

AGRO-TOURISM IN SOUTH-WEST OLTENIA IN THE POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD. ARE THERE TRENDS RETURNING?

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic had a particularly strong global impact on tourist traffic, and implicitly on the tourism industry, in the March-May 2020 period, reducing them practically to zero. After the relaxation of restrictions, tourist traffic begins to recover, registering particularities from one region to another. In the South-West Oltenia development region, the post-pandemic period is characterized by the relaunch of domestic tourism, followed after some lag by the gradual increase in the flow of foreign citizens, with disparities and similarities at the county and local level, the return of rural tourism being significant in some communities, by exceeding the level recorded before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Key words: *agro-tourist guest house, tourist arrivals, overnight stays accommodation capacity in operation, regional development*

JEL Classification: *C10, L83, O10, R58*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, tourism begins to play an important role in the development of local communities (Scutariu & Hapenciuc, 2008). Under the conditions of regional and local sustainable development, its role is amplified, becoming a significant vector of increasing living standards (Absalyamov et.al. 2019; Calero & Turner, 2020), as well as reducing the gaps between them.

In Romania, the diversity of landforms, local and regional cultural characteristics, as well as the approach and promotion of tourism at the local and regional level (Balen, 2016) led and lead to differences in terms of the intensity of tourist traffic, both between , as well as within the eight development regions (Arionesei et.al., 2016; Ceausescu, 2020). In 2019, the year before the outbreak of the pandemic, except for the Bucharest-Ilfov development region, in terms of the intensity of tourist traffic, the Center and North-East regions were on the first places, while the South-West Oltenia region was on the last place, with a number of arrivals more than 3.5 times lower than in the first two regions.

The increase in the degree of urbanization, with the inevitable daily stress generated by the growth of urban agglomerations, as well as their specific pollution levels, have led in recent decades to an increase in the demand for accommodation structures in as natural environments as possible (Slusariuc & Simina, 2018), with impact significantly on local and

regional development (Sima, 2020), of which the most sought-after are agro-tourism guesthouses.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic had a particularly strong impact on tourist traffic (Mihai & Toma, 2020; Vinerean et.al. 2021), in the second quarter of 2020 it was practically zero. After the relaxation of the imposed restrictions, starting from the third quarter of 2020, there is a revival of domestic tourism, as a substitute for foreign tourism (Gunnella, 2021). Gradually, throughout 2021, the flow of foreign tourists is also reviving. Overall, a characteristic of post-pandemic tourism is the orientation towards local communities (Popsa, 2022), so that, in the year 2022, it tends to and even exceeds in some communities the levels recorded before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Taking into account these aspects, the main objective of the paper was to find the answer to the question: During the post-pandemic period, did tourism in the agro-tourism guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia region return to at least the level of 2019? This concerned aspects regarding the accommodation capacity in operation, tourist traffic and the utilization index of the accommodation capacity.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the main objective of the research carried out, generically, the null hypothesis (H0) was: at the level of agro-tourism guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia development region, tourism has returned at least to the level before the outbreak of

the Covid-19 pandemic.

To test this hypothesis, under the three aspects highlighted above, the period January 2019 - November 2022 was chosen, the 12 months of 2019 constituting the reference levels.

The main data source was the statistical database of the National Institute of Statistics in Romania (NIS, 2022), respectively the data series on the monthly tourist accommodation capacity in operation (ACO, 2022), arrivals (TAV, 2022) and overnight stays (ONS, 2022) to domestic and foreign tourists in tourist reception structures, as well as the monthly index of use of the accommodation capacity in operation (CUI, 2022), at the level of agro-tourism guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia region (Table 1).

Table1. Identifiers, meanings and sources of data series, concerning agro-tourism guesthouses

Identify.	Variables	UM	Source
ACO_SWO	Acmd.cap. in operation, SWO	places days	ACO, 2022
ACO_C*	Acmd.cap. in operation, C*		
RTO_SWO	Romanian tourist arrivals, SWO	people	TAV, 2022
RTA_C*	Romanian tourist arrivals, C*		
FTA_SWO	Foreign tourist arrivals, SWO		
FTA_C*	Foreign tourist arrivals, C*		
ROS_SWO	Romanian overnight stays, SWO	days	ONS, 2022
ROS_C*	Romanian overnight stays, C*		
FOS_SWO	Foreign overnight stays, SWO		
FOS_C*	Foreign overnight stays, C*		
CUI_SWO	Capacity utilization index	%	CUI
C*- County: DJ, GJ, MH, OT, VL			

