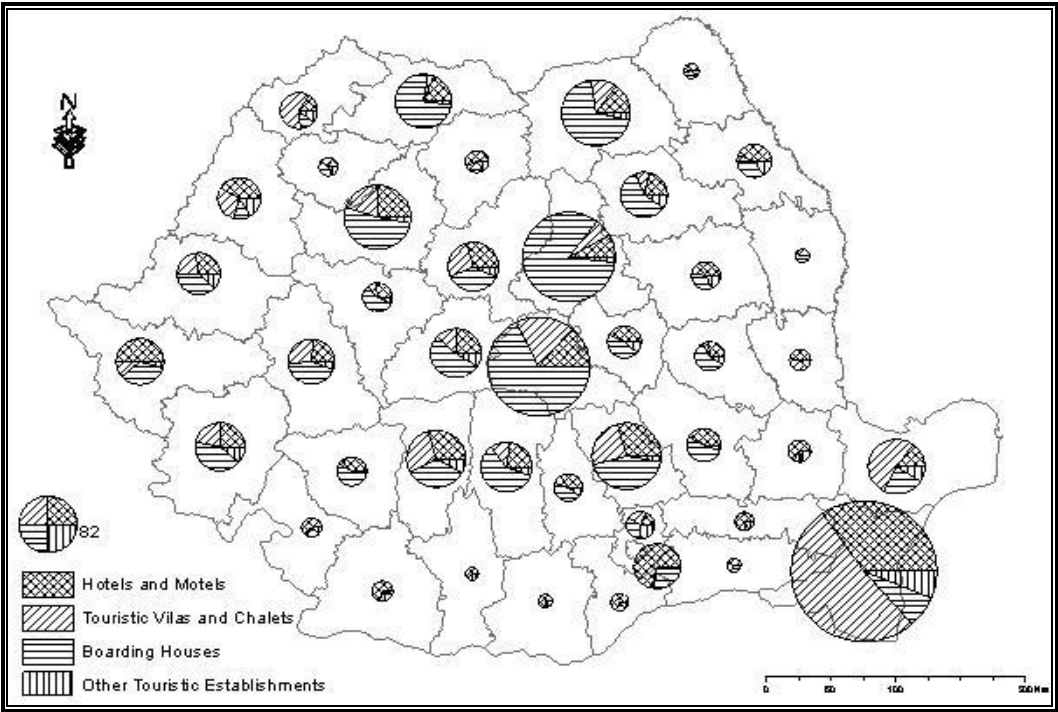


Figure 8. The structure of the accommodation (2008)
Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

