

Analyzing the Evolution and Structure of Tourist Demand Indicators for the Romanian Mountain Destinations

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Abstract

The demand for mountain tourist destinations represents an important segment of the tourist demand in Romania. It recorded an oscillating evolution during the last three decades (1990-2019), the causes being complex, of economic, social and political nature.

The significant increase of tourism demand in recent times is the effect of implementing coherent action plans, coordinated at the national level and supported by certain government measures to encourage the tourism industry. These involved both investments in tourism infrastructure and in the marketing and promotion of Romanian destinations. At the same time, tourism operators have understood that a diversified, tourist-oriented offer that meets tourists' specific needs is the only way to cope with competition on the regional tourism market and many of them have acted in this direction.

The further development of the tourist access infrastructure and facilities in the areas with high tourist potential, as well as the rehabilitation of some tourist attractions represent the strategic directions of action in order to continue this favorable trend.

Key words: tourism indicators, mountain tourism demand, Romanian mountain destinations

J.E.L. classification: Z30, Z32, L83

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze, from a quantitative point of view, the evolution of tourist demand for the Romanian mountain resorts, during the last three decades, in order to draw pertinent conclusions on the future evolution trends.

The number of tourists (arrivals) and the number of overnight stays, as important indicators of the tourist flow, are analyzed both nationally and structured by type of destination, but with emphasis on the mountain area, to highlight the contribution of mountain tourism to the global market. Although their overall evolution is favorable, the problems Romanian tourism is facing with cannot be ignored. Improvement trends may be observed and they are also reflected in the monitored indicators. But efforts in this direction must continue.

The future priorities, able to ensure the growth and competitiveness of mountain tourism, include the development of a complex tourist offer, making the most of existing natural and human resources, in correlation with the conservation of the environment and heritage, as well as a sustained and efficient tourism promotion, to ensure a distinct identity of the local offer of mountain tourism on the specific European market.

2. Literature review

The main current trends of tourism are: the increase in the number of tourists; more regions and countries entering the tourist circuit; more holidays and free time; the decrease of the average duration of stay and several stages of rest leave; the strong increase of the tourist demand, but also

of the supply. The main factors that have influenced the increase arrivals in the current stage are: the increase of the population's income; expanding the habits of traveling; changing population's traditions and preferences. Other causes that stimulated the development of national tourism are: diversification of the offer of tourist services; increasing the role of promotional activity in tourism; improving national legislation to stimulate tourism; the involvement of the central and local political power in the development of the tourist activities; the national and local strategies and programs in the field of tourism; ensuring the permanent training of the staff employed in tourism; educating the population to consume tourist products and services (Milin et al, 2005).

In preparing this paper, we consulted a series of works from the specialized literature, from which we selected the most interesting ideas and practices. The information from statistical sources represented the starting point in the documentation process involved in conducting a study of tourism demand analysis, especially targeting the quantitative side (Cocean and Dezsi, 2001). We consulted official documents and statistics compiled by some public authorities in Romania or other European countries.

3. Research methodology

In this paper, we used the theoretical research, the analysis and the synthesis. The theoretical research consisted in the study of the specialized literature. The study was conducted based on the analysis, processing and interpretation of the most significant indicators of tourist demand (number of tourists and their structure, overnight stays, average length of stay, density of tourist flow).

The research methodology was based on the analysis and interpretation of data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (tourism chapters from the Romanian Statistical Yearbooks, 1990-2019; Romanian Tourism. Statistical Brief, 1999-2019), using descriptive statistics.

Through the method of graphical modeling, we made suggestive diagrams for each indicator, using the application Microsoft Office Excel. The data tables were interpreted to conclude on the evolution and structure of the main indicators of tourism demand for the mountain destinations; in addition, we made comparisons with the existing situation at national level.

