

ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF SĂCELU SPA RESORT, GORJ COUNTY, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *Săcelu Resort is the only spa resort in Gorj County and its tourist potential is given by the mineral waters which have been used since ancient times to treat different disease. During the communist period, the Săcelu resort experienced a very strong development, but in the present day it does not benefit of promotion from local authorities or travel agencies. This paper aims to analyse the tourist potential and its degree of capitalization in Săcelu resort.*

KEY WORDS: *tourism potential, tourist traffic, Săcelu resort, spa, Gorj county,*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *R0, R1, Z3*

1. INTRODUCTION

Săcelu resort is a locality in Gorj County located approximately 32 km North East of Târgu Jiu and 20 km North of Târgu Cărbunești, located on both banks of the Blahnița River. Săcelu resort is located at the near Săcelu Hill, at an altitude of 340 m and consists of five villages. It is rich in springs with mineral waters and therapeutic mud.

The Săcelu resort owes its birth and the progress of the mineral waters that cross the cemented sedimentary rocks, through the cracks created in them. At the end of the Tertiary, the movements of the earth's crust produced the lifting and undulation of the deposits of organic and mineral remains transported by waters from the Parâng Mountains, thus forming the contour of the area of the Carpathians Hills and the Getic Piedmont (Candea, et al., 2003).

The continuity of the population in the area of Săcelu spa resort is proved by the archaeological discoveries belonging to the Neolithic, the Bronze Age, the Roman period and the Middle Ages, the first documentary attestation dating from 1480.

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The mineral waters from Săcelu have been used since ancient times, since the Daco-Roman period, the population in the area used the mineral waters to treat various diseases. In 1866, the specialists of the Ministry of Interior (to which public health also belonged) began to study these waters. In the same year, due to its therapeutic quality, Săcelu parish was declared a spa resort.

During the communist period, the Săcelu spa resort experienced a very strong development under the guidance of the O.J.T. Gorj, a company that has benefited from nationalization since 1950. Significant investments have been made in building a modern treatment base, a hotel, pools and beaches.

After 1989, the Săcelu resort had a period of decline, continuation of the policies of that period, regarding the land and real estate claims built before 1948. But, after the regression period, starting from the year 2000, the pools with mineral springs were more well maintained, new villas and boarding houses have appeared, all benefiting from modern accommodation and treatment conditions, all this proving that there is a perspective for the development of the resort for therapeutic and tourist purposes.

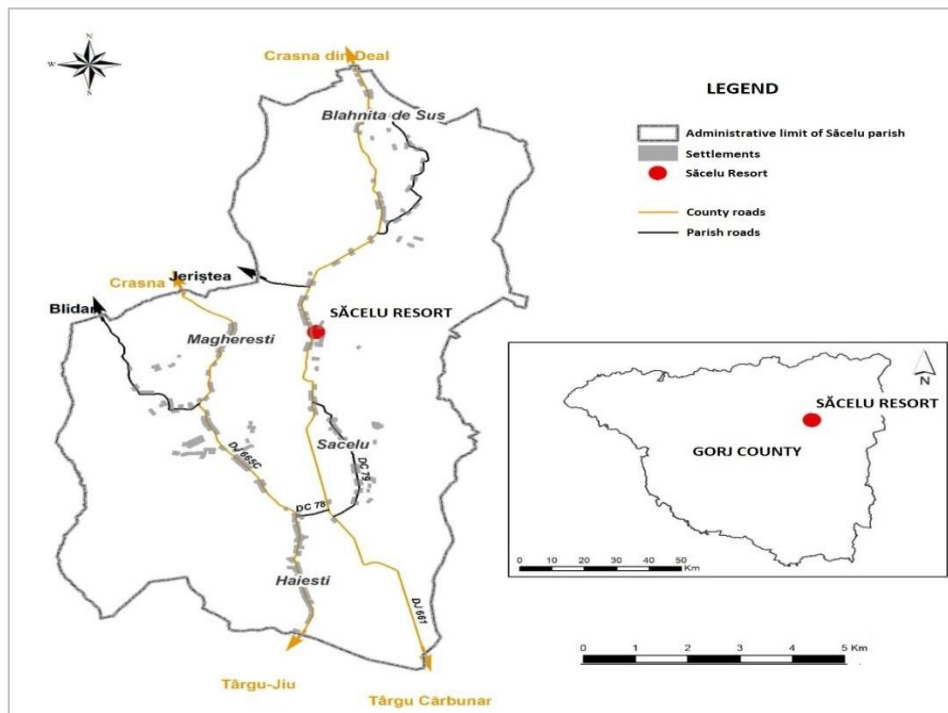


Figure 1. Location of Săcelu Resort and the main access roads

The access roads to Săcelu spa resort are: railway with access through Târgu Cărbunești or Târgu Jiu stations on the Filiași - Petroșani - Simeria line, then by bus to the locality and roads with two options: from Târgu-Jiu on the 67 national road Târgu Jiu - Râmnicu - Vâlcea and then on the 661 county road (32 km) and from Târgu-Cărbunești (18 km), crossing Câmpul Mare (figure 1).

2. ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST POTENTIAL

The tourist potential of a territory represents the set of natural, economic and cultural-historical elements, which present certain possibilities of tourist capitalization, give a certain functionality for tourism and therefore constitute premises for the development of the tourism activity (Slusariuc, 2015).

The climate in Săcelu spa resort has calming and sparing effects - sedative (lowland and hilly) with nuances of stimulation being free of large and sudden atmospheric variations and the unipolarity coefficient (number of positive ions / number of negative ions) is subunit = 0.76 (negative ions are predominant).

Therapeutic indications: musculoskeletal disorders (rheumatic, inflammatory, degenerative, osteoporosis); post-traumatic conditions (post-traumatic joint stiffness, conditions after joint operations, conditions after fractures, sprains, dislocations); peripheral neurological disorders (mild paresis, paralysis); nervous system disorders; respiratory diseases (people exposed to respiratory toxins, people with frequent microbial and viral pneumonia); digestive, hepatic-biliary and renal disorders.

The component rocks belong to the Tertiary era and are crossed by many narrow cracks through which the mineral waters reach the surface. The Blahnița River, crossing the sub-Carpathian hills, created a narrow and deep valley, thus highlighting the ascending mineral springs. This potential of hydro mineral sources is exploited in Săcelu resort through four mineral water basins, springs and boreholes. The therapeutic value of basins is given by the high content of mineral salts (sulphur, chlorine, bromine and iodine). In addition to the mineral springs on the bottom of the four basins, there are also those with different healing properties.

In the centre of Săcelu parish, four artificial lakes with mineral waters have been arranged, used by tourists in the external spa belts (Figure 2) that contain salt, iodized, chlorinated, brominated and mud mineral waters. Of the four pools, two are used as swimming pools and the other two for mud therapy. For the internal cure there is only one captured source, with sulphurous, chlorinated, sodium mineral water that has a pH of 8.06, called Săcelata.



Figure 2. The leisure pool complex within Săcelu resort

The Săcelata spring (Holy Trinity) located on the left slope of Blahnița, in the south-eastern part of the resort, is located on a fault that separates the Săcelu conglomerates from the clay-bituminous shale. Following chemical analysis, the total mineralization between 2,248-3,282 ⁴ mg / l. Due to the positive effects of hydrogen sulphide on the body, spring water is used to treat hypotonic gastritis, colitis, diabetes and heavy metal poisoning (Câșlaru, 2010).

The tourist potential of groundwater is capitalized in the four basins, as follows:

➤ Basin number 1 has an area of only 25 m² and a depth of 2 m, but it is extremely important due to the thickness of the therapeutic mud layer so beneficial in treating rheumatism; the flow of the springs that supply the basin is 2.6 m³ / day. The water in the basin is sulphurous, chlorinated, brominated, sodium, athermal and has low free gas emissions.

➤ Basin number 2 has a flow of springs of 15 m³ / day, an area of 550 m² and a depth of 2 m. In this basin an important role has sapropelic mud which has a thickness of about 0.2 m. Mineral water is sulphurous, chlorinated, bromide, iodide, sodium, athermal and at the exit through the cracks created in the soil is accompanied by weak gas emissions.

➤ Basin number 3 has an area of 800 m² and a depth of 1.5-2 m and the flow of the springs is 9 m³ / day, it benefiting from additional supply from a nearby drilling. The water is sulphurous, chlorinated, brominated, iodized. The water of the pool has colour variations being influenced by the season or temperature. The light green or whitish green colour is due to the oxidation process that the drilling water that feeds the basin undergoes.

➤ Basin number 4 ("Brown Basin" or "Healing Spring"), has 3000 m², 2-2.5 m depth and flow of 17 m³ / day. Water is rich in sulphur, bromine, chlorine, iodine and sodium. From here, by pumping, the bath water is sent to the bathtub, at a temperature of 60-65°C. The water in this pool has sudden colour variations.

In order to capitalize on the mineral waters in the area, over time, several drillings were carried out to increase the flow of mineralized water. At this time in Săcelu resort there are five reconditioned boreholes, used by tourists in the spas.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2013 Oltenia Energy Complex invested in the modernization of the beach for the 3 thermal water pools through: fine sand, umbrellas, 200 sunbeds, first aid point, new showers and toilets and a terrace where food and soft drinks can be consumed.

In 2014, investment was made in the modernization of the accommodation spaces and the treatment base so that they can be used all year round, not only seasonally.

