

SOME ACTUAL ASPECTS ABOUT THE TOURISM ACCOMMODATION IN HARGHITA COUNTY

George-Bogdan TOFAN*

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Faculty of Geography, Cluj-Napoca, 5-7 Clinicilor Street,
40006, Romania, e-mail: bogdan_tofan2000@yahoo.com

Adrian NIȚĂ

“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Faculty of Geography, Gheorgheni Branch,
Romania, e-mail: nitaadrian@hotmail.com

Abstract: The aim of the study is to synthetically present the tendencies of one of the most important elements of the tourism, the accommodation, within Harghita County. Analyzed for more than two decades, quantitatively it presents an evolution with different positive and negative rates. By categories, the tourist villas dominate at the beginning of the '90s, especially in the tourist resorts of the county (Borsec, Lacu Roşu, Izvoru Mureşului, Harghita-Băi, Băile Tuşnad, Băile Homorod). Later the situation changed for newer categories, existing and functioning on private initiatives (tourist pensions, agritourist pensions, bungalows), plus for some of the classic categories, the tourist chalet, adapted for the mountain tourism, the hotel, present especially in urban settlements and several resorts (Miercurea-Ciuc, Gheorgheni, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Topliţa, Băile Tuşnad, Harghita-Băi, Borsec), the motel and the tourist stop, specific to the automobile travel.

Key words: accommodation, comfort degree, villas, tourist pensions, Harghita

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

Aspects about the evolution of the accommodation in Harghita County were presented before in several studies approaching the geographic domain at national level (Geografia României, Geografia Umană şi Economică, 1984), at county level (the Romanian Academy series about the Romanian Counties, Judeţul Harghita, Pişotă, Iancu, Bugă, 1976; Judeţul Harghita, Cocean et al., 2013) or in some doctoral theses regarding the mountain depressions (Şeer, 2004, Mara, 2008, Tofan, 2013).

Also, the mountain area was often presented in tourism geography papers. Important information about the accommodation was given in Turismul din Carpaţii Orientali. Studiu de Geografie Umană, Ciangă, 1998.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the evolution of the accommodation in Harghita County, there was used data from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics

* Corresponding author

(<https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>) and the public information from the Ministry of Economy, Department for Small and Medium Business Environment and Tourism (<http://www.minind.ro/>).

By processing data, there were made extrapolation and interpretation that allowed the development of the cartographic method, helpful both in easily studying the theme and lecturing the paper.

The first source offers data regarding the number of accommodation units and the number of accommodation places, by accommodation categories, at county level (2nd degree administrative-territorial units) and at commune/town/municipality level (3rd degree, rural and urban administrative-territorial units).

The second source allows access to more detailed data, regarding the type, name, exact location, comfort degree, dimension, juridical statute, the registration number and the release and end data of the classification certificate of the accommodation unit.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ACCOMODATION AFTER 1990

The accommodation capacity oscillated in the last two decades, the data showing, when comparing the extreme years (1990 – 2013), important differences, both as number of places and as repartition on accommodation categories.