4. Findings

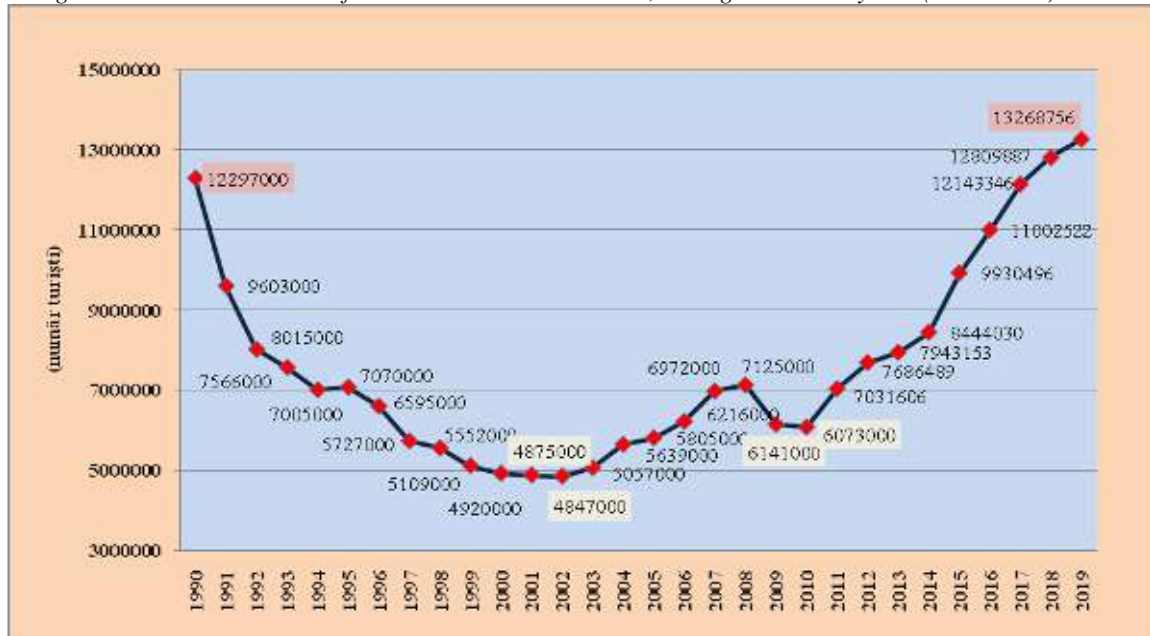
The evolution of the tourist demand indicators for Romania in the last three decades

The number of tourists (visitors) or tourist arrivals is the most important indicator of the tourist flow (Minciu, 2000; Stănciulescu et al, 2009). This is a physical, quantitative indicator, analyzed in evolution (over a period of 30 years) at national level and structured by types of destinations (to make comparisons with the mountain area), by the origin of tourists (domestic and international) or by their preference for accommodation.

This indicator has shown some significant fluctuations in the last 30 years (Figure no. 1, Table no. 1). It decreased significantly between 1990-2003: from a peak of 12.2 million tourists in 1990, to values by almost two thirds lower in the following years (1992-1995), followed by another period of steady decline since per year (1996-2002)), with values varying to about 5 million tourists by the end of that period (and at least 4.8 million tourists in 2002). The causes were complex, of economic, social and political nature, related to the post-1989 December transition period: the decrease of the living standard of the resident population (unemployment, low incomes), the continuous increase of the tariffs for tourist services, the decrease of services in many Romanian resorts, the political instability, the insufficient tourism promotion on foreign markets (Țigu, 2001), the inadequate coordination of tourism at national level (frequent changes within the Ministry of Tourism, and an incomplete, outdated tourism legislation – the Tourism Law is still in stage of project).

Starting with 2003, there was a steady increase in tourist arrivals, to over 7 million tourists in 2008. The increase from 2004-2008 was due to the increase in income and living standards of the resident population. In 2009 and 2010, the value decreased sharply by 1 million tourists compared to previous years, due to the effects of the economic crisis.

Figure no. 1. The evolution of tourist arrivals in Romania, during the last 30 years (1990-2019)



Source: data taken and processed from the *Statistical Yearbooks of Romania 1990-2020 and Tourism of Romania. Statistical Briefing, 1999-2019*, INS, www.insse.ro

Starting with 2011, there was a significant increase (over 0.5 million tourists annually) in arrivals (a trend that is also evident worldwide, where only in 2009 there was a regression in the number of international tourists). The Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism carried out, in the period 2009 - 2012, significant investments in the tourist infrastructure and in the marketing and promotion of the Romanian destinations, both from the European funds and the state budget. Thus, almost 820 million euros were allocated for the development of tourism, compared to 20 million euros allocated in the period 2006–2008. During this period, tourism development was achieved by implementing coherent action plans to coordinate the field: the Strategic and Operational Tourism Marketing Plan of Romania 2011-2015, the Strategic and Operational Tourism Marketing Plan for Bucharest 2011-2015, the Creation and Promotion Strategy of the National Tourism Brand, the National Strategy for Ecotourism Development, the National Strategy for the Development of Spa Tourism.

