

TOURISM – THE HOPE FOR THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEHEDIŢI COUNTY

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Abstract: It is well known the fact that tourism is a vector of the regional and national economic development, as the practice of so many countries around the world shows it. Is this case the case of Romania, and more precisely of Mehedinţi County? And if so, we question by what means, and if not, why not? What are the factors that keep us away from reaching economic wellbeing if the region is endowed with real treasures of relief, climate, anthropic? What are the directions to be followed and the actions to be taken to remove the obstacles to achieving a high level of living in the region by practicing sustainable tourism in the area?

Keywords: tourism, economic development, wellbeing, directions of action

The tourism potential in Mehedinţi County

The tourism potential in Mehedinţi County is high (fig. no.1), of great value and diversity, comprising elements of:

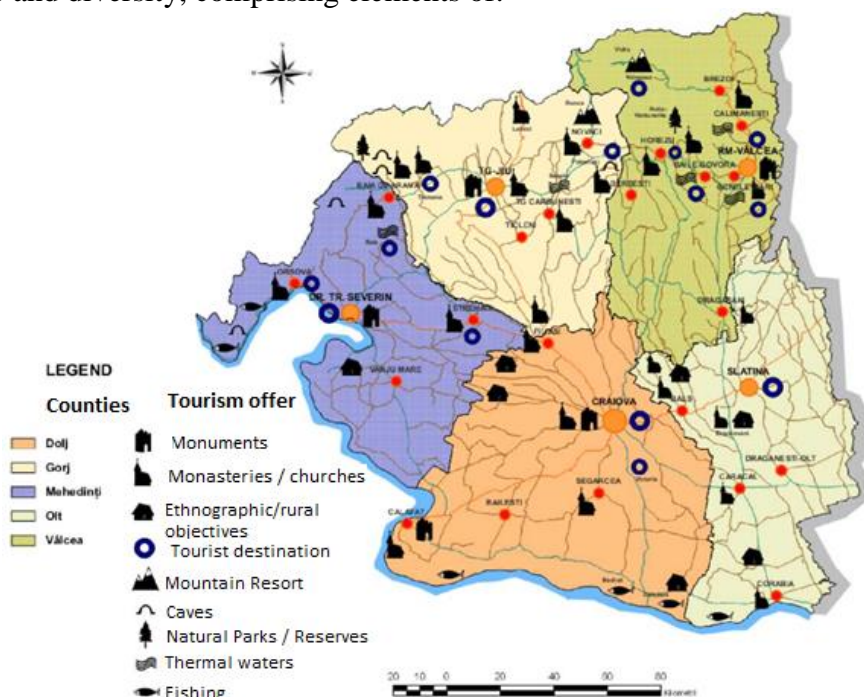


Fig. no. 1 – Tourism destination Oltenia

Source: ADR Oltenia – *Studiu privind dezvoltarea turismului la nivel regional*, pg.49
<http://www.adroltenia.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/STUDIU-TURISM-FINAL.pdf>

- the morphological touristic potential: represented by the *Mehedinti Mountains* (which extend from the south-west to the northeast on a distance of 50 kilometers, are visited by enthusiasts of the mountain tourism and geological researchers who travel on these massive following marked paths); the *Mehedinți Plateau*, having a mountain-like structure and relief, but a hill-like altitude, with its well-known tourist attractions (the Topolnița karst complex, the Topolnița Gorges, the karst phenomena from Isverna, the karst formations from Balta, Bulba cave, Gura Ponicovei Cave);

- the biogeographical tourism potential: the submediterranean climate, specific to Mehedinți County, is conducive to the existence of certain species and vegetal associations specific to the southern region, as well as floristic rarities of great tourist interest. Also, the fauna of the county (for example, the dry turtle, the horned viper, the carpathian scorpion, the chaser, the crater, the wild boar, the jar, the laugh, the fox, the squirrel, the wildcat, the hammer etc.), alongside protected areas and nature reserves, are undoubted tourist attractions;

