

# CULTURAL TOURISM IN CENTRAL REGION OF ROMANIA

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## Abstract

*Romania has a multitude of natural and cultural attractions, with five of the European biogeographical regions and seven sites included in the UNESCO heritage, but it does not sufficiently exploit its touristic potential. This paper provides a statistical analysis of tourism in the Central Region of Romania with a focus on rural tourism and an analysis of the cultural potential. The aim is to identify new opportunities of the development of cultural tourism in the region. In order to highlight the rural tourism, there were selected only agrotouristic boarding houses in communes and villages. Having an extremely generous nature and a cultural heritage of great value, the areas analyzed in this study have a high and diversified touristic potential.*

**Keywords:** *cultural tourism, rural tourism, Romania, statistical analysis, local development*

## 1. Introduction

According to the UNWTO, “Cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination.” (Twenty-second session of the UNWTO General Assembly in Chengdu, China, September 2017). Cultural tourism includes the following components: arts, architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries, the living cultures, characterized by their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions (Twenty-second session of the UNWTO General Assembly in Chengdu, China, September 2017). On the other hand, the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) (2010) defines cultural tourism as “the movement of people to cultural attractions that are far away from their place of residence, with the intent to collect information and new experiences in order to satisfy their cultural needs” (Tigu, G. et.al, 2014).

The most recent trends in European cultural tourism reveals that four out of ten tourists choose their destination based on its cultural offer. A survey performed by UNWTO on 38 countries provides an estimate of the cultural tourism market size. Thus, cultural tourists have a share of 35.8% out of the total number of tourists, representing 530 million cultural tourists in 2017 (UNWTO Report on Tourism and Culture Synergies, 2018).

The need for a more detailed analysis of Romania's tourism potential comes from the contradiction between the highly valuable cultural patrimony on the one hand and the modest economic performance of Romania's tourist activity on the other. Cultural traditions are often much better preserved in rural areas (Aleksieva, Stamov, 2005). Given that there is currently a tendency towards rural tourism, the importance of this type of tourist destination can be enhanced by promoting the cultural potential of rural areas. Creating a stronger link between culture and tourism can be a source of growth in economic performance and in the development level of tourist destination regions. “Culture and tourism have a symbiotic relationship. Arts and crafts, dances, rituals, and legends which are at risk of being forgotten by the younger generation may be revitalized when tourists show a keen interest in them. Monuments and cultural relics may be preserved by using funds generated by tourism. In fact, those monuments and relics which have been abandoned suffer decay from lack of visitation.”, it is stated by World Tourism Organization (2001), in Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development, UNWTO, Madrid. This type of tourism is characterized by possibilities of involvement in locals’ life, of participation in local specific events, and sometimes this kind of touristic products are combined with cultural tourism products. Rural tourism becomes most important especially to Western and Central European Countries, approximately 20% from all tourist trips in the European Union are made in rural areas (Mileva, 2004; Georgiev, 2010).

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A number of studies in the literature have outlined the cultural tourist profile: high socio-economic status, high educational level and above average financial possibilities. Thus, the study of Eusébio et al. (2012) analyzes the determinants of cultural holiday spending patterns. The results show – based on a 27 country-survey, from different continents – that the holiday spending are significantly positively influenced by: hotel accommodation, air travel, purchase of package holidays, income and age. Factors with a significant negative influence on the holiday spending of cultural tourists are: the size of the travel group and the length of stay. According to a UNWTO report on Tourism and Culture Synergies (2018), one in 10 tourists are motivated by cultural interests in the choice of tourist destination, while 4 out of 10 tourists have more general motives in choosing their tourist destination, but they also do cultural activities during holidays (UNWTO, 2018). According to a recent ATLAS survey, a large number of tourists who practice cultural tourism at international level are young, which is in contradiction with the results of other older studies, according to which most cultural tourists are older people. And 60% of cultural tourists are graduates of a higher education form (Richards G., 2018).

Figueroa et al. (2018) analyze how cultural factors influence the efficiency of tourist activity in destination countries, considering Chile case study. The results reveal that the cultural and natural attractions of a tourist destination can have a significant positive influence on the efficiency of that region, by increasing tourist flows and attracting foreign tourists. It is therefore necessary to effectively promote the cultural and natural potential of the region.