During the last 5 years (2015-2019), there was an unprecedented increase in the number of tourists, over 12 million tourists in 2017, a value reached only during the communist period (Figure no. 1, Table no. 1), then 12.8 million tourists in 2018 and 13.2 million tourists in 2019. This is due to a better involvement of the Ministry of Tourism in the initiation and application of laws and reforms in the field of tourism, a better promotion of Romanian tourism, as well as an diversified offer of tourism operators.

The significant increase of tourism demand in the last 5 years (2015-2019) was due to several government measures and state efforts to encourage the tourism industry: reducing tourism taxation to 5% (the lowest in the EU); implementation of the Master Plan for tourism; promoting Romania's unique tourist destinations, such as the Danube Delta; investments of national importance through the contribution of the Ministry of Tourism for the development of the ski area or of some tourist ports on the coast and in the Danube Delta; reconsolidation of Romania's position in the field of tourism by acquiring the function of President of the Executive Council of the UNWTO, during 2017-2018; business tourism development; the budget for tourism increased significantly during this period, which led to long-term tourism development and Romania's increasing competitiveness; the development of local communities in areas with high tourist potential, by increasing public investment in tourism infrastructure; competitive development of tourism through identification, evaluation, prioritization by forms of tourism and efficient targeting of public investments; developing a network of internationally competitive tourist destinations; sustainable capitalization of local specificities and elements of national identity through tourism and promotion

of an integrated approach to tourism policy in the regions, through the sustainable development of tourism (www.insse.ro, Press Release No. 116 of 5 May 2020: Tourism in March 2020, National Institute of Statistics).

Although the number of tourists tripled in the period 2002-2019, Romania has a high tourist potential, but poorly exploited. Romanian tourism faces a number of problems: tourism-specific infrastructure is largely damaged; cultural heritage is, in many cases, degraded; the training of tourism employees is not always appropriate; the low quality of tourist services compared to their high price; the transport infrastructure is poor (road, air), etc.

The average value of the annual growth rate of tourism in the analyzed period was 0.96%, with maximums in the periods 2006-2007 (12.16%), 2010-2011 (15.78%) and 2014-2015 (17, 60%) and minimums in the periods 1993-1994 (-17.56%), 1995-1997 (-13%), due to political instability, declining quality of tourist services in many resorts and non-correlation of supply with high rates, insufficient promotion of mountain destinations on foreign markets and 2010-2009 (-16.73%), due to the financial-economic crisis.

Analyzing the evolution and structure of tourism demand indicators for Romanian mountain destinations in the last three decades

The demand for mountain tourism represents an important segment of the tourist demand (domestic and international) in Romania (Țigu and Simoni, 2015), holding shares between minimum 13.19% (in 1994) and maximum 17.02% (in 2019). The average value of the last 26 years analyzed (1994-2019) is 14.82%, finding a share of 13-15% in the period 1994-2014 and a significant increase in the last 5 years (2015-2019).

Figure no.2. The evolution of tourist arrivals in the Romanian mountain destinations, during the last 27 years (1994-2019)



Source: data taken and processed from the *Statistical Yearbooks of Romania 1990-2020 and Tourism of Romania. Statistical Briefing, 1999-2019*, INS, www.insse.ro

In the analyzed period (1994-2019), the evolution of tourist arrivals in the mountain oscillated (Figure no. 3), corresponding to the existing situations at national level: a period of sharp decrease (1993-2002), with a minimum in 2002 (700,000 tourists), a period of growth (2003-2008) with values of almost 1 million tourists in 2007 and 2008, a decrease of 100,000 tourists corresponding to the economic crisis in 2008-2009, followed by a period of strong revival (2011-2019, in especially after 2015), when the maximum value of the entire analyzed period was also recorded (over 2.2 million tourists in 2019). Overall, the number of tourists in mountain tourist destinations

has increased 2.5 times in the last 26 years, from 924,000 in 1994 to 2,258,401 in 2019. Starting with 2017, record figures of more than 2 millions of tourists were recorded in the mountain tourist destinations.