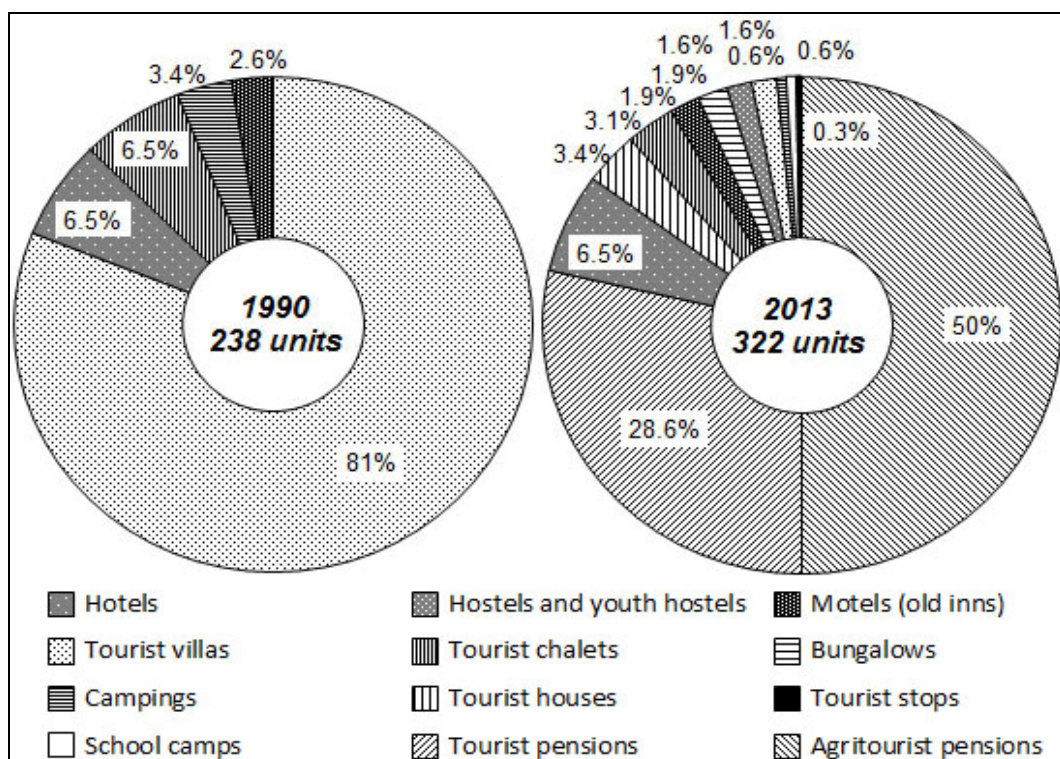


Figure 1. The total number and the weight of accommodation units categories in Harghita County, in 1990 and 2013

In 1990 the accommodation in Harghita County was varied and had important dimensions, summing 238 accommodation units (Figure 1) with a total of 10904 places (31.2% of the units in Center Region, and 24.6% of its total number of places).

The cause stood in the continuous degradation, corroborated with the lack of investment, which determined an ever lowering demand from the tourists. Their solicitations oriented towards another category, the hotel, offering superior comfort conditions, aspect reflected by the ascendant trend of the places in this type of accommodation (Ciangă, 2006).

In the following years, though with fluctuant evolution, the number of the accommodation units and places continued to decrease; in 2001 there was registered the lowest number of accommodation units (146) and by 2004, of the accommodation places (5 964). The process was caused by the lack of intervention to rehabilitate and reorganize the accommodation units, as well as of a strategy to attract the tourists in the resorts of the county. Most of the drastic decrease is consequence of the complete removal from the tourist circuit of the villas (2004).

After 2004 we witnessed an intense increasing of the number of accommodation units, reaching the highest value in 2008, consequence of capital infusion in tourism activity through the EU financing programs, especially in rural areas. Still, considering the newer units, especially tourist pensions with higher degrees of comfort than the old villas, oriented towards the personalized tourism, the number of places never reached again the values in the '90s (Niță et al., 2013).

Although in the last years we have noticed the intense increasing of the number of accommodation units and places in Harghita County (322 units with 8 015 places), in 2013 their weight in the total of Center Region was lower than the values in 1990, indicating less intensive dynamics (19.6% in the total of accommodation units and 14% in the total of accommodation places).

Considering the total number of accommodation units, in 1990 the most important settlement was Borsec resort (Mara, 2005, Mara et al., 2010). It had 73 accommodation units (30.6% of the ones in Harghita County), including 2857 places (26% of the ones in the county).

Almost all of the accommodation units were tourist villas; nowadays, many of them are not functional and only a small part was turned into tourist pensions. In consequence, on the background of the intense ascension of the tourist pensions, favored by the EU financing programs oriented especially towards the rural parts, these days the highest number of accommodation units is found in a newer resort, Praid (57 units, namely 17.7% of those in the county).