For compatibility and comparability of the characteristics of tourism in agro-tourist guesthouses, in the post-pandemic period, compared to 2019, indices corresponding to each of the variables used were determined as follows: let $X[x_{k,i}]_{i=1,35}$ the vector of the variable K , between January 2019 and November 2022, then the vector of the monthly indices for the period January 2020 – November 2022 is:

$$y_{k,i-12} = \frac{x_{k,i}}{x_{k,j2019}}, i = \overline{13,35},$$

$$j_{2019} = \begin{cases} i \text{ mod } 12, & i \text{ mod } 12 \neq 0 \\ 12, & i \text{ mod } 12 = 0 \end{cases} \quad [1]$$

The normalized data series of the evolution of tourism characteristics were also used:

$$z_{k,i} = \frac{x_{k,i} - \bar{x}_k}{\sigma}, \quad \bar{x}_k = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^n x_{k,j}}{n}$$

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{j=1}^n (x_{k,j} - \bar{x}_k)^2}{n}} \quad [2]$$

The additive method and the Henderson Trend Filter (X-12) were used to determine and analyze the seasonality, random components, as well as the trends of evolution of the analyzed variables. The main software tool used was EViews.

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, at the beginning of 2020, had a particularly large impact on the tourism industry, and not only, causing discontinuities, both of internal and external tourist flows, as well as of the tourist supply.

III.1. A preliminary overview

At the end of 2019, the South-West Oltenia development region offered tourists 8.49% of the total accommodation capacity in operation in Romania. By comfort category, in relation to the national level, it offered 8.79% of the accommodation capacity in operation, in hotels, 9.18% in guesthouses and 6.28% in agro-tourism guesthouses.

From the point of view of tourist traffic, in December 2019, of the 834,641 tourists who arrived in accommodation structures in Romania, of which 685,959 (81.19%) were domestic and 148,655 (17.81%) foreigners, only 9.91% were in the South-West Oltenia region, of which 95.37% are domestic and 4.63% foreign, which highlights the fact that this region is not among the first preferences of foreign tourists..

III.2. The impact on the supply of accommodation places

At the level of the development region, of the 555,367 place-days of accommodation capacity in operation (ACO), 59.61% were in hotels, 13.81% in guesthouses, 10.48% in agro-tourism guesthouses (AGH) and 16.11% in other categories of tourist accommodation structures.

After a first month, January 2020, which did not predict anything special, the outbreak of the pandemic causes, especially through the measures taken to prevent it, a collapse of the supply of accommodation places in operation of AGH (Fig.1).

The analysis of the post-pandemic evolution of ACO highlights the fact that, between the three counties with significant weights in terms of accommodation capacity in operation (Gorj, Mehedinți and Vâlcea), there are differences both in terms of the amplitude of seasonality (Figure 1), component dominant in the case of Mehedinți county, as well as the trend of evolution (Figure 2).

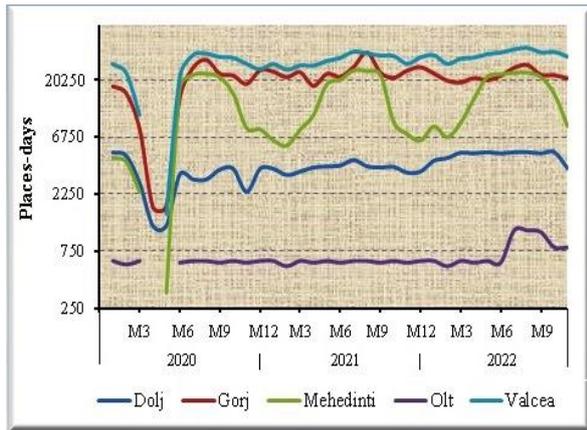


Figure 1 – The ACO evolutions of the AGH, in the SWO counties during the period January 2020-November 2022
Source: NIS's data series

Thus, after removing the seasonal component, the adjusted series (*_SA*) highlights the presence of disturbing factors of significantly greater amplitude in the case of Gorj and Mehedinți counties, compared to Vâlcea county, which gives it better predictability.