- the anthropic tourist potential: the representative anthropic tourism objectives are the hydropower and navigation systems of Iron Gates I (the largest in Romania) and II, the historical monuments, the archaeological vestiges, the folk architecture monuments from all over the county, in total 569 objectives of Patrimony (according to the Ministry of Culture);

- the tourist potential represented by the traditional habits and activities: fishing with ” vârșă” (which is a long-haul fishing gear made up of a basket made of wicker with narrow mouth and turned inwards in the form of funnels), fishing with net; agriculture, animal breeding (goats, sheep, cows), harvesting of fruits (figs, strawberries, wild strawberries, blackberries, rhubarb); Mills with a hoax.

The welfare of the population in Mehedinți County

Knowing the tourism valence and importance for the economic boom/development of the regions where it is taking place, could we conclude, on the basis of the rich and diversified tourist patrimony of the county, that the county's population has a high living standard, as a result of an effervescent tourism activity?

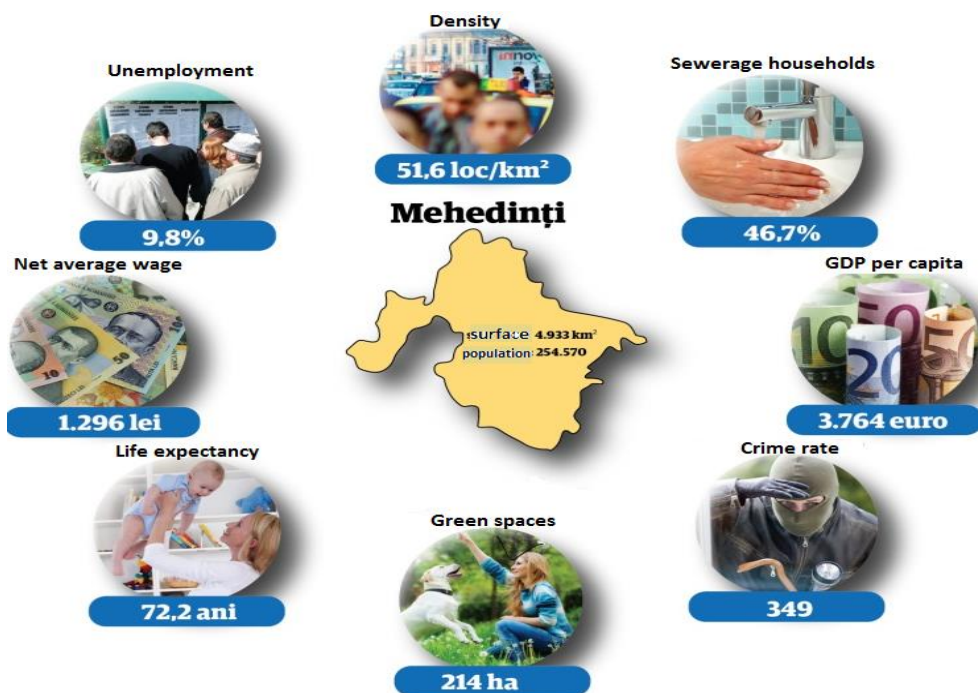
Let's just see what the statistics say: a study conducted in 2013 revealed that Mehedinți County is on the penultimate place in Romania's ranking according to the living standards of the population. "The indices (based on the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the National Employment Agency and the National Prognosis Commission) taken into account in the achievement of the ranking were:

- the unemployment rate
- the net average wage earned by employees in each county
- the estimated GDP per capita for 2013
- the life expectancy at birth of the inhabitants of the counties in Romania

- the percentage of households equipped with sewage facilities in each county
- the crime rate in each county of Romania - the number of final convictions for every 100,000 inhabitants
- the area of green areas in the urban areas of each county.

The score was awarded for each of the seven indices according to the place of the counties in the ranking, from 42 points to 1 point "(Gândul Financiar, 2013).

According to the evaluation made by the aforementioned publication, Mehedinți County was on the penultimate place in the ranking of the counties with the highest standard of living because "the level of living in Mehedinți County is" eroded "by a high rate of unemployment and crime, as well as a modest contribution of the inhabitants to the local economy" (Gândul Financiar, 2013).