Still, yet since before 1990, Băile Tușnad Town maintained as the most complex tourism facility in Harghita County: 66 accommodation units (27.7% of the ones in the county) covering 2857 places (26.2% of the ones in the county) in 1990 and 23 units (7.1% of the ones the county) with 1 182 places (14.7% of the ones in the county) in 2013.

According to 2013 data, on accommodation categories, the situation is as follows: the agritourist pension category represents 50% in the total of the accommodation units and 31.5% in the total of accommodation places; the tourist pension category, 28.5% and 25.4%; the hotel category, 6.5% and 22%; the tourist house category, 3.5% and 5.4%; the tourist villa category, 1.5% and 3.7%; the motel category, 1.8% and 3%; the tourist chalet category, 3.1% and 2.6%; the tourist hostel category, 1.5% and 2.6%; the school camps category, 0.7% and 2%; the camping category, 0.7% and 0.8%; the bungalow category, 1.8% and 0.6%; the tourist stop category, 0.4% in both, accommodation units and accommodation places.

THE FEATURES OF THE MAIN ACCOMODATION CATEGORIES IN HARGHITA COUNTY

The accommodation in Harghita County is consists of varied categories, which can be grouped in main accommodation categories (tourist villas, hotels, motels, tourist chalets

and tourist and agritourist pensions) and complementary accommodation categories (bungalows, tourist stops, tourist houses, campings), with different comfort degrees.

The hotels are accommodation units planned in buildings or building wings, which are putting at tourists' disposal rooms, studios and apartments, equipped properly, and provide specific services, also having inside a reception hall and eating spaces.

In Harghita County one can find an increasing of the number of hotels (from 15 in 1990, to 21 in 2013), but, as accommodation places in hotels, it registered an almost continuous decreasing (1910 in 1990 and 1765 in 2013). It is to be mentioned that in 2005 and 2006 in Miercurea-Ciuc also functioned a youth hotel, sheltering more than 300 places, which made that in 2006 the number of hotel places in Harghita County to increase to 2120.

Nowadays the most of them are 3 stars hotels and, as size, many of them are middle sized (50 – 200 places; according to the classification of N. Ciangă, 2006).

As territorial extension, they are concentrated either in municipalities, like Miercurea-Ciuc (Salvator, 55 rooms and 128 places; Fenyo, 65 rooms and 110 places; Merkur, 30 rooms and 60 places; Flamingo, 26 rooms and 52 places; Park, 20 rooms and 39 places; Prince Hotel, 19 rooms and 34 places), Gheorgheni (Mureș, 70 rooms and 140 places; Rubin, 32 rooms and 79 places; Filo, 21 rooms and 49 places; Astoria, 21 rooms and 37 places; Szilagyi, 10 rooms and 19 places), Odorheiu Secuiesc (Târnava-Kükülő, 73 rooms and 136 places; Septimia Resort Hotel Wellness and Spa, 25 rooms and 62 places; Gondzo, 22 rooms and 44 places; Europa, 8 rooms and 16 places) or Toplița (Mureș, 22 rooms and 46 places), either in tourist resorts, like Băile Tușnad (Ciucaș, 119 rooms and 238 places; O3zone, 117 rooms and 234 places; Tușnad, 108 rooms and 214 places; Anna, 28 rooms and 56 places; Fortuna, 12 rooms and 26 places), Lacu Roșu, component of Gheorgheni Municipality (Iasicon, 42 rooms and 84 places; Turist, 44 rooms and 80 places; Lacu Roșu, 36 rooms and 64 places), Harghita-Băi, component of Miercurea-Ciuc Municipality (Ozon, 31 rooms and 57 places), Izvoru Mureșului, component of Voșlăbeni Commune (Bradul Argintiu, 30 rooms and 64 places) or Praid (Praid, 22 rooms and 48 places).

