

STUDY ON THE RE-ASSESSMENT OF TOURIST POTENTIAL AND ACTIVITIES FROM A BOARDING HOUSE IN THE PONOARELE AREA - MEHEDIŢI, ROMANIA, IN THE PERIOD 2018 – 2022

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Abstract

The present study addresses a theme of topicality and continues to be new because it tries to re-invent and update the data regarding the natural and anthropic tourism potential of the Ponoarele area in Mehedinţi county, Romania. Although there are numerous data regarding the Mehedinţi area, during the pandemic and after it, the tourist activity at the level of the region and implicitly at the national and even international level was subjected to new challenges, trials and realities, which made it fall back, reconsider and quickly adapt to new conditions. In the first phase, the work aims at an inventory of all the natural and human resources of the area, and in the second phase, the case study presents the reality of the tourist activity in the Pensiunea and in the town of Ponoare, during the studied period, based on which a plan of measures and directions that will contribute essentially to the popularization of the advantages of practicing tourism in smaller structures that can adapt quickly and that can obtain secure incomes in the new realities of tourism.

Key words: natural and anthropic tourism potential, management, sustainable tourism, Ponoare, Mehedinţi, Romania

INTRODUCTION

The area under study is part of the Mehedinţi Plateau, which has numerous and valuable tourist resources, both natural and human, as well as an old tradition in terms of ethnography, an asset that can include tourism in the future among the basic branches of the economy, this being also a great chance in terms of the economic market, for the development of the rural area of this plateau. The tourist activity in this area is supported by a series of tourist resources, which can be the basis for the creation of diversified tourist offers and implicitly the establishment of the tourist potential of the region, the area has long been an attraction and for scientific research aimed at determining the tourist fund biogeographical and speleological. Unfortunately, today the area is faced with serious problems such as: the continuous deterioration of the standard of living, the aging of the population, the exodus of the young population to the city, the irrational exploitation of natural resources, the lack of an infrastructure, etc. precisely for that reason,

it was necessary to include this area on the list of protected areas [9].

Regarding the existing tourist accommodation capacity in the Mehedinţi Plateau, at the level of 2020 there were 721 places in accommodation units that are not evenly distributed, with important differences from one administrative unit to another. From the data in the specialized literature and from the study, it was observed that two localities (Bala and Baia de Aramă), hold over 60% of the entire accommodation capacity. Ponoarele and Gura Văii communes together own over 31% of the total number of accommodation places in the studied area. Ponoarele has the largest number of accommodation structures, but with a small number of accommodation places, on average 6-7, which makes its weight in the total number of places to be reduced, below 13%.

From the research carried out by us and other Romanian and even foreign researchers, it was found that the activity of rural tourism in general and that of agritourism in particular is practiced in Romania and in Eastern countries, more in units of the type of

agritourism households and less in agritourism farms, specific to western countries [1,13]. Also from these researches, it was found that although peasant households are multiplying, most of them have a precarious existence, not having the necessary equipment specific to modern farms and no corporate organizations found in Western Europe to protect their interests [11, 12, 26].

The progress and extent of agricultural industrialization in Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century led not only to the spectacular increase in agricultural production, but also to the drastic decrease in the number of peasant households, unable to face the competition of large farms. The progress also had very serious negative consequences on the environment, a fact that brought back to the attention of the public and European officials the status of the peasant household, its ability to conserve the environment and provide the population with natural products. The great diversity of peasant households in the Union, generated by the work specific to the traditional household, and the effects of agricultural intensification, led to the idea of rehabilitating the traditional peasant household, to become complementary to the large agricultural farms (which cannot be abandoned), and to contribute to protecting concrete environment, offering natural products to the consumer society [7, 15, 19].

A form specific to the studied area of the household is that of temporary dwellings, known as "mansions", which extend in the immediate vicinity of the village, up to distances of more than 10–15 km and which benefit from climatic shelter, favorable exposure, density sea of springs, numerous pastures and hayfields. The demographic and economic consistency of the phenomenon was noted from the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century [11]. The frequency of their establishment is in the Piedmont plateau, where the mansions form a real mosaic. Here there are hilltops and parcelled slopes, each parcel having hay, arable land cultivated with cereals but also vegetable plants necessary for daily food, alongside even small vine plantations, in the terraced areas, as well as fruit tree crops.