Peoples' destructive activity disturbs now, more than ever, the environment integrity, so sustainable tourism becomes more and more important. In this context, Díaz & Rodriguez, (2016) analyze the main factors of the sustainability of a destination country, as a key element in determining long-term competitiveness. Thus, the authors identify among these factors the cultural offer of a tourist destination, with the following components: historical patrimony, museums and cultural heritage. Research results show that the cultural offer of a tourist destination is directly and significantly correlated with its performance level, but not with the tourists' performance. The authors' explanation is that although the cultural patrimony has an invaluable value, adding value to the region, it is less familiar and known to tourists. Hence - the need to a more efficient promotion of the cultural side of a tourist destination, in order to increase its attractiveness in the tourists' eyes.

The key to sustainable tourism can even be given by tourists' focus on rural areas, where they can observe and participate in the lifestyle, traditions and habits of locals. These rural areas can become true cultural-cores which, although out of regular cultural routes, can act as a cultural network that can place rural areas on the European tourism map (Shishmanova, M.V. (2015).

## 2. Central region of Romania – a culturally favored region

The region under discussion is culturally favored, being the owner of a tremendous treasure of archaeological vestiges, historical monuments, architecture or art, as well as an invaluable patrimony that attests the evolution and continuity of work and life on these lands, the development of culture and the art of the Romanian people. Among the archaeological vestiges that witness the existence of various civilizations on this territory, we mention Sarmizegetusa Regia (the kingdom) which was the capital and most important military, religious and political center of the Dacian state before the wars with the Roman Empire or the Dacian Fortress Chapel located in Alba County and raised during the reign of Burebista. There are also a large number of localities in the region that still retain medieval features: houses with thick walls and roofs of olans, towers with entrance gates or fortress walls. The medieval fortresses, Sighișoara, Alba Iulia, Sibiu, Brașov, Făgăraș, Sebeș, the peasant castles Râșnov, Rupea, Slimnic, Feldioara etc., the Saxon fortified churches, Biertan, Prejmer, Viscri, Călnic, Harman, medieval, Renaissance or Baroque castles, Bran, Lazarea, Criș, Balta Citadel, Brâncovenesti, Avrig, Gornești, etc., make up a dense network of first-class tourist attractions in this area. Museums of history, art, ethnography, documentary libraries in Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, Brașov, Alba Iulia host interesting collections and objects of heritage. In fact, historical and architectural monuments, some of which are of great value, can be found throughout the region. In the analyzed areas there are also many prestigious traditional festivals, among which we mention: the Pentecostal Pilgrimage from Șumuleu-Ciuc, the Găina Mountain Girls' Fair, etc. Relatively small distances between cultural vestiges make it possible to create various thematic circles.

Romania has about one third of Europe's mineral water springs, many of which are located in the counties analyzed in this paper: Sovata, Covasna, Băile Tușnad, Balványos, Borsec, Red Lake, Ocna Sibiului being just a few of them. Emphasizing the demographic aging process makes inclusion in touristic packages and this wellness and spa component a great opportunity for tourism development in the area.

Also, rural tourism, especially attractive for families with children or for those seeking a quiet and healthy environment, is a direct means of knowing authentic civilization, being a direction that can be developed in the future not only of Romanian tourists but and foreigners interested in Romanian culture.

The cities of Brașov, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Targu Mures, Sighisoara, Miercure-Ciuc, Sfântu-Gheorghe and Suceava are cities with a complex cultural heritage. Although the historical past of these cities is very rich and with a valuable architectural and cultural heritage, although these cities are extremely dynamic and economically important, but we will put particular

emphasis on the historical cultural heritage elements of the countryside.

The analyzed region is very rich in archaeological vestiges. Roșia Montană, a 2000-year-old town, is the oldest documented mining settlement in the country. The traces of gold exploitation of the Roman period have been excellently preserved to this day. The Chapel is a Dacian fortress, a site included in the UNESCO Heritage List, along with 5 other Dacian fortresses in the Orăștie Mountains. At Tilișca and Covasna there are ruins of Dacian fortresses. Cacica is a common one that existed in the old operation of salt from brine recrystallized (by boiling and evaporation) in Europe (evidenced by archaeological findings in 1989).