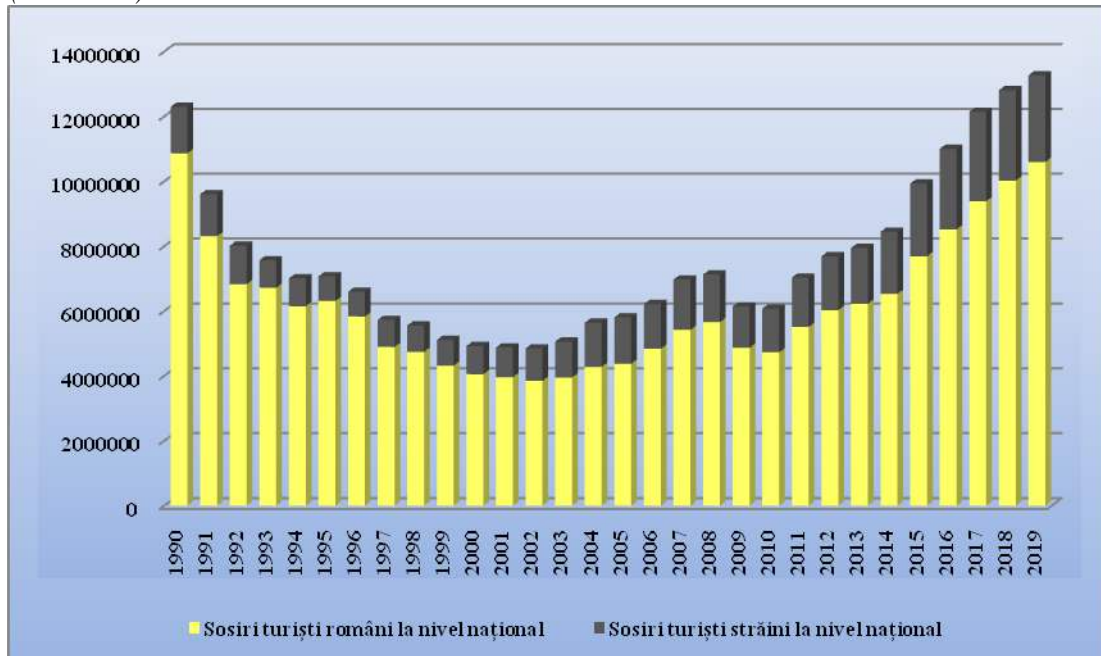
Table no. 1. The evolution and structure of tourist arrivals in mountain tourist destinations, compared to the national situation, during the last three decades (1990-2019)

Tourist arrivals in Romania					Tourist arrivals in Romanian mountain destinations					
Year	Total tourist arrivals in Romania	Annual growth rate (%)	Romanian tourist arrivals	Foreign tourist arrivals	Year	Total tourist arrivals in mountain destinations	Annual growth rate (%)	% total tourist arrivals in Romania	Romanian tourist arrivals	Foreign tourist arrivals
1990	12297000	-	10865000	1432000	1990	*	*	*	*	*
1991	9603000	-21.91	8309000	1294000	1991	*	*	*	*	*
1992	8015000	-16.54	6830000	1185000	1992	*	*	*	*	*
1993	7566000	-5.60	6718000	848000	1993	1121000	*	14.82	*	*
1994	7005000	-7.41	6149000	856000	1994	924000	-17.57	13.19	859000	65000
1995	7070000	0.93	6310000	760000	1995	1056000	14.29	14.94	984000	72000
1996	6595000	-6.72	5833000	762000	1996	918000	-13.07	13.92	856000	62000
1997	5727000	-13.16	4894000	833000	1997	796000	-13.29	13.90	723000	73000
1998	5552000	-3.06	4742000	810000	1998	821000	3.14	14.79	744000	77000
1999	5109000	-7.98	4314000	795000	1999	790000	-3.78	15.46	718000	72000
2000	4920000	-3.70	4053000	867000	2000	756000	-4.30	15.37	668000	88000
2001	4875000	-0.91	3960000	915000	2001	750000	-0.79	15.38	662000	88000
2002	4847000	-0.57	3848000	999000	2002	700000	-6.67	14.44	602000	98000
2003	5057000	4.33	3952000	1105000	2003	748000	6.86	14.79	650000	98000
2004	5639000	11.51	4280000	1359000	2004	836000	11.76	14.83	720000	116000
2005	5805000	2.94	4375000	1430000	2005	828000	-0.96	14.26	715000	113000
2006	6216000	7.08	4836000	1380000	2006	883000	6.64	14.21	786000	97000
2007	6972000	12.16	5421000	1551000	2007	998000	13.02	14.31	879000	119000
2008	7125000	2.19	5659000	1466000	2008	998000	0.00	14.01	893000	105000
2009	6141000	-13.81	4865000	1276000	2009	831000	-16.73	13.53	750000	81000
2010	6073000	-1.11	4727000	1346000	2010	815000	-1.93	13.42	728000	87000
2011	7031606	15.78	5514907	1516699	2011	936000	14.85	13.31	839000	97000
2012	7686489	9.31	6030053	1656436	2012	1121000	19.76	14.58	1008000	113000
2013	7943153	3.34	6225798	1717355	2013	1241133	10.72	15.63	1113959	127174
2014	8444030	6.31	6532213	1911817	2014	1284312	3.48	15.21	1152298	132014
2015	9930496	17.60	7690518	2239978	2015	1528583	19.02	15.39	1356404	172179
2016	11002522	10.80	8521698	2480824	2016	1748157	14.36	15.89	1565562	182595
2017	12143346	10.37	9383266	2760080	2017	2019142	15.50	16.63	1800140	219002
2018	12809887	5.49	10024482	2785405	2018	2176073	7.77	16.99	1960163	215910
2019	13268756	3.58	10597048	2671708	2019	2258401	3.78	17.02	2066492	191909