From the research carried out in the area, today a phenomenon of an accelerated decrease in the use of these manors can be seen, in direct connection with the aging of the population and the abandonment of occupations related to animal husbandry, especially the progressive decrease of shepherding, once this was the standard for the economic existence of the communities from the area [3].

The present paper wants to present in a scientific and academic manner the current situation and the degree of capitalization of the very rich tourist potential of the Ponoarele area in Mehedinți county, by inventorying and analyzing all existing natural and anthropogenic tourist resources and objectives and by reconsidering the use in the activity of tourism, of the traditional forms of household organization, such as "plai" mansions, which can give a unique character to the tourist offer in the area. In Romanian, the word "plai" means "a mountain or a hilly region almost flat or slightly inclined covered by grasslands".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology is the classic one combined with the case study method, applied on a smaller scale, namely at the level of Ponoare commune in Mehedinți county. At the beginning, the principle of observing the tourist phenomenon at a general level was used, within the delimited area to be studied, in which the level of implementation of rural tourism in the area was followed, as an integrated part of sustainable tourism based on ecological principles [4, 5]. After that, we went on to describe all the more important aspects that define as a whole the type of tourism mainly practiced in the area of Ponoare and the effective way of applying them. The subsequent stage included the inventory and analysis of all existing natural and anthropogenic tourist resources and objectives and the reconsideration of the use in tourism activity of traditional forms of household organization, such as plai mansions, which can give a unique character to the tourist offer in the area. The case study

concerned a boarding house in Ponoarele commune where the first phase was to inventory and count all the natural resources with very valuable tourist potential, which represent a real asset for the practiced tourism activity [4, 6].

Also, the totality of the existing anthropic tourism resources was studied, being represented in particular by the multitude of monuments of monumental architecture and art, religious and cultural edifices of unique beauty. After identifying all the assets that can positively favor the tourism activity practiced at the Boarding house, the main economic indicators were also studied on the basis of which the tourism activity and the quality level of the management practiced were characterized and diagnosed. These indicators mainly concerned the tourist offer of the boarding house, tourist traffic, the utilization index and the degree of occupancy, indicators on the basis of which a series of conclusions could also be formulated regarding the level of competence of the staff working and especially on the quality and the efficiency of management activities, from the "Conacu Boierului" boarding house.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was carried out in Ponoarele commune in Mehedinți county, which according to the census carried out in 2021, has a population of 2,249 inhabitants, down from 2011, when 2,425 inhabitants were registered. Accessibility in the area is ensured by the main road, which is the European Road E70, which connects Bucharest and Timișoara. It ensures good connectivity between the county and the rest of the country and other national and county roads that serve different localities in the county. Mehedinți County has a few railway lines, but rail accessibility can be limited compared to other means of transport. The county does not have its own airport, but the nearest airport is Craiova International Airport, located approximately 150 kilometres north of the county [23].

Inventory and analysis of the specific tourist potential of the Ponoarele area

In the present study, the research was oriented especially towards the touristic objectives and attractions specific to the studied area, and the general touristic potential of Mehedinți County, which is very well known, was no longer insisted upon. They were insisted on because only through them, the studied area can develop a unique, attractive and personalized offer, totally different from other mountainous areas in our country. One of the most famous and popular tourist attractions of the Ponoarele area is the Bridge of God, which represents a real emblem of the places, being the most famous natural monument in the entire land. It is found right in the centre of Ponoarele, at a distance of only 100 m from Conacu' Boierului, being a huge stone arch. It is one of three existing natural bridges in the world and the second largest in Europe. It is also called God's Bridge, because according to a legend, a battle between the Devil and God took place here, and also, over the years, several cars ran out of brakes, but also a cyclist fell off it and they escaped without injury [8, 9, 27].

There are many legends about the Bridge of God, the most widespread among them is the one that talks about the formation of the bridge through the intervention of divine power. The bridge was formed by the collapse of the upper wall of the cave. Residents prayed to God to banish evil from the territory of the commune, and he helped them, descended to the ground and the Devil entered the cave. God pressed the ceiling of the cave with his hand to catch the Devil, but he slipped through the cave and came out through the other side of the cave, but still he was banished from this area [23, 20, 28].