In 2020, at the level of Săcelu spa resort, there were a total number of 172 accommodation places in a hotel (140 places) and an agritourism pension (32 places).

The evolution of accommodation places for the studied period is presented in the following table (table 1).

The number of accommodation in the hotel decreased in the studied years by 8.9% (156 places in 1995 compared to 140 places in 2019), while in tourist villas the situation is dramatic, in the period 2010-2019 there is no more accommodation. In 1995

there were 185 places for tourist villas and in 2005 they had already decreased to 48 places, a decrease of 25.9% in just 10 years so that in 2010 there would be no place to stay in villas.

Table 1. Tourist accommodation capacity by types of tourist reception structures

Accommodation type	Year / Number			
	1995	2005	2010	2019
Hotels	156	152	152	140
Villas	185	48	-	-
Agrotourism guesthouses	-	20	30	32
Total	341	220	182	172

It is noteworthy that since 2005 a tourist boarding house with 20 places has appeared, which until 2019 reached 32 places, an increase of 62%.

In 2019, out of the total accommodation places in the reception units in Săcelu resort, the largest share is held by hotel places (81.4%) followed by places in agritourism, approximately 4 times less (18.6 %).

It should be mentioned regarding the classification category of accommodation units in Săcelu that the hotel is classified with 1 star and the pension with 3 daisies.

At the level of Săcelu resort there are optimal conditions for spa tourism but also for hiking tourism, but there are not enough tourist reception units, and the existing ones have minimum comfort conditions.

Aspects unfavourable to the development of tourism in Săcelu are also related to the lack of infrastructure as well as the conditions strictly necessary for modern tourism (places for spending free time etc.).

According to the Săcelu parish Hall, in the resort there is a restaurant canteen open within the Hotel, which belongs to the Oltenia Energy Complex, with a capacity of 120 seats, this being used both on patients staying in the hotel and on those coming to Săcelu for a longer period. short time. There is also a restaurant at the existing guesthouse in the resort and one on the beach of the four pools, also managed by the Oltenia Energy Company.

The leisure units are missing in the Săcelu resort, here there are no means for entertainment such as clubs, game rooms or amusement park nor for sports leisure such as a sports field.

Instead, there is a treatment base that is currently being developed and 400 modern treatment procedures can be performed. The therapy takes place in Săcelu between May 1st and September 15th, but the months of July and August are the busiest, often the requests exceeding the capacity. Many patients in the county travel every day for treatment. It should be mentioned that the treatment base was established for the treatment and recovery of miners from the Oltenia Energy Complex.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST TRAFFIC

4.1. The evolution of tourists' number arrived in Săcelu resort

The number of tourists is one of the representative indicators of tourist traffic. It is obtained from the sum of the information from the statistical documents, and concretely it is calculated either at the end of the year, for the period of the whole year, or in different periods, according to needs.

The number of arrivals in the accommodation units from Săcelu resort, in the period 2001-2019 is presented in table no. 2 and figure 3.

Table 2. Number of tourists from Săcelu resort in the 2001-2019 period

Accommodation type	Year / Number				
	2001	2005	2010	2015	2019
Hotels	1343	687	1993	737	-
Villas	528	290	-	-	-
Agrotourism guesthouses	-	150	349	718	475
Total	1871	1127	2342	1455	475

From above table results that the number of tourists in Săcelu resort experienced, in the analysed period some significant variations. In 2001 the number of tourists was 1871 and in 2003 it decreased to 1127, so in five years the number of tourists decreased by 39.7%.



Source: INSSE, 2020

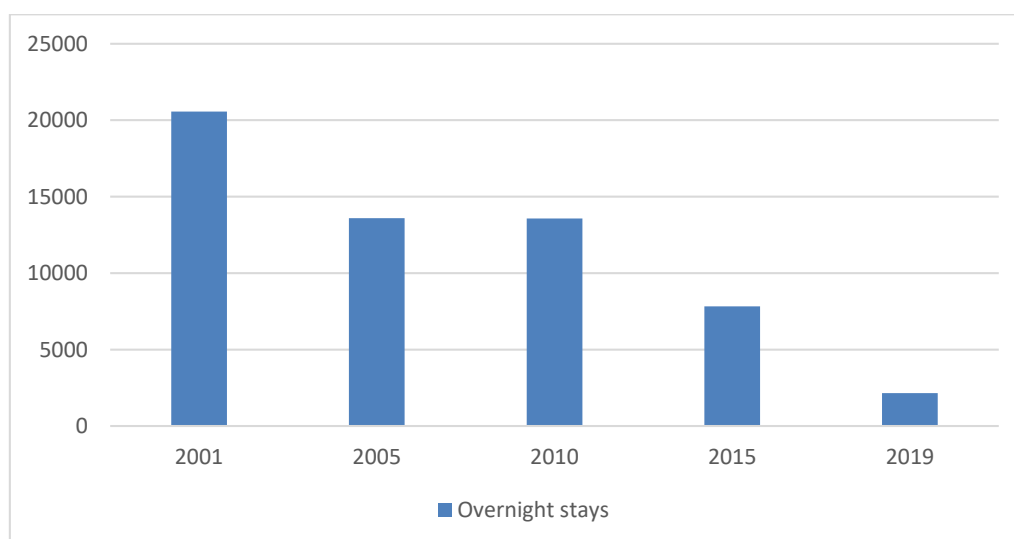
Figure 3. Evolution of tourist number in Săcelu resort from 2001 to 2019