Source: data taken and processed from the *Statistical Yearbooks of Romania 1990-2020 and Tourism of Romania. Statistical Briefing, 1999-2019*, INS, www.insse.ro

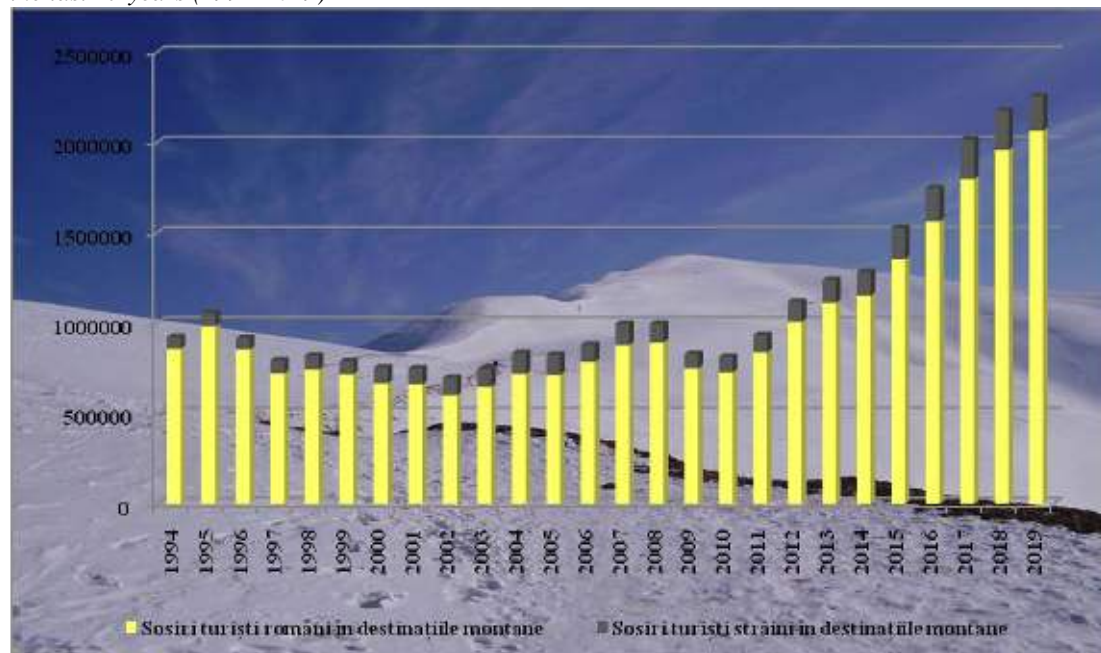
In the period 2011-2019, the value of the annual growth rate of arrivals in the mountain area was significantly higher (over 19% in 2012 and 2015, 15.5% in 2017) than the national average, a gratifying fact for Romanian mountain tourism.

Figure no.3. The evolution and structure of tourist arrivals in Romania, during the last 30 years (1990-2019)



Source: data taken and processed with the help of the Microsoft Excel application from the *Statistical Yearbooks of Romania 1990-2020 and Tourism of Romania. Statistical Briefing, 1999-2019*, INS, www.insse.ro

Figure no. 4. The evolution and structure of tourist arrivals in Romanian mountain destinations, during the last 27 years (1994-2019)



Source: data taken and processed with the help of the Microsoft Excel application from the *Statistical Yearbooks of Romania 1990-2020 and Tourism of Romania. Statistical Briefing, 1999-2019*, INS, www.insse.ro; own photo of the Sorica ski slope in the Azuga mountain resort