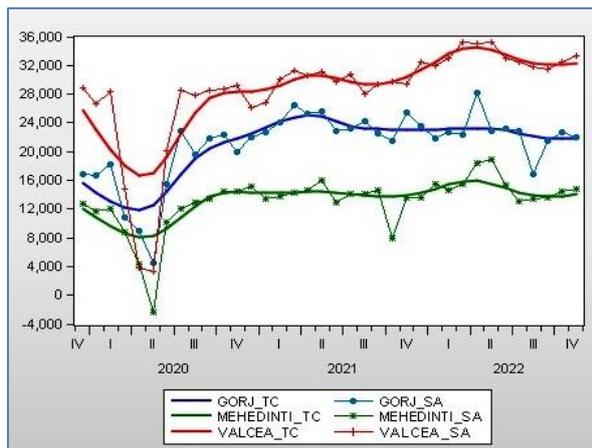


Figure 2 – Evolution of the trend (*_TC*) and adjusted (*_AC*) components of the ACO from AGH in Gorj, Mehedinți and Vâlcea counties, in the period 2020-2022

As for the trend components (*_TC*), there are also differences in this case, in the sense that in Vâlcea county the trend is positive, in Mehedinți county the trend is relatively stabilized, and in Gorj county, starting from mid-2021, we witness to a slightly downward trend.

The evolutions of the ACO have influenced, to some extent, the weights of the counties within the development region from this point of view (Figure 3)

Although from the point of view of ranking the counties through the prism of trend components (*_TC*), in the post-pandemic period, there were no changes, their effective ACO values were significantly influenced by seasonality, especially in Mehedinți

county. If in the winter months the weights of Mehedinți county decrease, and those of Vâlcea and Gorj counties increase, in the summer months the weights are reversed. Thus, if in January 2022 the shares of the three counties were 47% in Vâlcea, 38% in Gorj and 9% in Mehedinți, in August they were 40% in Vâlcea, 27% in Gorj and 24% in Mehedinți, reaching November 2022 to 49% in Vâlcea, 32% in Gorj and 18% in Mehedinți..

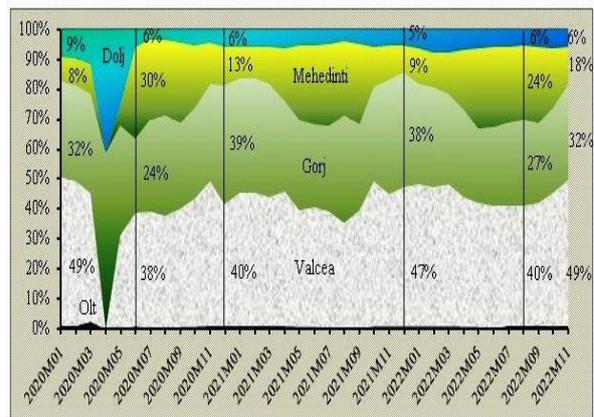


Figure 3 - County distribution of SWO ACOs in the period January 2020-November 2022
Source: authors' calculations

An interesting piece of information is also provided by the evolution of the monthly ACO weights from 2020-2022 in relation to the corresponding months of 2019 (Figure 4).

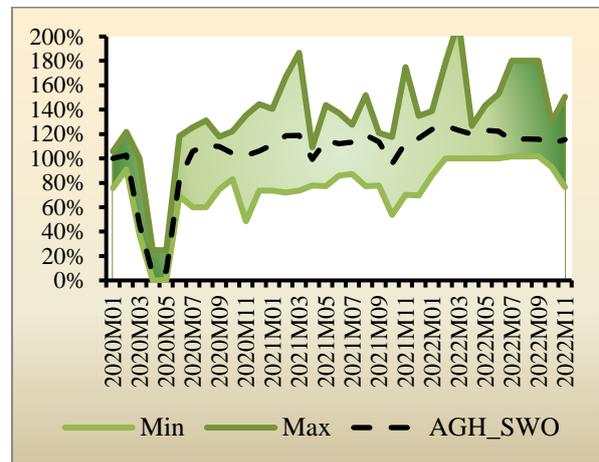


Figure 4 – The monthly weights of ACO from AGH, in SWO in the period January 2020-November 2022 in relation to the corresponding months of 2019
Source: authors' calculations

In comparison with the evolution of the accommodation capacity in operation of the agro-tourism guesthouses at the level of the South-West Oltenia region (ACO_SWO), which after a rather rapid recovery is maintained at a level similar to the

period before the outbreak of the pandemic, the amplitude of the differences between the maximum and minimum values of ACO also highlights disparities between counties.

Thus, while starting from June 2020, the minimum limit of the variation range is given in particular by ACO_DJ, which only in the second part of 2022 reaches values similar to those recorded in 2019, the maximum limit is given by ACO_MH and ACO_GJ, which register significant increases compared to the values recorded in the corresponding months of 2019

III.2. The impact on tourist traffic

From the point of view of tourist traffic, in August 2019, the arrivals of Romanian tourists (RTA) were channeled in a proportion of 53.42% to hotels, 13.76% to guesthouses, 14.64% to agro-tourism guesthouses and 18.19% to other tourist reception structures. Regarding foreign tourist arrivals (FTO), 77.47% opted for hotels, 7.83% for guesthouses and 8.12% for agro-tourism guesthouses.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic also had a particular impact on tourist traffic, in the months of April and May 2020, tourist flows were practically equal to zero.