Another representative objective located in the immediate vicinity of the God's Bridge is the Ponoarele Cave, which is 734 m long and is located just below the hill that bears its name, representing the only connection between Lake Zătonul Mare and Lake Zătonul Mic, made at the level underground. It is a complex, multi-storied cave with two openings. The stalactites, but especially the present stalagmites, have sculptural shapes, similar to statues, some representing people, others animals or flowers, and some

formations have changing colors between white - reddish - yellowish. Numerous bats of the *Myotis*, *Miniopterus* and *Rinolophus* species roost in the cave [2, 28].

The church under Stei is another beautiful and interesting tourist attraction, which is located at the foot of Steiul Ponorii. The church has the appearance of a wooden house with a porch, supported by four pillars that have bent as if under the weight of the weather. Here, the monk Nicodim (founder of the Tismana Monastery), in the century XIV, he wanted to build a monastery. The only evidence remained the small oak church in front of which you can still see some stones covered with earth that marked the crosses from the old cemetery [16, 20].

Moara Crăucenilor, that is, the mill of the inhabitants of the village of Cracu Muntelui, is the only mill that has remained intact and functional, on this water course. In the past, there were eight wooden mills lined up on Valea Morilor, used for the traditional grinding of wheat and corn. These bore names depending on the village and the villagers who used them, being private or belonging to the community, as follows: Andrei's Mill, Răculeștilor Mill, Crăucenilor Mill, Nebunilor Mill, Martineștilor Mill, Tihoilor Mill, two mills of the Băluceni [16, 23, 20].

The Field with Lapias, known in the literature as "Lapiezul de la Ponoarele", this is the most impressive karst phenomenon of this kind in Romania. The slates represent special karst forms that the water has encrusted in the limestone. They have the shape of channels, being real wrinkles furrowed by time on the calcareous surfaces [17, 24].

Lake Zăton, located beyond Dealul Peșterii, on the opposite side of the Bridge of God, just 15-20 minutes on foot from Conacu' Boierului, it presents special features, being the largest karst lake in Romania. In rainy springs, immediately after the snow melts, it can reach impressive dimensions: 2.5 km long, an area of 2 km² and more than 20 m deep, at the maximum point at the level of the sorb, during dry summers it can dry up completely, therefore it is also called Phantom Lake. After it dries, the landscape becomes arid, the mud on the bottom of the lake cracks,

having the appearance of a lunar landscape [24, 25].

On the opposite side of the lake, behind the Boarding house, also due to the accumulation of water, the Zătonul Mic Lake was formed. The karst lakes Zătonul Mare and Zătonul Mic, also called "Ghost Lakes", appear and disappear depending on the amount of precipitation: rain and snow melt. Cheile Băluței, connects Ponoarele with the spa resort of Bala. On their route, impressive landscapes are encountered, being crossed by a winding road with a special appearance. In 1967, sequences were filmed here for the Romanian film "Dacii" (The Dacians) [20].

The Ponoare Lilac Forest, a natural wonder, is a botanical reserve located 3 km from Conacu' Boierului. The reserve covers an area of 20 ha, at an altitude of 500 m and is the only Lilac Forest in the country preserved due to the mild climate, with sub-Mediterranean influences. It is declared a protected area of the Mehedinți Plateau Geopark.

Peștera Bulba, the cave is classified in category A, which includes caves of exceptional value which, through their scientific interest or the uniqueness of their resources, are representative of the national and international speleological heritage [8, 14].

Steiul Ponorii is a massive cornet, having the appearance of a dinosaur's spine, bordered by a rocky slope and is 597 m. At the foot of the Steiul there are 2 smaller caves, to which various legends are related: Peștera Soimului where it is said that people descended on times to catch this bird, used for falconry and the Cave of Elijah the Thief, which is linked to legends of outlaws and treasures. Also, from the base of the rock springs the Ponorii (Morilor) River.