Legend:

- density 2011 (inhabitants/km²) - National Institute of Statistics / Census of population and housing 2011
- unemployment 2012 (%) - The National Employment Agency
- net average wage 2012 (ron) - National Institute of Statistics
- life expectancy at birth 2010 (years) - National Institute of Statistics
- green spaces 2011 (hectares) - National Institute of Statistics
- crime rate 2011 (the number of final convictions for every 100,000 inhabitants) – N.I.S.
- GDP per capita 2013 (eur) - National Prognosis Commission
- Households with sewerage facilities 2011 (% of total) - Census of population and housing 2011
- surface (km²) - National Institute of Statistics
- population (number of persons) - National Institute of Statistics

Fig. no. 2 – Assessment of living standards in Mehedinți County

Source: Gândul Financiar, ”MEHEDINȚI. Cum se trăiește în Mehedinți, județ care ocupă penultimul loc în topul regiunilor cu cele mai bune condiții de viață din România” (8 Aprilie 2013)

It is true that this grim situation concerning the living conditions in the county was valid 4 years ago; meanwhile, the things have evolved and the situation has changed. Unfortunately, not for the best, not even for the good, because in 2017, the Mehedinti County ranks first in terms of unemployment in Romania.

So, the so much-desired economic development is still to be expected, and even tourism does not seem to make a big difference in changing this trend. But why, because the resources (both natural and anthropic) are numerous (as seen from the above). Is this touristic potential, though varied, actually worthless, without any trace of attractiveness?

How attractive is the tourism potential?

If we cannot have any doubt about the existence of the tourism potential, at least in the light of the mentioned above, then we are putting the question regarding the degree of attractiveness of the tourism objectives in Mehedinți County.

In order to determine the attractiveness of the tourism potential of a destination, there is used the formula of the tourism attractiveness index, which is determined by the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism (INCDT) by taking into account the natural tourism potential, the anthropic tourism potential, the technical-material facilities and tourism general infrastructure.

On the basis of these elements, the degree of tourism attractiveness of the Mehedinti County was calculated according to: the quality, originality and competitiveness of each element in the analysis, and even more: there was drawn a comparison between the county in question and the other counties that together make up the Region: South-West Oltenia. As shown the data in the table no. 1 show, the Mehedinți County is ranked first, having the highest tourism attractiveness in the South-West Oltenia region (ADR Oltenia – *Studiu privind dezvoltarea turismului la nivel regional*, pg.48).

Table no. 1 - The tourism attractiveness index for South-West Oltenia region

<i>I. Natural tourism resources:</i>	Dolj	Gorj	Mehedinți	Olt	Vâlcea
Landscape	1	2	3		2
Relief: diversity of forms and attractiveness of landscapes;	1	3	3		2
Climate: climatic elements, favouring the development of the tourist activity;	1	2	3		3
Water network: water courses and surfaces;	2	2	3		3
Fauna: cynegetic and fishing funds;	1	2	3		3
Flora: forests, specific vegetation;	1	3	3		3

Protected areas;	1	3	3		2
Therapeutic factors;	0	1	2	0	3
Quality of the environment;	1	2	2	0	2
II. Anthropic tourism resources:					
Historic and art monuments	2	3	2	1	2
Archaeological vestiges	2	1	3	2	1
Churches and monasteries	2	2	1	1	2
Museums	2	3	2	1	1
Traditional architecture	1	2	1	1	1
Crafts and handicrafts	2	3	2	1	1
Traditional customs	2	3	1	1	1
III. Technical-material facilities					
Accommodation units	1	2	3	1	3
Food and beverage facilities: classical or specific restaurants (with traditional food) bars, etc	1	2	2	1	2
Recreational units	0	1	2	0	1
Spa treatment units	0	1	1	0	3
IV. General infrastructure					
Ways of access: road, railway, air, naval	2	2	2	1	1
Urban networks: water supply, sewerage system, natural gas supply, electric energy, thermic energy	2	2	2	1	2
Ecological points for collecting waste	1	1	1	0	1
The tourism attractiveness index	0,42	0,69	0,72	0,28	0,65
TOTAL: SW Oltenia Region			0,55		

So, on the one hand, we have the most attractive, valuable tourist potential in the area, and on the other hand one of the poorest economic counties in the country. Here comes another dilemma:

What can be done for regional economic development supported by tourism?