Starting from June 2020, after the relaxation of restrictions, domestic tourist flows are relaunching, being also favored by the fact that important restrictions were maintained in most foreign destinations. This fact led to the recording of a peak of RTA_SWO in the months of June and August (Figure 5) with the highest values of the entire period, especially at the level of agro-tourist guesthouses in Mehedinți (RTA_MH) and Gorj (RTA_GJ) counties.

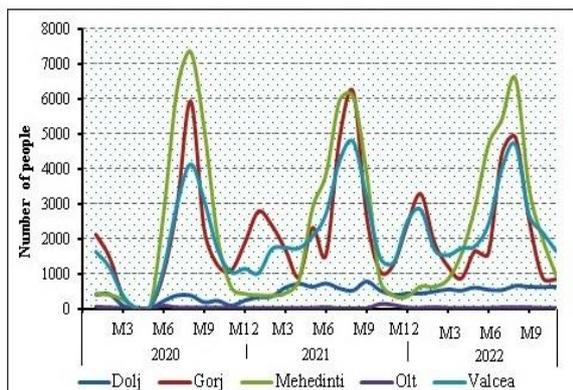


Figure 5 – The evolutions of RTA in AGH from the counties of the SWO in the period 2020-2022

Source: NIS's data series

The phenomenon of seasonality determines certain peculiarities at the county level regarding the monthly evolutions of domestic tourist arrivals throughout the analysis period (2020-2022). Thus, in Mehedinți County, the most intense activity of the

agro-tourism guesthouses is in the summer months, August being the peak month with 7333 tourists in 2020, 6063 tourists in 2021 and 6568 tourists in 2022. On the other hand, their number decreases significantly during October – April.

Another county with a large number of tourist arrivals in agritourism guesthouses is Gorj. At its level, the manifestation of seasonality is highlighted by two peak periods of tourist activity (Figure 6), in the winter and summer months. The maxima of the two seasons are recorded in the months of January and August respectively of each year. In January, the arrivals were 2113 tourists in 2020, 2773 tourists in 2021 and 3272 tourists in 2022, and in August there were 5925 tourists in 2020, 6196 in 2021, respectively 4894 tourists in 2022.

An evolution similar to that of the seasonality in Gorj county is also recorded in Vâlcea, with maximum values of arrivals in August and December, and with minimum values in April and November.

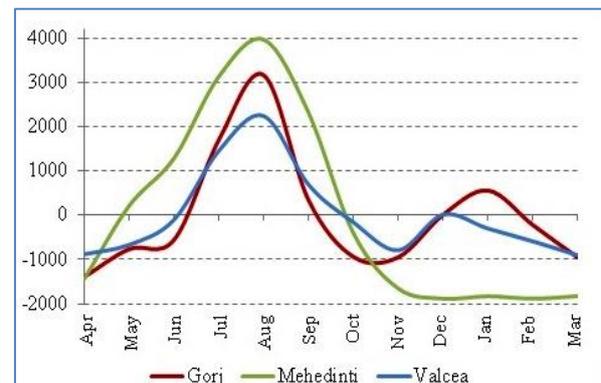


Figure 6 – Particularities of the seasonality of RTA_GJ, RTA_MH and RTA_VL

Source: authors' calculations using EViews

The counties of Dolj and Olt are characterized by the lowest values of tourist circulation in agro-tourist guesthouses, throughout each year, compared to the other three counties. While, for Dolj county, from a minimum of 398 tourists in January 2021, it reaches a maximum of 774 tourists in September 2022, in Olt county tourist circulation in agro-tourism guesthouses is almost non-existent, the maximum amplitude being only 128 arrivals. Consequently, in what follows, Olt county is no longer included in the analysis.

Regarding the unpredictable factors ($_IR$), random, which influenced the evolution of the circulation of domestic tourists in the agro-tourist guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia region, the largest amplitudes were recorded in the counties of Mehedinți (Mehedinți $_IR$) and Vâlcea (Vâlcea $_IR$). Compared to these, in Gorj county significant values of random factors (Gorj $_IR$) were recorded only in 2020 and the third quarter of 2022, in the rest of the

analyzed period very low values were recorded.