Other important events that represent real attractions for tourists in the studied area are The Bat Festival which takes place every year on the first Sunday of May, during the period when the bat is in bloom. The venue is the well-known "Lilac Forest", located in the Prislop Valley, a unique reserve in the country with an area of approximately 20 hectares. It is a celebration dedicated to spring, when nature dresses up in festive clothes and to the

flowering of the Lilac, symbol of this locality. It is said that such parties were held here since ancient times. The Bat Festival became famous both for the special setting in which it took place, but especially because of the folk music performances. The lilac forest, as well as the festival itself, brings many tourists who discover the landscapes and sights of the area. Likewise, folklore, the popular music so loved both in the world of the village and in the city, resonates with great affection in our valleys, in Ponoarele [8, 10, 20].

Another significant event is the National Folklore Festival "PonoarePonoare", which takes place every year on the first weekend of August, in a superb natural amphitheatre in the immediate vicinity of the Bridge of God. It is a welcome opportunity for the inhabitants of the 16 villages of the commune to meet again and spend time together, listening to traditional music or eating outdoors. Every year, thousands of people come to this Festival, turning the quite common below the foothills into an anthill of happy people. The contest has grown year by year and has always maintained a superior quality among contests of its kind [20].

An event dedicated to cycling lovers is the competition called Ponoarele MTB Race, which is addressed to all lovers of sports and movement in nature. The main organizer is the Association for Tourism "Mehedintiu under the mountain", a non-governmental organization that aims to develop tourism in the northern area of Mehedinți county by promoting natural beauty, preserving local traditions, but also by encouraging the practice of sports in nature, in any season and at any age. This competition proposes two routes designed in such a way as to be attractive to as many cyclists as possible, regardless of age category, level of physical training or competitive experience [8, 23].

Ethnographic and folklore values. The area is distinguished by its wealth of ethnographic and folkloric values, which are an important part of the region's cultural identity. These values reflect the traditions, customs and creativity of local communities and include aspects such as traditional architecture, folk installations and techniques, folk costumes,

musical, choreographic and literary folklore, folk celebrations, festivals, village traditions and rituals. Wooden houses in the villages of the area you can still see traditional wooden houses with hipped roofs, which preserve the architecture specific to the area. Pottery: An important part of the Mehedinți tradition and the ceramics of the area is known for its traditional designs and for the vessels and decorative objects made by hand [22].

Hand weaving was a widespread activity in the past. Traditional textiles such as bark, woollen fabrics and embroidery are preserved as significant elements of local culture. The popular port of Mehedinți reflects influences of local and regional traditions, using specific materials and patterns. Folk costume is traditionally worn at cultural and festive events. Traditional Music - the area has a rich tradition in folk music, with instruments such as the flute, bagpipes and violin. The repertoire includes folk songs, ballads and Mehedițean hora (a traditional folk dance). Traditional Dances - such as boy dance and girl dance, are present at the celebration events. Traditional Holidays. Events such as Christmas, Easter and Christmas are marked by a series of customs and traditions involving songs, dances and specific dishes [22].

These ethnographic and folkloric values contribute to the preservation and transmission of local traditions, as well as to the promotion of the cultural identity of the area. They offer a rich and varied picture of the cultural heritage of this region and make a significant contribution to Romania's cultural diversity. The huge treasure in the rural area of Mehedinți is highlighted through events related to various religious or secular events, which bring generations together in exceptional events.

Study on the tourist activity at the Boarding house

The case study was carried out in Ponoarele commune, Mehedinți county, at the Conacu' Boierului farm boarding house, which has 14 rooms, as follows: 4 twin rooms, 5 rooms with double bed (180 x 200) and 5 suites (double bed + sofa bed). Each room is decorated differently, with hand-painted traditional motifs from all areas of the

country. This is how the cameras were born: Oltenia, Moldova, Banat, Dobrogea, Ponoarele, Muntenia, Maramureş, Mureş, Flori de Liliac, Bucovina, Crişana, Vatra Dornei, Clisura Dunării and Transilvania [20]. Conacu' Boierului is located just 150 meters from Ponoarele Cave and God's Bridge, Târgu Jiu City is 50 km away, Băile Herculane resort is 69 km away and Drobeta-Turnu Severin is 61 km away. The agrotourism boarding house has an accommodation capacity of 34 places, with equipment corresponding to the comfort category, for which it received classification.