The hostels, predecessors of youth hotels, are accommodation units with capacity of minimum 3 rooms, studios or apartments, arranged usually in buildings with other destination than tourism, on upper floors, offering a number of minimal services.

This type of units targets the low budget tourists, generally young people; the accommodation is in commune bedrooms, with several simple beds or bunk beds and the payment is per bed. In Harghita County they were firstly initiated in 2005, nowadays covering over 50 places, framed in two stars comfort category. They are located both in municipalities like Miercurea-Ciuc (Casa Lasarus, Fodor) or Odorheiu Secuiesc (Septimia, Tranzit) and rural settlements like Ciucsângeorgiu (Școala Pădurii) or Praid (Ani).

The villas (the rest or treatment houses) are accommodation units with a relatively low capacity (up to a few tens places), with low comfort degree, functioning in independent buildings with a specific architecture, placed in tourist resorts or in other settlements with tourism importance, providing accommodation and specific services like treatment, recreation and leisure.

Between 1990 and 2013 the number of tourist villas in Harghita County reduced from 188 to 5, and their number of places, from 5 895 to 292; the main cause of the drastic diminution (by 97.3%, respectively, by 95%) was the lack of investment in this accommodation category, leading to continuous degradation of the existing villas (Tofan, 2012, Tofan, 2013b, Tofan, 2013c).

Until 2001 the tourist villa was the main component of the accommodation in tourist resorts as Borsec, Băile Tușnad, Izvoru Mureșului, Lacu Roșu and Toplița. The most of them entered in the property of foreign owners whom have not executed maintenance, leaving them derelict, on the background of the total withdrawal of the state

from the holdings of the tourist resorts, which finally led to diminishing this accommodation category close to extinction (Tofan, 2013a).

It can be also mentioned some of the functional villas, modernized and reintroduced in activity, in tourist resorts as Borsec (Villa 7 Springs, Villa Bella, Villa Sport) and Lacu Roșu (Villa Bradul, Villa Rustic).

The motels, accommodation units placed usually on main roads, outside the settlements hearths, equipped and arranged for accommodation and catering, as well as for safety parking the automobiles. In Harghita County they are placed along the main national roads near urban centers like Miercurea-Ciuc (Csillag, 48 places), Gheorgheni (Imola, 44 places) and Băile Homorod, component of Vlăhița Town (Homorod, 36 places) or in rural settlements, as in Lupeni Commune (Nyiko, 56 places). The one in Lupeni is classified as a one star comfort motel, and the other ones, as two stars.

The tourist chalets are accommodation units with a relatively reduced capacity, functioning in independent buildings with specific architecture, providing accommodation and other specific services, necessary for the tourists in hiking or resting in mountain areas, in nature reserves, in vicinity of balneary resorts or other tourist landmarks. Lately, the tourist chalets became important landmarks in the mountains of the county, increasingly required destinations (Căliman, Gurghiu, Harghita, Giurgeu, Bistricioarei and Hășmaș Mountains). In 1990 this type of accommodation was provided by 15 units with 546 places, reduced until 2010 to 10 units and 210 places, included in two and three stars comfort category. As number of places, the most important tourist chalets are Csiki (49 places) from Miercurea-Ciuc, Miorița (47 places) from Lacu Roșu, Harghita (39 places) and Uz Bence (36 places) from Harghita-Băi and Honor Villa (30 places) from Izvoare Village, Zetea Commune.

Among them, a unique category is represented by the forestry hunting chalets, built and arranged by the forestry districts, providing services to a limited category of people, involved in hunting tourism (Hurdugaș, Iris Galben, Bistricioara, Tisaș, Lacu Roșu, Cheile Bicazului-Hășmaș National Park Chalet, Mădăraș, Brădești and Șuta).

The bungalows are accommodation units with small capacity and seasonal activity, made of wood or similar material, especially in areas with high humidity.

Shown in recent statistical data of the county, with small accommodation capacity (little more than 20 places) and rather high comfort (up to three stars), they can be found in Odorheiu Secuiesc (Horizont, 24 places) and Zetea (Vidra, 24 places).