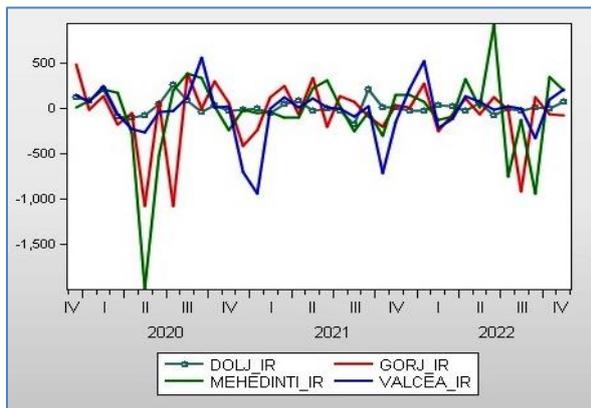


Figure 7 – The influences of unpredictable factors (*_IR*) on RTA_DJ, RTA_GJ, RTA_MH and RTA_VL, in the period 2020-2022Source: authors' calculations using EVivus

After filtering the seasonal and random components (*_IR*), the evolution of the trend components (*_TC*) of tourist arrivals in the agro-tourism guesthouses of the counties of the SWO region in the period 2020-2022 (figure 8) also highlights particularities.

Thus, Mehedinți county is characterized by an upward trend (Mehedinți_TC), with positive (September-October 2020 and April-May 2021) and negative (April-May 2020, September-October 2021 and July-August 2022) alternations around it, but which tend to flatten out.

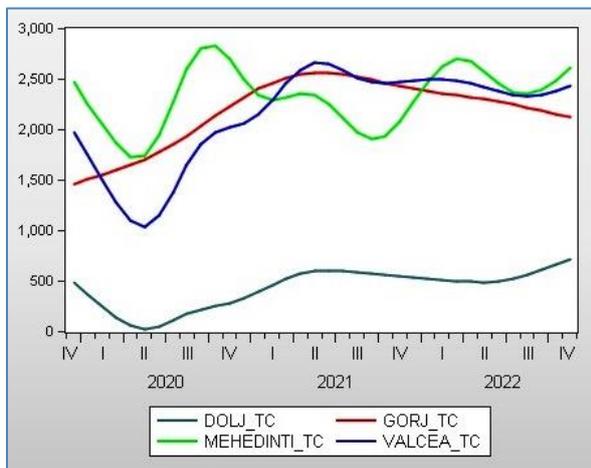


Figure 8 – Evolution of the trend components (*_TC*) of RTA_DJ, RTA_GJ, RTA_MH and RTA_VL, in the period 2020-2022 Source: authors' calculations using EViews

In Vâlcea County, the trend (Vâlcea_TC) is characterized by a significant increase from the third quarter of 2020 until the second quarter of 2021, followed by an approximately stable evolution until the end of the analyzed period.

The evolution of the trend of arrivals in Gorj County (Gorj_TC), although in the first part of the analyzed period it is similar to that recorded in Vâlcea County, starting from the third quarter of 2021 it enters a slightly downward slope, from approximately 2500 tourists in June 2021, to approximately 2200 tourists in December 2022.

With a rather large value difference in arrivals compared to the other counties, at the level of Dolj county, the trend component (Dolj_TC) registers a very slight increase, reaching approximately 500 tourists at the end of the analyzed period.

Peculiarities of the tourist circulation in the agro-tourism guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia region are also highlighted by comparative analysis of the index of monthly arrivals, from June 2020 to November 2022, compared to the same months of 2019 (figure 9).

Oscillations with the highest amplitude of the monthly indices are registered in Gorj county, which means that here the effects of the pandemic were felt the most, compared to the other counties. Here, highs of 157% were recorded in August 2020, 202.82% in May 2021, 191.9% in July 2021 and 199.37% in July 2022, as well as lows of 89.52% in June 2021, 91.97% in June 2022 and 67.07% in August 2022.

In Mehedinți county, compared to 2019, there were lows of 59.69% and 32.05%, in April and October 2021, as well as highs of 115.57%, in July 2021, and 200.97% and 134.47%, in February and November 2022.

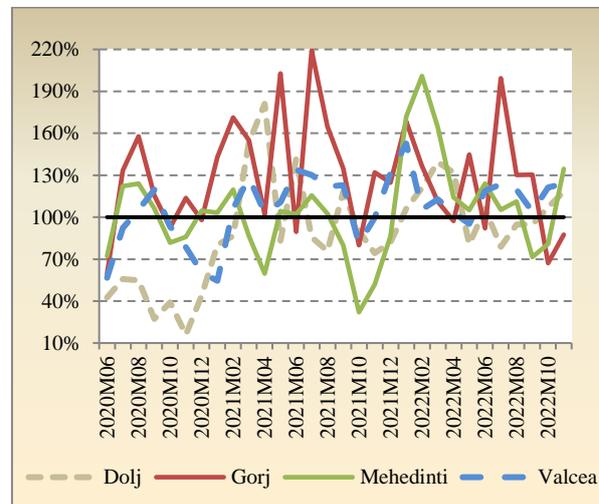


Figure 9 – The relative evolutions of RTA_DJ, RTA_GJ, RTA_MH and RTA_VL, in relation to the corresponding months of 2019 Source: authors' calculations