Table 1. Evolution of tourist circulation indicators from the Boarding house, in the period 2018-2022

Years	Number of arrived tourists	Number overnight stays	Average number of tourists arriving per day	Average duration of stay (days)
2018	731	1,584	2	2.1
2019	1,021	2,390	2.8	2.3
2020	483	1,000	1.3	2
2021	695	1,521	1.9	2.1
2022	987	2,245	2.7	2.2

Source: processing from field and NIS data[18].

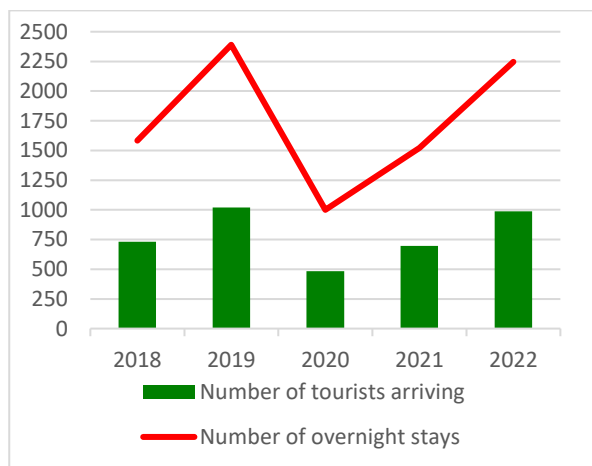


Fig. 1. Number of tourists arriving and overnight stays at the Boarding house, in the period 2018-2020
 Source: processing from field and NIS data[18].

From Table 1 and Figure 1, it can be seen that in the first year of the study, the Boarding house received 731 visitors and recorded over 1,584 overnight stays. In 2019, the number increased significantly to 1,021 tourists and 2,390 overnight stays. However, travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant drop in 2020 to just 483 tourists and 1,000 overnight

stays [21]. Tourism activity revived after 2021, with the number of tourists and overnight stays increasing significantly, a fact also observed in 2022, when the values of these indices were the highest.

Table 1 and Figure 2 highlight the fact that the number of tourists arriving per day was the highest in the second year of the study, of 2.8 tourists, a phenomenon that was also observed in the other analyzed indicator, the average length of stay, which reached the maximum value of 2.3 days. Also, from here you can see a drastic drop in the values of the two indicators in figure 2, in the year most affected by the pandemic 2020, to only 1.3 tourists, even if the average length of stay remained at an average value of over 2, 0 days.

Following the data recorded during the studied period, entered in table 2, it was found that tourist activity in the Ponoarele area began a slow but sure process of recovery, thanks to the drastic but effective measures aimed at its revival and re-adaptation to the new realities of economic life and everyday life of the locality. This process is highlighted by the fact that the values of the two indices (arrivals and average length of stay) began in 2022 to be close to those of the second year of study 2019 (2.7 and 2.2).

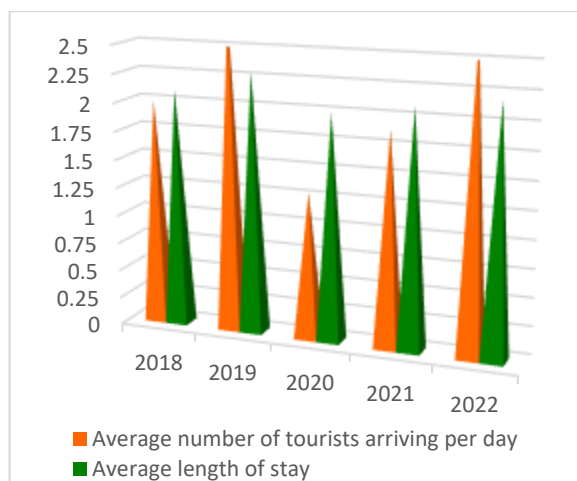


Fig. 2. Number of tourists arriving per day and the duration average stay at the Boarding house.

Source: processing from field and NIS data [18].

Regarding the tourist demand in Table 2, it can be seen that the number of tourists arriving at boarding houses showed large

fluctuations, especially in terms of the difference between normal years and 2020, the peak of the pandemic. Comparing the values recorded at the 3 daisies boarding house and those of the 4 daisies boarding house taken into the study, it can be very easily observed that the differences between them are significant, a fact that was primarily due to the services and quality management practiced at this boarding house.