This high demand for the mountain destinations was due to the promotion of winter sports in recent years, which led to a revival of the preference or interest of Romanians to practice them; in parallel, a series of ski areas in many traditional "white" mountain resorts (Poiana Braşov, Sinaia, Predeal, Busteni, Păltiniş) were arranged, redesigned or modernized, through investments carried out under the coordination of the Ministry of Tourism, with the appearance or relaunch of many smaller resorts for practicing winter sports (Râncea, Vidra, Arieşeni, Şuitor, Parâng, Straja, etc.). There are currently 180 authorized ski slopes throughout the country. Rural tourism in mountain areas also developed during this period: more tourist villages and rural pensions and more European funds granted for rural development. Investments were also made and many of the mountain spas were revived, some of which had declined sharply after 1990. Investments were also made in the transport infrastructure, as some transcarpathian axes were modernized: Transalpina, Transrău, Olt Valley, Jiu Gorges, Bicaş Gorges, Timiş-Cerna Corridor etc.

The mountain tourist destinations rank secondly in the Romanian tourists' top of preferences and thirdly in the case of foreign tourists (Table no. 2, Figure no. 5). In 2019, over 2.2 million tourists preferred mountain destinations, meaning 17% of all tourists. The foreign tourists the preferred urban tourism (77.31%) and only 7.18% mountain tourism, while the preferences of the Romanian tourists were more diversified: 39.63% urban tourism, 19.5% mountain, 10.56% seaside, 10.33% spa. The share of foreign tourists in mountain destinations is considerably lower than at national level. Instead, the preference of Romanian tourists for the mountain area increased by 3-4% in the last 26 years, with a maximum of 19.5% of preferences in 2019, when the maximum value of the analyzed was registered, over 2 million Romanian tourists.

In 2019, in the mountain tourist destinations, the number of Romanian tourists represented 79.9% of the total arrivals. Compared to 2018, the number of arrivals increased by 3.6% in total, the number of Romanian tourist arrivals increased by 5.7%, and that of foreign tourists decreased by 4.1%.

Table no. 2. The structure of tourist arrivals by types of destinations in Romania (2019)

2019	u.m.	Total	Seaside resorts	Spas	Mountain resorts	Danube Delta including town Tulcea	Bucharest and county seat cities	Other localities and tourist routes
Total tourist arrivals	tourists	13268756	1153682	1129314	2258401	166411	6265358	2295590
	%	100	8.69	8.51	17.02	1.25	47.22	17.30
Foreign tourists	tourists	2671708	34281	34361	191909	20405	2065479	325273
	%	100	1.28	1.29	7.18	0.76	77.31	12.17
Romanian tourists	tourists	10597048	1119401	1094953	2066492	146006	4199879	1970317
	%	100	10.56	10.33	19.50	1.38	39.63	18.59

Source: data taken and processed from the publication *Tourism activity in 2019*, No. 4 - 2019, 2020, INS, www.insse.ro

Regarding the structure of tourist arrivals by accommodation units in 2019 (Table no. 3), most tourists in the mountain area preferred hotel accommodation (51.96%, compared to the national average of 70.48%), followed by agritourism pensions (20, 17% compared to 9.04% national average), tourist pensions (11.79% compared to 9.27% national average), tourist villas (6.97% compared to 3.46% national average) and chalets (5.12% compared to the national average of 1.15%). This higher preference of mountain tourists for accommodation units such as guesthouses, villas and cottages reflects the specificity of tourism activities in the mountain area (hiking, mountaineering, adventure tourism, speleotism, ecotourism, rural tourism, etc.) and the corresponding accommodation units.

We also noticed some differences in foreign tourists' preferences for accommodation in mountain areas: higher shares for hotels (70.34% foreign tourists versus 50.24% Romanian tourists, reflecting their higher expenses for accommodation) and campsites (2.06% foreign tourists versus 0.16% Romanian tourists, reflecting their preference for hiking, climbing, mountain biking and implicitly camping – we should mention the considerable number of foreign tourists hiking the trails that cross the Romanian Carpathians, especially their ridges).

In case of *accommodation comfort degree*, most tourists din destinațiile montane preferred 3 star (48%) and 4 star (23%) units (table 4) in 2018 (the latest data provided by the National Institute of Statistics). The order of preferences is reversed for the Romanian tourists (3 stars 49.39% and then 4 stars 31.25%), compared to foreign ones (4 stars mostly 46.77%, followed by 3 stars 37.53%).