In Dolj County, throughout 2020, the arrivals of domestic tourists were much lower compared to those recorded in the months of 2019, with indices oscillating between 16.01% and 60.45%, values recorded in November and December. From March 2021, in this county, the arrivals of domestic tourists begin to exceed those of the months of 2019, the most

significant value of 181.01% being recorded in April 2021, followed, until the end of the analyzed period, by slight oscillations around the values monthly registered in 2019.

Unlike the other three counties analyzed above, in Vâlcea county, the monthly indices of tourist traffic, compared to 2019, were of much lower amplitudes, falling between a minimum of 60.45%, in December 2020, and a maximum of 152.67%, in January 2022.

The flows of foreign tourists (FTA) in the South-West Oltenia development region, at the AGH level, differ significantly from those of domestic tourists (RTA), in the sense that in the analyzed post-pandemic period, their intensity was much lower than in 2019.

In 2019, the year before the Covid-19 pandemic, in August, the largest number of FTA_SWO was registered, namely 459 people, representing 2.61% of the total FTA in agritourism guesthouses in Romania. Among them, 50.98% (234 people) were registered in Mehedinți county, 33.55% (154 people) in Gorj county and 12.42% (57 people) in Vâlcea county, FTO_DJ and FTO_OT being insignificant.

Although from the summer of 2020 the restrictions on the arrival of foreign tourists in Romania are relaxed, their number continues to be particularly low. An improvement of FTO_SWO is recorded in the summer of 2021, their number reaching 271 people in July, and 375 people in August, which represented only 68.09% and 81.70%, respectively, compared to the respective months of 2019.

Unfortunately, in 2022 a new decline of FTO_SWO is recorded. The highest values are also recorded in the months of July and August, their number (248 people in July and 238 people in August) representing only 62.31%, and respectively 51.85% compared to 2019, the counties preferred by foreign tourists being Gorj, Mehedinți and Vâlcea.

III.3. Impact on length of stay

The fluctuations recorded throughout the analyzed period, both in terms of the number of arrivals and overnight stays, as well as the capacity of accommodation in operation, in the agro-tourist guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia region influenced, on the one hand, the length of stay of tourists, both Romanian (RTS), as well as foreigners (FTS), and on the other hand the accommodation capacity utilization index (CUI) of this category of tourist reception structure.

The evolution of the length of stay of domestic tourists in agritourism guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia development region, during the analyzed period (Figure 10), oscillated between a minimum of 1 day in April 2020 and a maximum of 2.3 days in November and December 2019 before the outbreak of the pandemic of Covid-19.

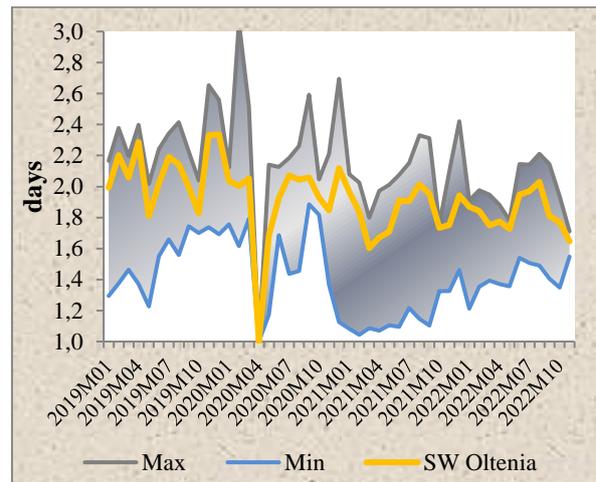


Figure 10 – RTS evolutions in AGH from the South-West Oltenia region

Source: authors' calculations

In the post-pandemic period, RTS was below the values recorded in 2019 in all counties. The best results regarding RTS were recorded in Mehedinți county. Here the RTS oscillated between a minimum of 1.5 days, recorded in March and November 2022, and a maximum of 2.7 days, a value recorded in December 2020. It should be noted that in this county, out of the 28 months of the period August 2020 – November 2022, only in 18 (64.29%) RTS was greater than or equal to 2.0 days.