The campings are seasonal accommodation units consisting in a complex of light buildings (small houses with two beds), dispersed in a delimited area, with surfaces for installing tents, plus the receiving and guiding tourists service and the catering units (Ciangă, 2006). One can see the same drastic decrease of the number of units (from 8 to 2, between 1990 and 2013) and an accommodation capacity reduction by 93.5%, because of the lack of interest from tourist, since the campings only have minimal facilities. Some of them are functioning near other accommodation units. They lie in tourist resorts as Borsec (Eti, 120 places; Irimescu, 26 places), Izvoru Mureșului (Bradul Argintiu, 48 places), in vicinity of cities (Perla Vlăhiței, near Vlăhița Town, 36 places) or along important roads (Nyiko, 20 places, in Lupeni Village, along National Road 13A).

We also mention the accommodation units framed by **the tourist houses** type, identified with a group of independent tourist small houses, with commune reception and administration. They are registered in the data since 2000, by 2013 covering 439 accommodation places, distributed in 11 units.

The tourist stops are, like the campings and the motels, accommodation units developed as consequence of the expansion of the automotive tourism (Ciangă, 2006). They have small accommodation capacity, made of small houses and/or bungalows; they also offer food services and safe auto parking.

In Harghita County this accommodation units have capacities from a few tens to a little over 100 places and they are positioned near mountain peak passes: Creanga Pass (Vanda, 12 places), Vlăhița Pass (Matyi, 36 places), Pângărați Pass (Turist, 108 places and Bradu, 100 places, both situated in Lacu Roșu tourist resort).