Table 2. Tourist demand at rural tourist boarding houses in the locality, in the period 2018-2022

Specification	Number of arrived tourists at Boarding house				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Boarding house of 4 daisy	731	1,021	483	695	987
Boarding house of 3 stars/daisy	567	820	323	529	745

Source: processing from field and NIS data[18].

Table 3. Number of days tourists stayed at boarding house, in the period 2018-2022

Years	Number of arrived tourists	Number nights	Total number tourist days (t)
2018	731	1,584	1,157,904
2019	1,021	2,390	2,440,190
2020	483	1,000	483,000
2021	695	1,521	1,057,095
2022	987	2,245	2,215,815

Source: processing from field and NIS data [18].

Analyzing the data in Table 3, it can be seen that in 2018, the boarding house received 731 tourists, with 1,584 overnight stays and which led to the registration of 1,157,904 days of accommodation. In 2019, this number increased significantly, reaching 1,021 tourist arrivals, 2,390 overnight stays and 2,440,190 day-tourists. The severe restrictions in 2020 made the total number of travel days only 483,000, a fact that strongly affected the economic efficiency of the tourism activity carried out in this guesthouse. In the following years, thanks to some very good and efficient management measures taken by the owner, the values of this indicator, listed in table 3, increased constantly and continuously reaching in 2021, a total of 1,057,095 days of accommodation, and in the year 2022 to over 2,215,815 tourist days. The large number of accommodation days also

reflects the permanent and sustained concern of the owner and the staff of the guesthouse to offer very good quality services, which will attract new and loyal customers.

Table 4. Accommodation capacity in operation (places-days) in the Boarding house, in the period 2018-2022

Years	Number of days of operation	Number of places of accommodation	The capacity of accommodation in operation
2018	355	34	12,070
2019	340	34	11,560
2020	251	34	8,534
2021	334	34	11,356
2022	345	34	11,730

Source: processing from field and NIS data[18].

Table 4 shows the data related to the accommodation capacity in operation (places-days) of boarding houses in the period 2018-2022. In 2018, the boarding house had 12,410 bed-days and operated for 355 days. In 2019, the boarding house had 11,560 bed-days and operated for 340 days. In 2020, the hostel had 7,324 bed-days and operated for 251 days, possibly due to travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the boarding house had 9,520 bed-days and operated for 334 days. For the year 2022, an operational accommodation capacity of 9,980 place-days and an operation of 345 days are estimated.

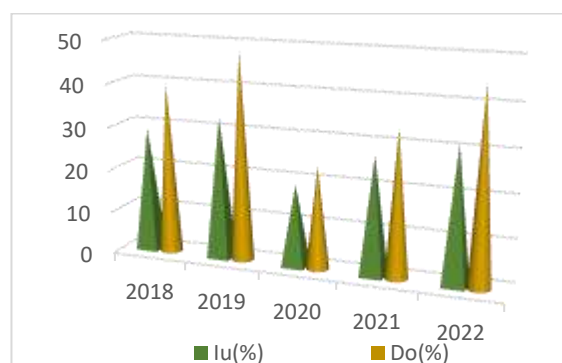


Fig. 3. Graph of the variation of the utilization index Iu (%) and the degree of occupancy Do (%), in the period 2018-2022.

Source: processing from field and NIS data [18].

As can be seen from Figure 3, in 2018, the Iu utilization index was 28.9%. It increased significantly in 2019, reaching 32.8%. However, in 2020, the usage index dropped to only 28.9%, in 2021, the usage index increased again, and in 2022 it reached again,

close to the maximum value of 32%. From the same figure, it can also be seen that in 2018, the occupancy rate was 39.9%, it increased significantly in 2019, reaching 48.5%. However, in 2020, the degree of occupancy decreased significantly, following that later after the removal of all restrictions on the movement of tourists, it will steadily recover, reaching in 2022, a percentage of over 44.8. The high values of the main indicators regarding tourist supply and demand from the boarding house were, in our opinion, also due to the relatively good price of accommodation and quality services, practiced at the boarding house under study, leading to a favourable quality/price ratio. The rates are differentiated according to the quality of the accommodation conditions in each room. The loyalty of tourists has also led to an increase in demand and the values of the main indicators of tourist traffic, because in addition to the offer of accommodation, the management of the boarding house was also oriented towards the diversification of food and leisure services, the Boarding house offering breakfast, half board, full board, gastronomy, traditional recipes, cure of natural products made in the household or farm, etc.