Long periods, with RTS greater than or equal to 2.0 days, were also recorded in Gorj county. Here RTS recorded values between 1.4 days, in May 2021, and 2.2 days, in December 2020. However, the share of months with values of RTS greater than or equal to 2.0 was only 28.57%.

In Dolj and Vâlcea counties, with few exceptions, in the vast majority of months between August 2020 and November 2022, RTS had values below 2.0 days

Regarding the length of stay of foreign tourists in agro-tourism guesthouses in the SWO region, due to the very small number of their arrivals in agro-tourism guesthouses at the county level, the results are not conclusive. At the same time, at the SWO level they can be considered valid only in a few periods when the FTA_SWO was at least 200 people. Thus, at the SWO level, in the period May-September 2019, the duration of the FTS was between 1.9 and 2.0 days, and in the months of July and August of the years 2021 and 2022, months in which the ETA_SWO slightly exceeded 200 people, the duration of the FTS was between 1.8 and 1.9 days.

III.4. Impact on the use of accommodation capacity in operation

The index of the use of the accommodation capacity in operation in the agro-tourism guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia region (CUI_SWO) exceeded the value recorded in the agro-tourism

guesthouses in Romania (CUI_RO), in most of the months from January 2019 to October 2022.

Thus, in 2019, except for the month of October when CUI_RO was 18.2% and CUI_SWO 16.9%, in all other months of 2019 CUI_SWO exceeded CUI_RO with values between a minimum of 0.4 percentage points, in May 2019, and a maximum of 5.0 percentage points, in September 2019.

This feature is maintained for the next three years. Except for the months of November 2020, October and November 2021 and April, May and October 2022, where CUI_RO has lower values than CUI_SWO, in all others the CUI weights are higher. Consequently, it follows that, in the period August 2020 – November 2022, 78.57% of the values registered CUI_SWO are higher than CUI_RO, which is a positive fact.

At the level of the counties in the South-West Oltenia region, CUI oscillates around the values of CUI_SWO being affected by seasonal oscillations of different amplitudes and phases (Figure 11).

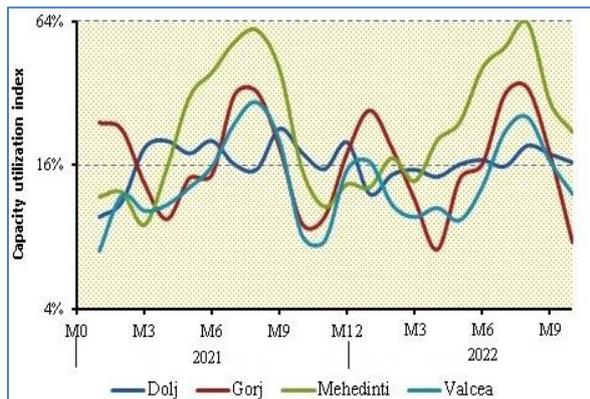


Figure 11 – Evolutions of CUI_DJ, CUI_GJ, CUI_MH and CUI_VL during 2021-2022
Source: NIS's data series

The highest CUI amplitudes are recorded in Mehedinți county both in 2021 (49.7%) and in 2022 (50.2%). At the same time, this county also has the highest CUI in August both in 2021 of 58.7% and in 2022 of 63.1%.

In Gorj county, the accommodation capacity utilization index (CUI_GJ) has an oscillating evolution, but, unlike Mehedinți county, here there are two significant maximum and minimum points each year. Thus, in 2021, from 25.1% in January, it reaches a CUI of 9.5% in April (amplitude of 14.60%), and from 32.3% in July it will be reduced to 9.7% in October (amplitude of 22.60%). In 2022, the amplitudes of seasonality increase, being 20% in the first period of the year and 26.1% in the second period.

The evolution of the CUI_VL, as a whole, has an oscillatory growth trend from 7% (January 2021) to 12.1% (October 2022). As for Dolj County, here the CUI fluctuations are quite low. Thus, from 9.7% in January 2021, it will reach 22.7% in September 2021,

followed by a reduction to 12.1% in January 2022, and a slight increase until October 2022 when it will be 16.4%.

