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THE CORRELATION BETWEEN ALMĂJULUI VALLEY WATER MILLS AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Valea Almajului started to be known as a tourist destination due to the water mills from Rudăria. Although the entire area is studded with water mills, only Rudăria managed to become a nationally known destination.

The purpose of this article is to identify the correlations between the existence of water mills, tourism promotion, and the development of HoReCa businesses in the area.

In the article the authors used the method of documentary analysis, structuring the information obtained from the bibliography at the end of the paper.

Following the research, it was confirmed that the tourist development of the Valea Almajului area depends on the existence of water mills correlated with tourism promotion

Introduction

- Romania has areas where ecotourism activities can be carried out. Most of these areas are not known to tourists and their tourist potential is not valued.
- The Almajului Valley is an exclusively rural intra-montane area, well vascularised by the rivers and streams that descend from the mountain slopes on their way to the Nera River. Human communities developed around each river, with a village or a hamlet developing on each tributary. Water mills appeared as a natural necessity for man to be able to feed himself more easily. Using simple technology, using the power of water, the strength of stones and the versatility of wood, the man-built water mills. The main purpose was to grind the grains.
- What hundreds of years ago was a necessity for the locals is today the basis of the economic development of this area through rural tourism.

Material and method

- In their scholarly exposition, the authors meticulously applied the documentary analysis method, a rigorous approach that involved systematically organizing and meticulously scrutinizing the wealth of information culled from the bibliography provided at the conclusion of the article.
- This methodological precision enabled a thorough and comprehensive exploration of pertinent literature, ensuring that no valuable insights were overlooked. By delving deeply into the referenced works, the authors enriched the study's theoretical framework, grounding their analysis in a solid foundation of existing knowledge and scholarly discourse.
- This meticulous examination not only broadened the scope of understanding but also enhanced the depth of analysis, allowing for nuanced insights and a more robust interpretation of the subject matter.

Results and discussions

- Due to the mountain relief and the limited access roads, the Caras-Severin county is divided into several areas. Each area is well defined geographically, socially, and culturally. Therefore, depending on the natural resources that prevailed in certain areas, the life of the inhabitants was developed and adapted. One of these areas, part of the Caras-Severin county, is the Almajului Valley.
- The Almaj Valley is an intramontane depression, located in the southern part of the Banat Mountains.

1. The situation of Water Mills in the Almajului Valley during the period 1874 - 2023



Figure 3. The number of existing mills in the year 2023 in each village of the Almajului Valley area

In conclusion, Eftimie Murgu (Rudăria) is the village where the largest number of mills have been preserved and renovated. Eftimie Murgu owns 22% of the millinological heritage of the Almajului Valley. The Almajului Valley lost 71% of the mills it had a century and a half ago.

2. The economic life of the area

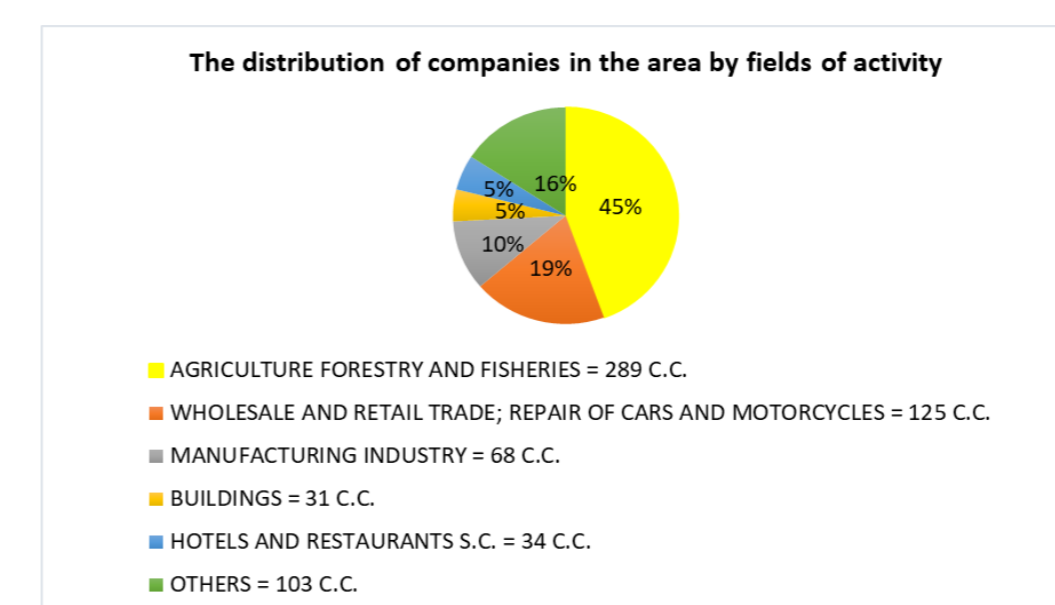


Figure 4. The distribution of companies in the area by fields of activity

According to the data, the area is predominantly agricultural. Activities in the category of hotels and restaurants represent only 5% of the total commercial activities conducted here.