The restaurant has a number of 35 places where you can serve the specialties of the manor, soups, snacks on the run, for those who are hungry, fish, borrowed from the city, snacks, dessert and picnic basket, as well as traditional Gorjense food: Tismana trout with garlic sauce, sprinkled with wine from our own production, sarmaluțe with polenta, peasant stew, chicken soup, bean soup with smoked bone, sausage, dairy and meat products obtained from farm animals, compotes (stewed fruit), home-made juices [20].

Private events can be held in the Pension's restaurant on the major Christian holidays (Easter, Christmas, New Year's Eve, etc.) or upon request, the reservation can be made before the arrival time, with a time interval greater than 5 hours. A terrace with over 50 seats can also be provided on request, and the conference room, which is equipped with all the necessary technical equipment, can also be requested.

Leisure services in the Boarding house were also an important factor in attracting tourists and positively influencing the analyzed tourist indices. These consisted of walking, sports, hiking, horseback riding, fishing and hunting, cultural, religious, spa, congress and conference tourism, cycling, table tennis, billiards, children's playground, game room and others.

CONCLUSIONS

As found in this study, the researched area is part of the area of Mehedinți county, which has a significant potential for the development of agritourism and rural tourism, having a series of natural and cultural characteristics that can attract tourists willing to explore the countryside and enjoy of authentic experiences. The area enjoys an impressive variety of landforms, including canyons, caves, mountainous areas, dense forests and areas with Mediterranean influences. This diversity of landscapes creates the right setting for various tourist activities, from easy hiking to extreme sports in the natural environment. The cultural and historical heritage has a rich heritage of archaeological remains, monasteries, castles and tourist attractions related to the history of the place. These can be included in tourist itineraries to give a wider perspective on the region. Also, agricultural activities and traditional crafts provide opportunities for tourists to engage in traditional agricultural activities, and traditional crafts such as pottery and weaving can be introduced into leisure activities and tourist itineraries.

A benefit of agritourism in Ponoarele commune is its contribution to the sustainable development of the community, by promoting traditional agriculture and local production, not only representing an economic opportunity, but also an effective means of preserving traditions, promoting sustainability and improving the quality of life for the residents of the community, creating lasting connections between the local community and those who come to discover the charm of Ponoarele village. Holiday homes or agritourism boarding houses can offer tourists

a comfortable and authentic stay, giving them the chance to experience the rural lifestyle and especially a revival of the authentic way of living in this area, such as plai mansions, which have a strong local specificity and authenticity.

From the analysis of the main indicators of tourist activity, it was found that the priority of agritourism in Ponoarele and Pension is focused on economic development, by increasing incomes, thus causing significant changes in the structure of expenses, increasing investments, expanding economic activities through the emergence of new branches related to agritourism (a real local industry). Along with the development of this activity, there is also a constant increase in commercial activities, to which both tourists and the local population turn. Households that practice agritourism reinvest the income obtained in improving their own homes, upgrading tourist facilities, repairing and purchasing household and household equipment. All this leading to the provision of decent living conditions in Ponoare, as well as to the diversification of employment options, especially for the young population, who are often the most vulnerable and who most frequently want to leave the area.

A very relevant aspect to emphasize is that agritourism in Ponoarele can totally influence the behaviour of local authorities, in the sense of remodelling, modernizing and streamlining the general infrastructure in the locality, restoring all the tourist attractions and heritage buildings and preserving the authentic way of life in the plai mansions, specific to the area.

Their behaviours were also influenced by the fact that agritourism has demonstrated that it has the ability to preserve and promote local traditions, thus, local artisans have a platform to exhibit and pass on their traditional crafts to future generations. This process of preserving cultural identity is vital to maintain a balance between modernization and respect for cultural roots.

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