The fortified churches of Transylvania are part of the German heritage of Transylvania. They still have a strong "German" fingerprint. Urban structure, regular street tram, specific architectural style (houses with high walls) are preserved intact for hundreds of years. The churches in these villages, usually built in the highest area of the settlements, have fulfilled a double role in history: sacred and defense. Another element of uniqueness is their great density. There are about 150 churches spread over a rather narrow geographical area. 7 of them were included in UNESCO's patrimony: Biertan, Valea Viilor, Prejmer, Viscri, Saschiz, Câlnic, Dârju, considered by experts to be the most beautiful and representative.

Also, the fortified churches of Alma, Moșna, Dealu Frumos, Merghindeal, Iacobeni (located in the northern part of Sibiu County) are among the most important fortified churches in Transylvania, built between the 13th and 15th centuries, being listed in the national patrimony list architecture. The fortified church in Barsa Country, Harman, built between the 13th and 15th centuries, is a combination of Romantic and Gothic styles. The Church of Cisnadioara, "the most important monument of the Saxon ecclesiastical architecture", is the oldest Romanian church in Romania, preserved in excellent conditions dating back to 1223. Due to its good acoustics, the church hosts concerts and theater performances.

An impressive number of medieval settlements, some of which have preserved vestiges of almost a millennium, remained in Transylvania. The most important medieval fortifications were built on hills with steep slopes or terraces, and they contained large enclosures surrounded by waves of earth or trenches. They were raised near the strategic routes and the large rivers like Mureș and Someș, important navigation channels of those times. The fortress Calnic (Kelling), listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, is one of the oldest and most interesting architectural monuments in Romania. The fortress was built in XIII century (1269) by Count Chyl de Kelling, as his residence. The village of Viscri in the UNESCO World Heritage is renowned as one of the most beautiful Saxon peasant fortresses, which includes among its walls one of the few churches-Romanesque Hall of the XIII century in Transylvania, preserved to this day.

Fagaras Fortress is one of the best-preserved fortresses in Romania, whose construction began in the 14th century. The fortress, provided with several bastions and surrounded by a ditch filled with water, played an important role in the defensive military system of Transylvania. Currently, the fortress shelters several cultural institutions, among which we mention the Făgăraș Country Museum. Rupea fortress, built on a basalt massif, on the site of an older fortification, was first certified in 1324. Since the end of the 17th century the fortress has begun to be abandoned by the inhabitants, which will gradually lead to ruin it. The city is currently undergoing a vast process of restoration and redevelopment. Feldioara fortress was built by the Teutonic knights who settled in Transylvania between 1211 and 1225, afterwards the Feldioara inhabitants enlarged and strengthened the original fortification, becoming one of the most powerful peasant fortresses in Transylvania. Râșnov Peasant Fortress, built by the inhabitants of the settlement in the 14th-15th centuries, became a filming platform for several historical production productions. The Slimnic peasant fortress, built in the 14th-15th centuries, has seen a tumultuous history with numerous sieges and devastations. In spite of the damages suffered, the fortress remains one of the most beautiful cities built and ruled by a peasant community.

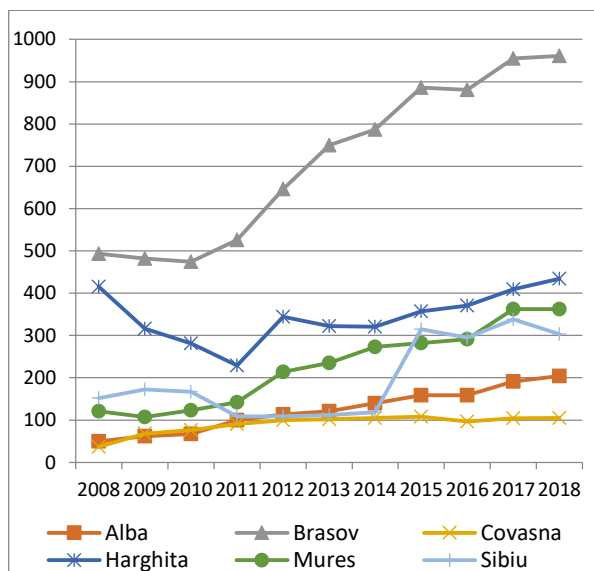
Moreover, Romania has numerous palaces or castles on its territory, over which time has been spent, and often forgetting. There are palaces in the central area of Romania, such as Bran Castle or Bruckental Palace, which enjoy a great media coverage, but there are also spectacular palaces that are less known to the general public but very well preserved. There are a lot of castles built in 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries: Kemeny Castle, Castle Lazarea, Castle Turnu Rosu, Castelul Bethlen Haller, Zalbala Castle Feudal Castle or castles built in 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries: Bethlen Castle, Racoș, Gurghiu Castle, The Kemeny Castle All these palaces were, in their time, sumptuous residences, and the stories of those who built and inhabited them are true stories that should be known and publicized.