Table no.3. The structure of tourist arrivals in Romania and in mountain destinations by types of accommodation units and by the origin of tourists (2019)

Accommodation units (2019)	Total tourist arrivals	Romanian tourist arrivals	Foreign tourist arrivals	% total	Mountain destination arrivals	Romanian tourist arrivals in mountain destinations	Foreign tourist arrivals in mountain destinations	% total
Total	13268756	10597048	2671708	100	2258401	2066492	191909	100
Hotels	9352239	7043134	2309105	70.48	1173370	1038368	135002	51.96
Hostels	392279	316545	75734	2.96	27373	25885	1488	1.21
Motels	276928	262719	14209	2.09	25043	23619	1424	1.11
Inns	2911	2857	54	0.02	0	0	0	0.00
Vilas	459406	420412	38994	3.46	157402	149675	7727	6.97
Tourist chalets	152433	143628	8805	1.15	115620	110080	5540	5.12
Tourist pensions	1230610	1112301	118309	9.27	266175	249413	16762	11.79
Agrotourism pensions	1199322	1106927	92395	9.04	455423	436912	18511	20.17
Campings	60213	51314	8899	0.45	7365	3401	3964	0.33
Tourist stops	25152	24585	567	0.19	6467	6343	124	0.29
Holiday villages	6243	5200	1043	0.05	3029	2935	94	0.13
Bungalows	38458	36519	1939	0.29	7857	6773	1084	0.35
Camps for students and preschoolers	46949	46874	75	0.35	9117	9089	28	0.40

Source: data taken and processed from the publication *Tourism Activity in 2019 (2020)*, Tourism Statistics Series, No. 4/2019, National Institute of Statistics, www.insse.ro

Table no. 4. Structure of tourist arrivals in the mountain area, by accommodation comfort degree (2018)

	Total	5 stars	4 stars	3 stars	2 stars	1 star	unclassified
Arrivals in mountain destinations	2217110	61667	726930	1069087	295277	43469	20680
Share of total arrivals in mountain area (%)	100.00	2.78	32.79	48.22	13.32	1.96	0.93
Romanian tourist arrivals in mountain area	1997812	56611	624373	986789	270978	39380	19681
Share of total Romanian arrivals in mountain area (%)	100.00	2.83	31.25	49.39	13.56	1.97	0.99
Foreign tourist arrivals in mountain area	219298	5056	102557	82298	24299	4089	999
Share of total foreign arrivals in mountain area (%)	100.00	2.31	46.77	37.53	11.08	1.86	0.46

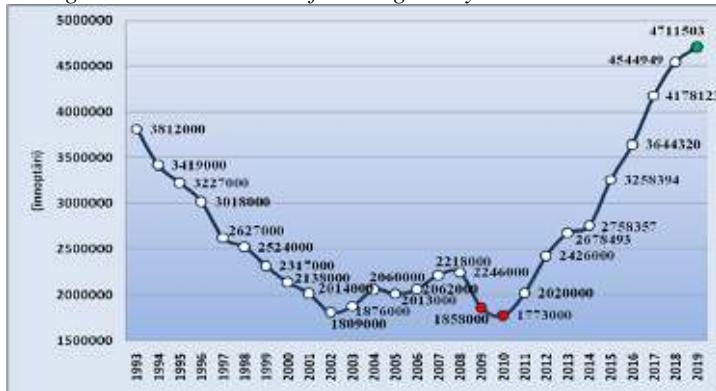
Source: own processing of the data taken from *Romanian Tourism. Statistical Abstract*, National Institute of Statistics, 2019

The oscillations of the overnight stays indicator are directly proportional to those of arrivals (Figure no. 5): maximum values in the period 1993-1996 (over 3 million overnight stays); minimum values in 2002 (1.8 million overnight stays) and during the economic crisis of 2009 (1.8 million overnight stays) and 2010 (1.8 million overnight stays); subsequently, there was an upward trend in the period 2011-2014 (year in which the overnight stays in the mountain area reach the value of 2.8 million tourist days) and strongly upward starting with 2015 (4.7 million overnight stays in 2019).

In 2019, out of the total of 4,544,949 overnight stays, those of the Romanian tourists represented 92% (4,330,823 overnight stays), and those of the foreign tourists 8% (380,680 overnight stays). Compared to 2018, the total number of overnight stays in the mountain area increased by 3.6%, the number of overnight stays of Romanian tourists increased by 5.4%, that of foreign tourists decreased by -12.6%.