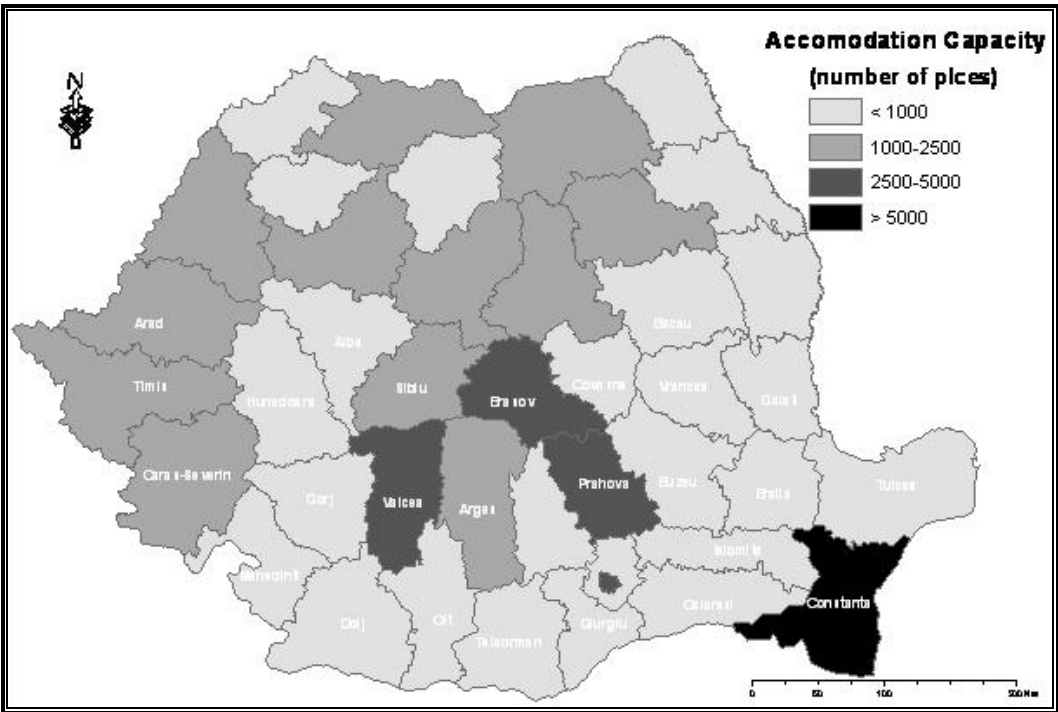


Figure 9. The distribution of the accommodation (2008)
Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

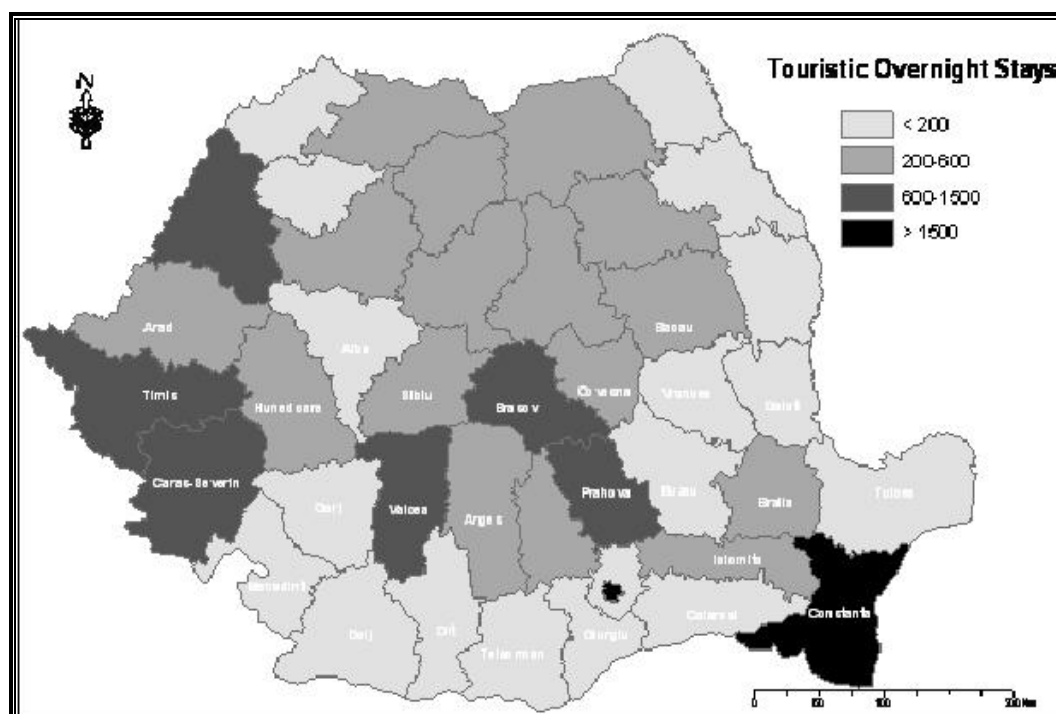


Figure 10. The Distribution of the overnight stays (2008)

Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

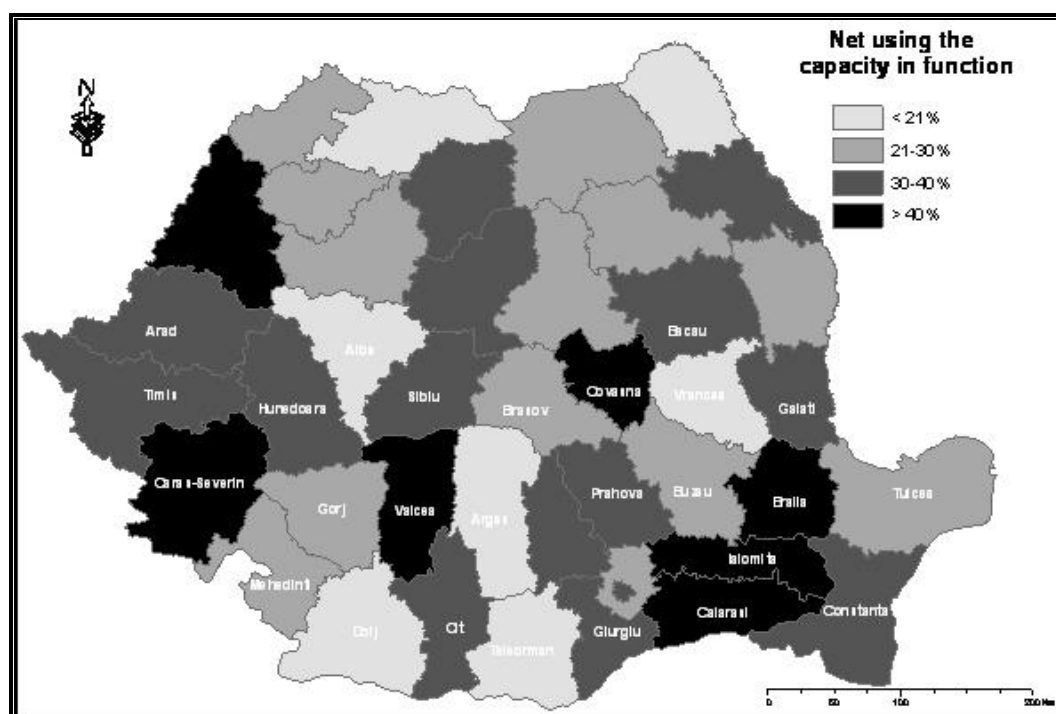


Figure 11. The coefficient of utulization (2008)

Data source: The National Institute of Statistics

The highest values regarding the touristic over nights stays are in Constanta County and in the capital, with over 1.500 touristic nights each. The value of 4.116 touristic nights for Constanta county is explained by the agglomeration of the Romanian seaside of the Black Sea during the summer season (from May until September), and the value of 1.541 touristic nights for the capital is due to the organising of conferences, seminars, congresses and other manifestations with a national character, but also with an international character, in which the capital takes part, especially since it has become a NATO and EU member (2004 and respectively 2007). Values between 600 and 1500 touristic nights are registered for three counties (Prahova – 966, Caraş Severin – 798 and Timișoara - 608), most part of the counties registering values between 200-600 touristic nights. The lowest values, under 50 touristic nights, are registered in the counties Vaslui (49) and Teleorman (31), both being dominated by an extremely reduced touristic flow, specific especially for the transit tourism (figure no.10).

The coefficient of using the capacity of accommodation represents a synthetic and correlation indicator which is influenced by several variables, the most important of which is represented by the touristic seasonable character, this being one of the biggest enemies of the touristic activity. Consequently, the most important weights (over 40%) are in the counties Covasna (57%), Ialomița and Bihor (47% each), Vâlcea (46%), Caraş-Severin (44%), Brăila (43%), Călărași (42%) and Iași (40%). A number of 6 counties have the lowest values, under 21%. Among these there are: Botoșani, Dolj and Argeș (20%), Maramureș (18%), Teleorman and Vrancea (14% each) (figure no.11).

3. Conclusions

The analysis of the territorial disparities in the distribution of the touristic services emphasized the causes which determine the significant differences, where the territorial resources present comparable values of the attractiveness indicator.

The quality of the transport and communication infrastructure contributes to the different development of the touristic areas, representing, in several situations, the essential condition for starting an investment project in the tourism field.

As a result of the studies, a significant progress of the quality of the services was noticed. The progress was noticed together with the development of the transport infrastructure, which immediately determined an increase of the tourists flows, and also of their expectations regarding the touristic services. This aspect was analysed in the Apuseni mountains, where once the transport infrastructure was modernised, the first accommodation units, with a comfort degree of three and four stars, appeared.

Important differences in the distribution of the quality of the touristic services are determined by a series of local initiatives, of capitalizing some of the natural resources. These initiatives represent starting points in the development of the tourism and implicitly of the quality of the touristic services.

If the implementation of the quality standards does not contribute to differentiations in the distribution of the touristic services, these being imposed by very clear judicial and methodological mechanisms, the maintaining of the standards presents important differences from one region to another, depending on the way of the institutional organization of the control system of the quality standards in this field.

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