### 3. Tourism in Central Region of Romania

The material base of tourism in Central Region was 2818 accommodation units in 2018, accounting for 33% of the total tourist accommodation facilities in Romania. The density of accommodation units is 7.1 tourist accommodation structures per 100 sq. Km in Central Region, compared to 3.6 at national level. Brașov county has the highest density of tourist accommodation units (17.9), followed by Mureș County with 9.8 tourist accommodation units per 100 sq. Km. The lowest density of tourist accommodation units is found in Alba and Covasna counties with densities below the national average (3.3 and 2.8 tourist units per 100 sq. Km respectively). In the counties from Central Region 43% of the accommodation units are in agro-touristic houses. Among them, Brașov is

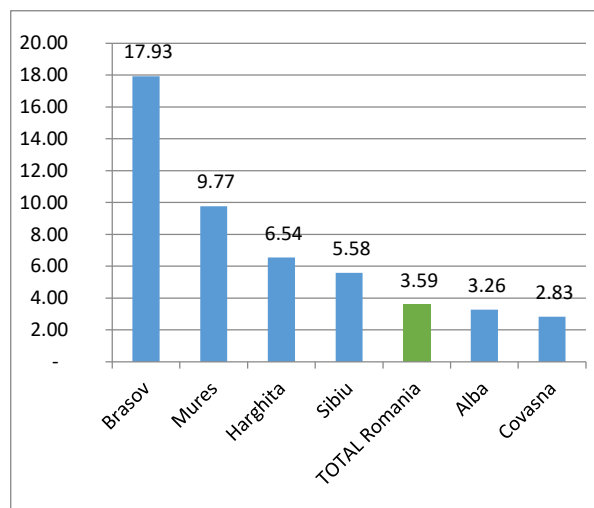
highlighted by increasing the number of tourist accommodation establishments, from 2008 to 2018, the number of these being doubled. Harghita and Sibiu are two counties in which the evolution has not been steadily increasing over the last 10 years but after a stagnation period in 2008-2010, there has been a decrease in the number of accommodation units followed by an increase in their number starting with 2014, more pronounced in Sibiu than in Harghita.

**Figure no. 1** Number of tourist accommodation units by counties, 2008-2018



**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

**Figure no. 2** The density of tourist accommodation units per 100 sq. Km by counties, 2018



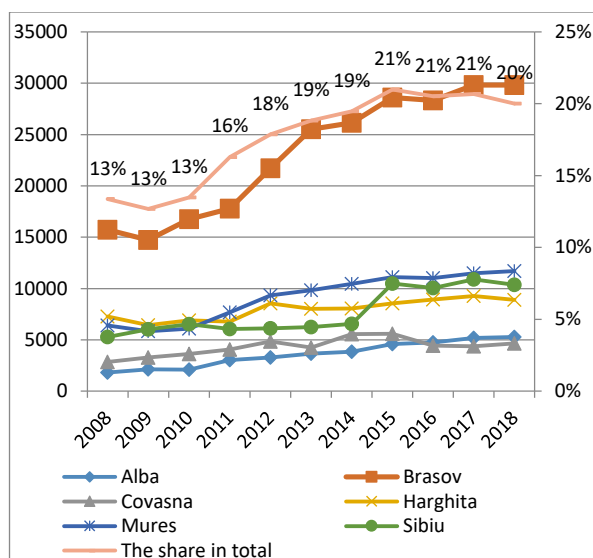
**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

The existing accommodation capacity in 2018 in Central Region of Romania was 82848 seats (23.4% of the national accommodation capacity), which gives to the region an extremely important position in country tourism. The accommodation capacity is 79% higher

than in 2008, with the highest increases in the counties: Alba by 189%, Sibiu by 97%, Braşov by 90% and Mureş by 83%. The county with the lowest increase in accommodation capacity is Harghita county with an increase in accommodation capacity of only 22% (compared to the national average of 20%).