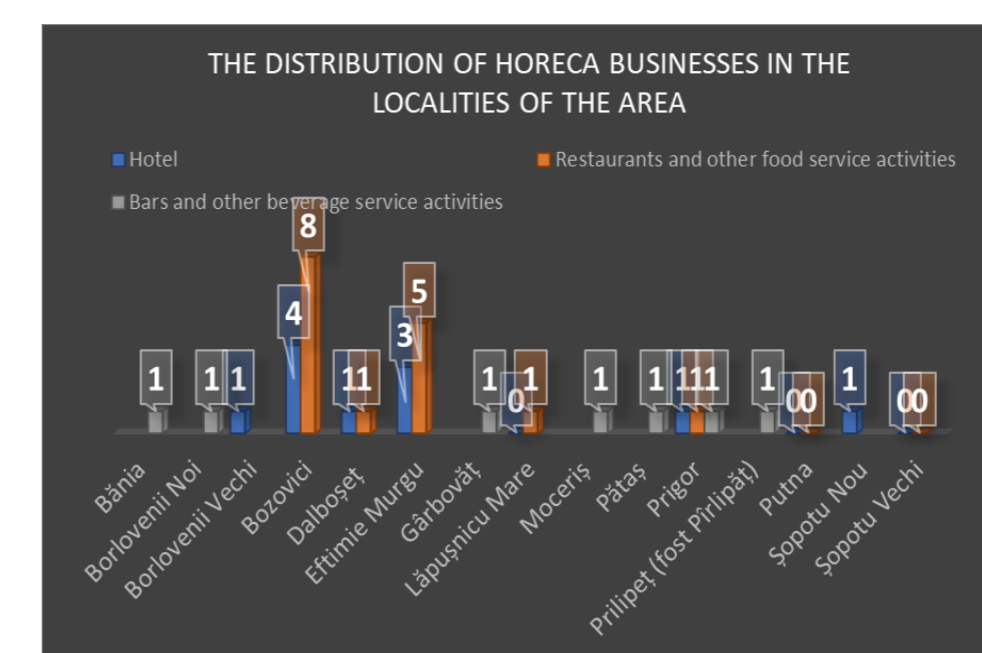


Figure 6. The distribution of HORECA businesses in the area.

To elaborate, within this context, there exist 27 businesses that actively contribute to the turnover through tourism-related activities in the area. These enterprises exhibit varying degrees of dependence on tourism for their revenue generation. Consequently, at present, tourism accounts for approximately 4% of the total business activity in Almajului Valley. This statistic underscores the growing significance of tourism as a component of the local economy, albeit within a diverse economic landscape encompassing multiple sectors.

3. How tourism has impacted the economic development of the area

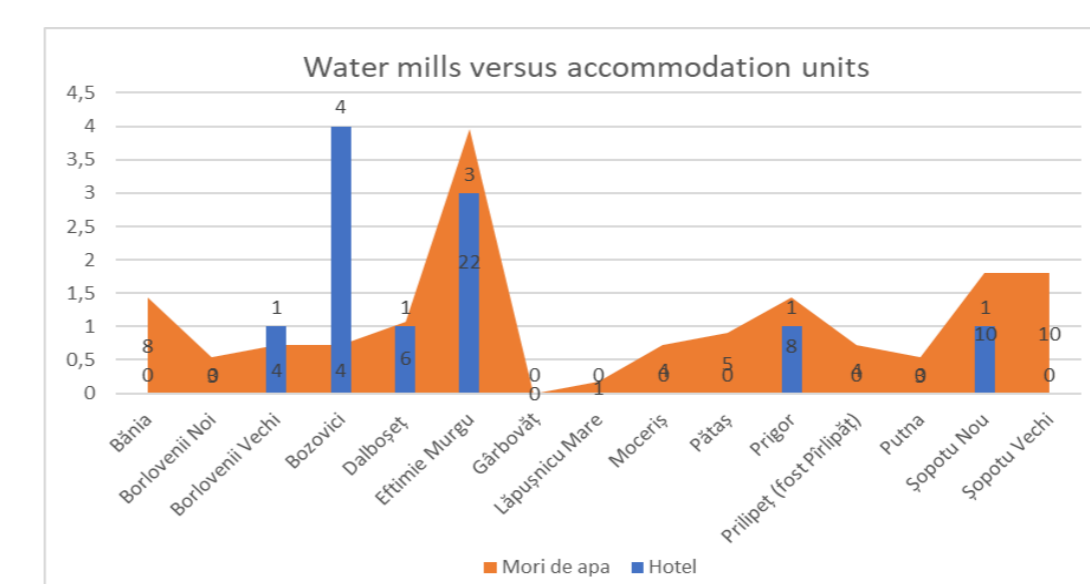


Figure 8. Water mills versus accommodation units

When we talk about tourism, the most suggestive indicator is the number of accommodation places. If any of the other components of the HORECA field can be impacted by locals and visitors, hotels are used only by those who choose to stay overnight, becoming tourists. According to the data above, the largest number of accommodation units is in Bozovici, although there are not the largest numbers of water mills in this place. The development of Bozovici town did not have the water mills as its main starting point, but is based on the fact that it is the largest city, being the economic and cultural center of the area. In Eftimie Murgu, being a secluded village in the foothills of the mountains, tourism developed due to the number of visitors who came to the area and wanted to spend the night here.

CONCLUSIONS

In Eftimie Murgu (Rudăria), the growth of tourism is intricately linked to the presence and active promotion of water mills. Simply having water mills in the area is insufficient for driving profitable businesses, particularly in the hospitality and catering (Horeca) sector, without concerted efforts in both online and offline promotion. The synergy between the historical charm of water mills and effective promotional strategies is essential for attracting visitors and creating sustainable tourism ventures in the region.

A tangible illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in Sopotu Veci, where despite the presence of the most significant and historically valuable mills in the Almaj Valley, there is a notable absence of businesses in the hospitality and catering (Horeca) industry. This underscores the notion that the mere existence of cultural landmarks such as water mills does not inherently lead to the development of thriving tourism-related enterprises. Conversely, regional centers, even if not traditionally considered tourist destinations, demonstrate an ability to evolve and attract visitors. These more prominent villages not only draw tourists intentionally visiting the area but also capture the attention of passersby, thereby contributing to the broader tourism economy of the region.