The specialists in the field claim that the answer lies in the coordinated and rational valorisation of the potential tourism offer, together with the development of the specific and general tourism infrastructure because, basically, they represent the sensitive point of the Mehedinți County (figure 3).

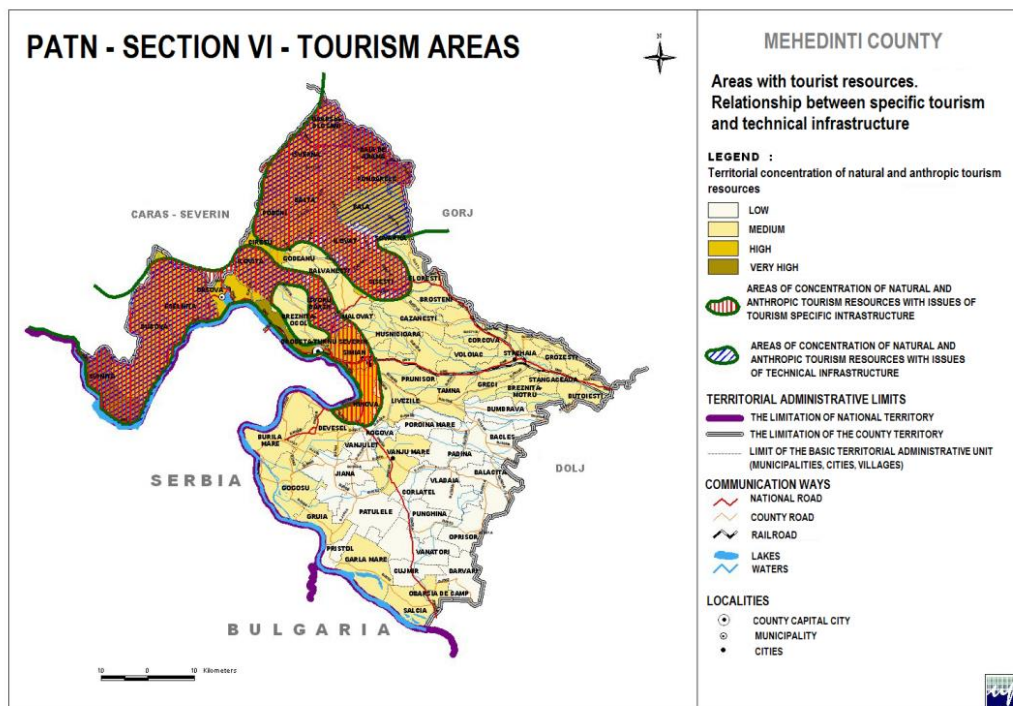


Fig. no. 3 – Correlation between Tourism Resources - Infrastructure

Source: Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Administrației Publice, *Planul de amenajare a teritoriului național, secțiunea a vi-a - zone turistice*, (accesat la 28 Septembrie 2010)
<http://www.mdrt.ro/studii-de-fundamentare-privind-patn-sectiunea-a-vi-a-zone-cu-resurse-turistice>

In the document "The Regional Development Strategy of SW Oltenia 2007-2013", there are traced the actions that are desired to be taken in order to achieve the objective of regional economic development by performing a competitive tourism that exploits the natural and anthropic heritage, and the actions are:

- ”creating jobs;
- increasing the visibility of the region by creating and editing flyers, brochures, other categories of presentation documentation;
- expanding tourism businesses by creating support services for tourism businesses and by professional associations in the field of tourism” (Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională Sud-Vest Oltenia, 2006).

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