The share of accommodation in boarding houses is 23.9% in counties from Central Region compared to a national average of 13.7%. The counties with the highest share of accommodation capacity in the boarding houses are: Alba (41%), and Harghita (36%). Mureş County has the lowest share of accommodation capacity in rural tourism, only 9.5%.

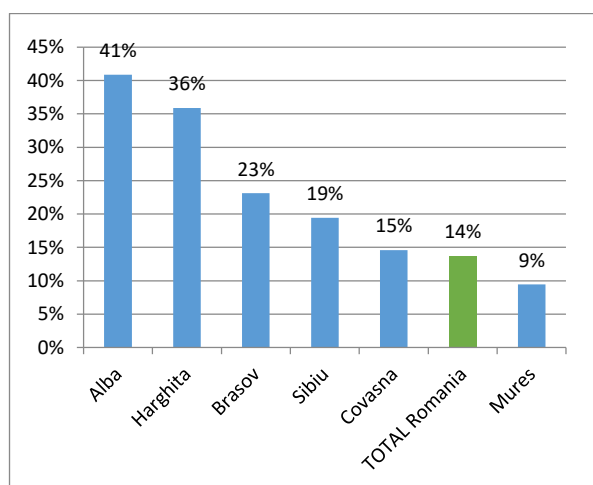
**Figure no. 3** Dynamics of accommodation capacity by counties, 2008-2018



**Note:** Share in total: the share of existing accommodation capacity in Central Region in national accommodation capacity

**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

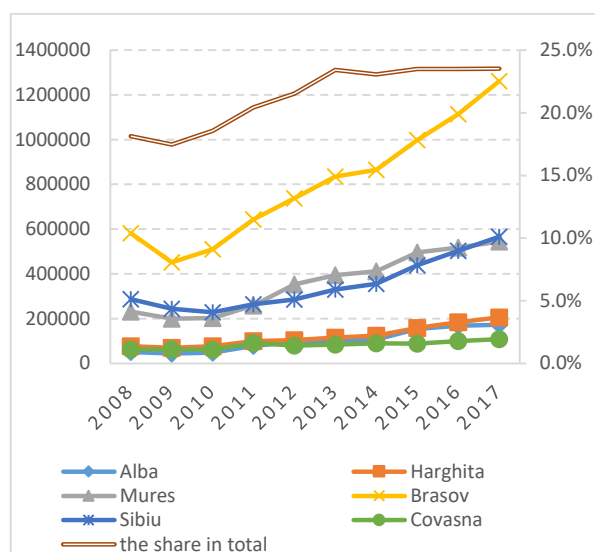
**Figure no. 4** The share of accommodation in boarding houses per county, 2018



**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

The total number of tourists arriving in the tourist accommodation structures in the analyzed counties was constantly increasing during the period 2008-2017, from 1,520,582 in 2008 to 3,242,234 in 2017 tourist arrivals (an increase of 113% in 2017 compared to 2008). The importance of Central Region in the national tourism is demonstrated by the extremely large share of the total number of tourists arriving in the tourist accommodation establishments in this region compared to national level, which has been increasing in the last 10 years, from 17.5% in 2008 to 23.5% in 2017.

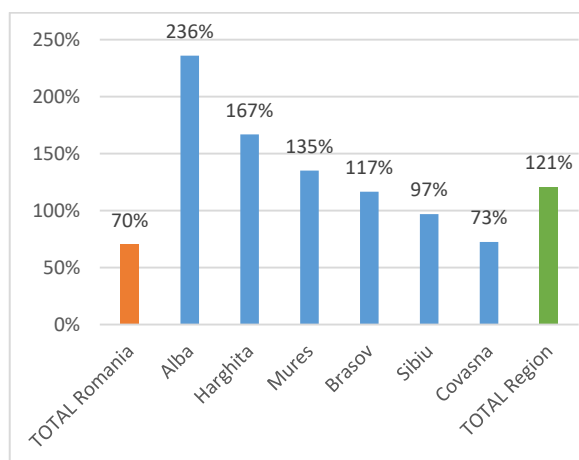
**Figure no. 5** Number of tourist's arrivals by county, 2008-2017



**Note:** Share in total: % of tourists' arrivals in the region in the total number of tourists in Romania

**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

**Figure no. 6** The growth rate of the number of tourist's arrivals in the tourist accommodation establishments by counties, 2017



**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

The county with the highest registered number of arrivals of tourists in 2008-2017 was Alba County,