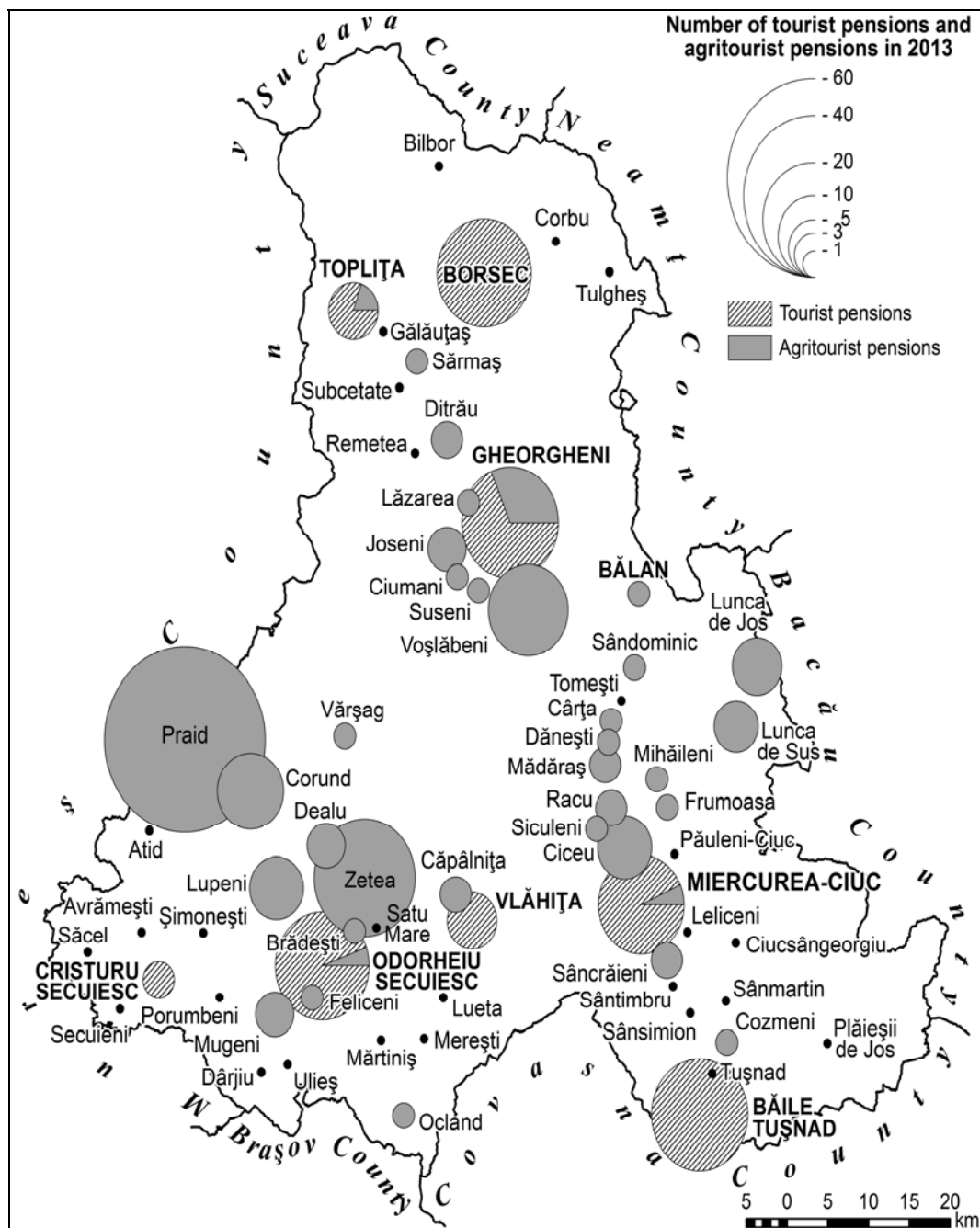


Figure 4. The number and repartition of tourist and agritourist pensions in Harghita County, in 2013

The school camps registered the same decreasing trend. Their capacity diminished by 86.2%, those not corresponding functionally anymore being put out of service. Today there are accessible the school camps in Sub Cetate Village (Zetea Commune) and in Băile Homorod.

The tourist pensions are accommodation units with capacity up to 60 places in 20 rooms, functioning in the people's houses or in independent buildings, offering accommodation and conditions to prepare and serve food. In Harghita County they are recorded in data since 2000, when there were registered 7 tourist pensions with a total of 83 places.

In 2013 their number reached 92, representing 28.5% in the total of the accommodation units, and offering 2 033 accommodation places, namely, 25.3% in the total of the ones in Harghita County.

The most of them are classified as 2 or 3 stars comfort units and they are concentrated especially in the traditional tourist resorts (Borsec, Băile Tușnad and Lacu Roșu).

Accommodation offers also **the agritourist pensions**, units with capacity up to 8 rooms, functioning in people's houses or in independent buildings, with spaces compartmentalized for accommodation and preparing and serving meals, as well as the possibility to participate to household activities and crafts, in order to practice the rural tourism.

The data records the intense extension of this category, from 39 units (22.8% in the total of Harghita County) and 275 places (3.7%) in 2000, to 161 units (50%) and 2 523 places (31.4%) in 2013. They developed in important tourist resorts in rural administrative-territorial units (Praid and Izvoru Mureșului – in Voșlăbeni Commune) or in villages with important tourism resources, like those in communes Zetea, Corund and Lupeni.

CONCLUSIONS

The successive analysis of the main accommodation types in Harghita County leads to outlining several conclusions of maximum generalization:

- Compared to 1990, in 2013 one can find a doubling of the number of accommodation types (from 6 to 12); we also emphasize the ascension of a small size accommodation type, the tourist pension, dispersed on large spaces in both rural and urban areas;

- We are witnessing the decrease of the number of accommodation places (from 10 904 in 1990 to 8 015 in 2013), on the background of the increasing of the number of accommodation units (from 238 in 1990 to 322 in 2013). Many of the places lost were in the villas and in tourist campings which did not get up anymore to nowadays requirements of the tourists. In consequence, it is an evolution towards increased comfort units, either with a higher number of places (especially hotels), either with a lower number of places but easily adaptable, customizable to tourists demands (especially tourist pensions);