The average length of stay in the mountain area registered a downward evolution (Figure no. 6), from over 3 days in the period 1993-1998, to a longer period of slight decrease, with average values of approximately 2.3 days in the last 21 years analyzed (1999-2019). The average value of the 27 years analyzed (1993-2019) was 2.54 days.

Figure no. 5. Evolution of overnight stays in mountain accommodation units in the period 1993-2019



Source: own processing of statistical data from *Tourism Activity in 2019* (2020), No. 4/2019, National Institute of Statistics, using the application Microsoft Excel

Figure no. 6. The evolution of the average length of stay in mountain destinations, from 1993 to 2019



Source: own processing using the application Microsoft Excel

Tourism flow density provides information on how solicited a destination is, and on the indirect measures that should be taken to ensure tourists' satisfaction without disrupting residents' activity or having undesirable effects on the environment. This indicator was calculated by reporting the number of tourists to the surface of the Romanian Carpathians (Tourism flow density₂₀₁₉ = 2,258,401 tourists: 66,300 sq.km = 30.06 tourists / sq.km). This value is lower value compared to the national average of 55.65 tourists / sq.km (due to the large extent of these mountains on 28% of the national territory).

For the entire tourism and hospitality industry, the year 2020 is certainly a turning point in terms of future trends. Tourism is perhaps the economic sector most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Europe, the world's largest tourist destination, has become the epicenter of the Coronavirus. However, the European Union unveiled an action plan to get its internal borders reopening, safely fire up its hospitality sector and to revive rail, road, air and sea connections that have been strangled during the pandemic (CNN Travel, 2020).

For Romania, INS statistics capture the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the measures taken by the authorities following the decree of the state of emergency on the Romanian territory starting with March 16, 2020: compared to March 2019, there was a decrease of arrivals by 69.8% , and overnight stays by 68.2%, the arrivals of foreign visitors decreased by 50.1%, and the departures abroad of Romanian visitors by 55.6%, in March 2020 (Press release no. 116 of May 5, 2020).

Although the evolution of the pandemic is uncertain, distancing measures are expected to become less and less restrictive, so it is possible that the summer tourist season 2020 will benefit tourists who are looking forward to it after weeks or months of staying home. "This is not going to be a normal summer, not for any of us. But when we all work together and we all do our part in the

ways the Commission is setting out today, then we don't have to face a summer stuck at home or a completely lost summer for the European tourism industry. ", said Margrethe Vestager, the vice-president of the EU's executive arm, the European Commission (CNN Travel, 2020).

5. Conclusions

The significant increase in tourism demand in the last 5 years (2015-2019) is due to several government measures and state efforts to encourage the tourism industry. The mountain tourist destinations rank secondly in the Romanian tourists' top of preferences and thirdly in the case of foreign tourists. In 2019, over 2.2 million tourists preferred mountain destinations, meaning 17% of all tourists.

Regarding the structure of demand for the Romanian mountain tourist destinations, in 2019, most tourists preferred accommodation in 3-star and 4-star units, especially in hotels followed by agritourism and tourist pensions, tourist villas and chalets. The oscillations of the overnight indicator were directly proportional to those of arrivals, registering a strong upward trend starting with 2015 (and a maximum of 4.7 million overnight stays in 2019). The average duration of the stay in the mountain area registered a downward evolution and an average value of the 27 years analyzed (1993-2019) of 2.54 days.

Based on these trends, we may conclude that there are favorable premises to continue growth, provided a coherent development orientation, through: improving the promotion strategy, modernizing tourist offers, developing unique regional tourism products, individualizing them within the specific market, increasing the quality of tourist services, qualification and continuous improvement of personnel, developing collaboration between stakeholders and supporting the public-private partnership.

In order to penetrate foreign markets and face the competition on the tourism market, there is still a need for sustained financial investments and strategic development projects, supported at national and regional level from public funds, which will allow a superior capitalization of the existing tourist resources. Among the priority directions for the development of mountain tourism, in addition to recreational and sports activities, the customs, traditions and history of certain places should be promoted. However, they must be directed towards sustainable development, without neglecting the priority of conserving the natural environment and protected areas, thus contributing to increasing the contribution of tourism to the national P.I.B., improving the quality of life and increasing the standard of living of the local population.

Given the current context and taking into account the fact that both the tourist infrastructure and the existing tourist potential are not used to their full capacity, but especially the favorable image of our country as one of the countries least affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, continuation of the upward trend are very favorable. There are even opinions according to which the year 2020 will represent a moment of spectacular relaunch of the Romanian mountain tourism.

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