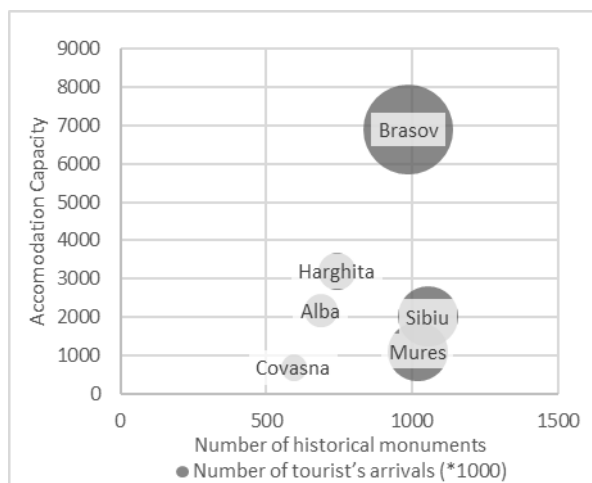
where the number of arrivals increased in the period 2008-2017 by 236%, followed by Harghita County, with an increase of 167%. Among the tourists arriving in the area, only 19% were foreigners compared to the national average of 23% in 2017. The counties with a percentage above the national average of the arrivals of foreign tourists are Sibiu with 29% and Harghita with 24% foreign tourists' arrivals in 2017. Covasna was the county with the lowest number of foreign tourists arrived in the total number of arrivals of tourists in the county in 2017. As to the type of accommodation structures, 13.7% of the total arrivals in 2017 took place in boarding houses. In Alba and Harghita the arrivals of tourists in agro-touristic hostels held a much higher share than the other counties. The main reason is that the capacity of accommodation in the agro-touristic pensions is much higher compared to the other counties.

#### 4. The relationship between tourism and cultural potential of counties from Central Region

In order to study the relationship between tourism and cultural potential of each county from Central Region there are studied the Spearman correlation coefficients between the accommodation capacity, the number of tourist arrivals, the number of historical monuments and the number of museums (Figure no.7).

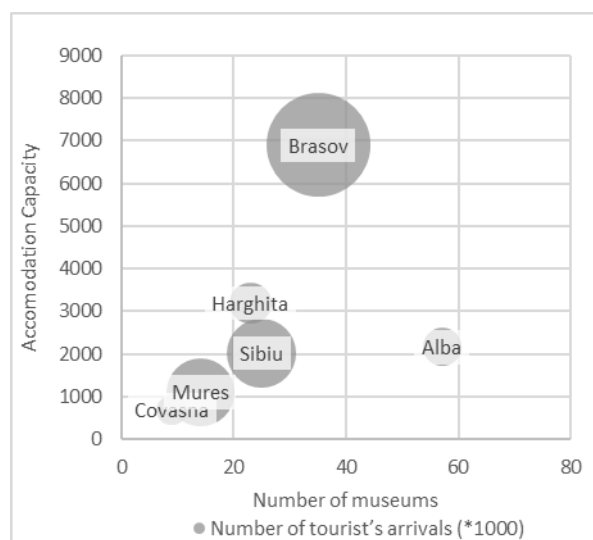
By representing the relationship between the accommodation capacity, the number of tourist arrivals and the number of historical monuments it could be observed that the counties with the highest number of historical monuments have the highest number of tourists. However, in Sibiu and Mures counties the accommodation capacity could be developed. In case of Harghita and Alba, both increasing accommodation capacity and the promotion of historical monuments through complex tourist programs should increase the number of tourists.

**Figure no. 7** The relationship between the accommodation capacity, the number of tourist arrivals and the number of historical monuments, 2017



**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

**Figure no. 8** The relationship between the accommodation capacity, the number of tourist arrivals and the number of museums 2017



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**Source data:** Own representation based on National Institute of Statistics databases

## 5. Conclusions

The study concludes that overall, the Central region has enormous touristic potential in terms of cultural patrimony. But the characteristics of every country in the region are given by the heterogeneity of some specific indicators: accommodation units, accommodation capacity, density of tourist accommodation units per 100 sq. Km, share of accommodation in boarding houses and number of tourist's arrivals.

By investigating the relationship between the accommodation capacity, the number of tourist arrivals and the number of historical monuments/the number of museums, the study underlines that the touristic potential of Central region of Romania could be improved by developing the network of accommodation units and by promoting the historical monuments and museums.

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