- If in 1990 the most of the accommodation activity (84% of the units and 89% of the accommodation places) developed in urban areas like Borsec, Băile Tușnad, Gheorgheni (with Lacu Roșu resort) or Toplița, until 2013 the rural areas partially recovered: 54.3% in the total of accommodation units and 37.9% in the total of accommodation places are situated in rural space, especially in settlements from the communes Praid, Voșlăbeni (most of them in Izvoru Mureșului resort), Zetea (most of them in Izvoare Village), Corund, Joseni (most of them in Borzont Village), Lupeni, Ciceu, Frumoasa, Lunca de Jos etc.

REFERENCES

- Ciangă, N., (1998), *Turismul din Carpații Orientali. Studiu de Geografie Umană*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Ciangă, N., (1977), *Câteva probleme asupra structurii și capacităților de primire ale stațiilor balneoclimaterice din zona centrală a Carpaților Orientali*, Studia UBB, Geol.-Geogr., Cluj-Napoca.
- Ciangă, N., (2006), *România. Geografia Turismului*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Cocean, P., Niță, A., Dombay, Șt., (2013), *Județul Harghita*, Editura Academiei Române, București.
- Cocean, P., Niță, A., Dombay, Șt., (2004), *Județul Harghita*, Editura Academiei Române, București.
- Mara, V., (2005), *Fluxul turistic din stațiunea balneoclimaterică Borsec*, în vol. „Repere ale afacerilor în comerț, turism și servicii”, Centrul de Dezvoltare a Afacerilor în Turism, Comerț și Servicii, Editura „Dimitrie Cantemir” Târgu-Mureș, Târgu-Mureș.
- Mara, V., Mara, Daniela, Simona, Niță, A., (2010), *The anthropic tourism potential in Giurgeu-Ciuc Regional Sistem, The Role of Tourism in Territorial Development*”, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Mara, V., (2014), *Giurgeu și Ciuc. Studiu de Geografie Regională*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Niță, A., Dombay, Șt., Sáska-Magyari, Zs., (2013), *Aspects of the influence of economic crisis in the accommodation activity in Băile Tușnad resort*, Lucrările Seminarului Geografic „Dimitrie Cantemir”, nr. 2, Iași.
- Șeer, I., M., (2004), *Așezările și organizarea spațiului geografic în Depresiunea Giurgeului*, Teză de doctorat, Univ. Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca.
- Pișotă, I., Iancu, Silvia, Bugă, D., (1976), *Județul Harghita*, Editura Academiei R.S.România, București.
- Tofan, G., B., (2012), *Tourism Restoration and Remodelling of Borsec Resort*, Romanian Review of Regional Studies, vol. 8, no.1, pp. 87-92, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Tofan, G., B., (2013 a), *Current tendencies regarding the touristic infrastructure of Drăgoiasa-Tulgheș Depression Alignment*, Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Geografie, year XXIII, no 1, pp. 35-44, Oradea University Press, Oradea.
- Tofan, G., B., (2013 b), *Componenta nordică a ulucului depresionar din Grupa Centrală a Carpaților Orientali (Drăgoiasa-Glodu-Bilbor-Secu-Borsec-Corbu-Tulgheș)*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Tofan, G., B., (2013 c), *Specific Features of the Tourist Flow in Borsec Resort*, Analele Universității București, Seria Geografie, Year LXII, pp. 155-162, Bucharest University Press, Bucharest.
- * * * (1984), *Geografia României II, Geografia Umană și Economică*, Editura Academiei R. S. România, București.
- <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>, consulted on 04 March, 2014.
- <http://www.minind.ro/>, consulted on 04 March, 2014.
- <http://www.harghita.insse.ro/main.php>, consulted on 04 March, 2014.

Submitted:
16.04.2014

Revised:
09.09.2014

Accepted and published online
12.09.2014