In the next five years, the number of tourists increased significantly by 107.8% from 1127 tourists in 2005 to 2342 tourists in 2010. From 2010 to 2019, the number of tourists arriving in accommodation structures in Săcelu spa resort decreased continuously, by 37.8% in 2015 compared to 2010 and by 32.6% in 2019 compared to 2015.

This was due to several factors, among which we can mention the existing deficiencies in the accommodation, food, leisure and transport infrastructure.

4.2. Evolution of the number of tourist overnight stays

From figure 4 it is observed that the highest number of overnight stays was in 2001 compared to the other years of the studied period when the number of overnight stays decreased dramatically from 20562 overnight stays in 2001 to 2156 overnight stays in 2019, almost 10 times less. In the first 5 years (2001-2005) the number of overnight stays decreased by 33% and in 2010 the number is comparable to the overnight stays in 2005. In 2015 it decreases by 20% compared to 2010 and in 2019 it decreases by 72% compared to 2015.



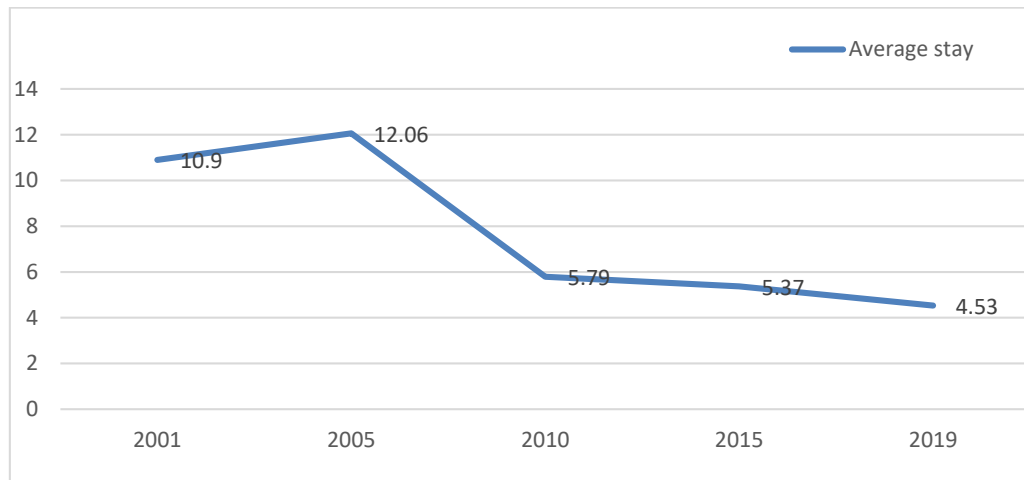
Source: INSSE, 2020

Figure 4. Evolution of tourist overnight stay in Săcelu resort from 2001 to 2019

4.3. Evolution of the average duration of tourist stay

The duration of the average stay is calculated as a ratio between the number of overnight stays (total tourist days) and the number of tourists arriving in the accommodation structure. The indicator represents the average time (days) of tourists staying in the accommodation spaces and reflects the probability of the tourist offer to retain the tourist in a certain area, region etc.

The duration of the average stay at Săcelu resort is presented in figure 5.



Source: INSSE, 2020

Figure 5. The duration of the average stays at Săcelu resort from 2001-2019

It is observed that the average length of stay in the first period (2001-2005) increased from 10.9 days to 12.06 days and then decreased steadily, by about 50%, reaching 4.53 days in 2019.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In Săcelu parish, tourism is, without a doubt, the main economic activity at the parish level. In favour of this activity act the natural resources - the mineral springs that are the basis of the treatment complex, the hilly relief, the climatic conditions, the vegetation and the fauna. In the Săcelu resort can be practiced spa tourism, leisure and hiking tourism. Săcelu spa resort is the only spa resort in Gorj County and yet it does not benefit of promotion from local authorities or travel agencies.

Although it benefits from valuable natural and anthropic potential, the resort is insufficiently exploited, explained by the decrease number of tourists in the last years, but through a major investment and promotion it would become very attractive at national level, taking into account the fact that it is one of the oldest spas in Romania.

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