Compared to the corresponding months of 2019, between June 2020 and November 2022, CUI recorded a similar evolution to that of arrivals (figure 12). Thus, Gorj county, as in the case of arrivals, presents the most significant monthly increases and decreases of the CUI, compared to the other counties. High index values are recorded in August_2020 (112.82%), July 2021 (137.72%) and July 2022 (138.60%). Minimum values of CUI_GJ, in relation to the values recorded in 2019, are recorded in November 2020 (54.59%), November 2021 (52.43%), April 2022 (56.35%) and October 2022 (51.35%)

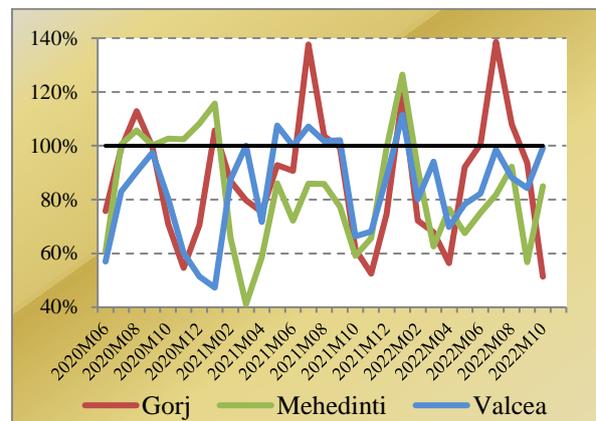


Figure 12 – The relative evolutions of CUI_GJ, CUI_MH and CUI_VL in AGH, in relation to the corresponding months of 2019
Source: authors' calculations

In relation to the monthly CUI values recorded in 2019, in the period August 2020 - November 2022, in Mehedinți and Vâlcea counties, the seasonal fluctuations are, with very few exceptions, below the values recorded in 2019.

Finally, it should also be emphasized that the Covid-19 pandemic determined, in the second part of 2020, a phase shift between the extreme points of the CUI indices in relation to 2019. Thus, while in Mehedinți and Vâlcea counties records maximums in August 2020, in Gorj the maximum value is reached in September. The phase shift is even more obvious in the case of the moments of time when the minimum values are reached: Gorj in November 2020, Vâlcea in January 2021, and Mehedinți, in March 2021. Starting from the second part of 2021, these gaps fade, the maxima tending to register simultaneously in all three counties.

IV. CONCLUSION

The article highlights the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on rural tourism both at the level of the South-West Oltenia development region, and in detail on the component counties, through the lens of the characteristics of tourism in agro-tourism guesthouses.

The implications and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on rural tourism in the South-West Oltenia development region are highlighted by the disparities between the counties of the region, as well as by the way of evolution and the characteristics of the seasonal oscillations which, in three of them, Mehedinți, Gorj and Vâlcea, were very pronounced compared to the other two.

All the indicators included in the analysis indicated that for almost all counties there was a fairly rapid return to a level close to that of the period before the outbreak of the pandemic.

From the perspective of rural tourism, among the five counties of the Southwest Oltenia region, significant processes were registered in Vâlcea, Gorj and Mehedinți, counties in which there is a much richer offer compared to the other counties.

In the period 2020-2022, at the level of Mehedinți county, it can be concluded that, after the Covid-19 pandemic with all the fluctuations presented during the months, mainly due to the offer that allows visiting the tourist attractions with priority in the summer (Lapiezuri Field, Danube Gorge, Portile de Fier National Park, Simion Island, etc.) there were slight increases: of the accommodation capacity in operation on average, by approximately 108 bed-days/month, of CUI by 2.7 percentage points and of arrivals on average by 15 tourists/month, as well as a 0.2% reduction in length of stay.

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With all the quite rich natural tourist offer of Gorj County (Transalpina, Sohodolului, Oltețului and Gilortului Gorges, Polovragi Caves, Muierii), complemented by the offer of religious tourism with the monasteries in the area, as well as the offer of balneoclimatic resorts and tourist of local interest (Peștișani, Săcelu, Baia de Fier, Polovragi), on the whole, only a small average increase in the accommodation capacity of the agro-tourism guesthouses in operation is recorded with approximately 85 places-days/month. For the rest of the indicators, there were decreases, on average by 36 tourists/month in arrivals, by 0.3% in length of stay and 17.44 percentage points in CUI.

The fairly low average number of tourists arriving in Vâlcea indicates that the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on rural tourism were quite large in the period 2020-2022, although, here too, there is a fairly rich tourist offer, both the natural one, as well as that of the spa resorts. During the analyzed period, the accommodation capacity of the agro-tourism guesthouses in operation increased on average by almost 122 places-days/month (the biggest increase compared to the other counties). As in the case of the other two counties presented, there are also decreases for the average length of stay (by 0.5%) and for CUI (by 9.2 percentage points).

As far as Dolj and Olt counties are concerned, rural tourism is still at a low level both in terms of the offer of agro-tourism guesthouses and tourist traffic.

In conclusion, with all the discontinuities and disruptions caused by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in 2020, starting from 2021 and until the end of the analyzed period, the activity of rural tourism in agritourism guesthouses in the South-West Oltenia region returned at least to 2019 level.

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