



The Evaluation Stage of the Specific Tourism Infrastructure and Tourist Flows- Chances to Revitalize Galati City

Iulian Adrian ȘORCARU*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted February 2016

Available online April 2016

JEL Classification

Z 32, R10

Keywords:

Specific tourism infrastructure,
Local economic development,
Urban revitalization, Tourist flows,
Galati City

ABSTRACT

The tourism potential (natural or anthropic) and the evolution of tourist flows are amplified or restricted by the quality of specific tourism infrastructure. Certain urban settlements have a hidden tourism potential which can contribute, especially when local economic contraction occurs, to economic revitalization of the region. The main objective of this study is to evaluate objectively and comprehensively, the specific tourism infrastructure in Galati City according to the methodology described in national legislation, and establish the annual evolution tourist flows during 2001-2014 and monthly from 2010 to 2014. Another goal was to highlight the national and international determinants of the tourist flows in Galati City during the period mentioned above.

© 2016 EAI. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Tourism potential, both natural and anthropic, is closely linked to the *quality of specific tourism infrastructure* that requires permanent investments to maintain tourist attractiveness.

The specific tourism infrastructure, identified and evaluated in Galati City, according to Order no.913/30.10.2009, which describes the methodology for evaluating the tourism potential in Romanian administrative units, includes:

- ✚ accommodation units;
- ✚ treatment facilities;
- ✚ conference rooms, exhibition centers, etc. ;
- ✚ other leisure facilities (golf courses, "Blue Flag" beaches, water sports facilities, theme parks, stud farms).

Although, in Romania or abroad, Galați City is not a famous touristic destination, in the last years, the production growth of the industrial units from the city (Damen Shipyard and Arcelor Mittal Steel Plant) have generated a diversification and an improved comfort of the specific tourism infrastructure. In the same time, the city became more visible, due to the fact that most of the accommodation units of the city are now registered on the international tourist websites.

2. Objectives and Methodology

A comprehensive selection and an objective evaluation of the specific tourism infrastructure in Galati City, according to the existing methodology described by the national legislation were the main objectives of the study.

Qualitative and quantitative analyzes performed, reflect the strengths and also weaknesses of specific tourism infrastructure in the city on the Danube and constitute preconditions for tourism development strategy of the municipality in the near future. We also tried to reflect and explain the evolution of tourist flows during 2001-2014, as a consequence of infrastructure diversification.

Quantitative analyzes were based primarily on field research being supplemented by data obtained from the National Institute of Statistics, Tempo Online Database. We also used the statistics offered by the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration in National Planning Document (PATN- VIth Section, Touristic Areas), accommodation units websites, and also several publications (articles, books) that analyzed over time the economic and/or tourist attractions in Galati City.

The legislation used in order to achieve the qualitative analysis of the specific touristic infrastructure were Order no.913/30.10.2009 and HG 709/2009 concerning the classification of accommodation units published in the Official Gazette, Part I no. 440 of 26th of June 2009.

* Dunarea de Jos University of Galati, Romania. E-mail address: iulian.sorcaru@ugal.ro (I. A. Sorcaru).

The research methods used were documentation and observation method, and for the quantitative research we processed the data using the graphic method, extremely useful being also the interpretation method.

3. Infrastructure and Tourism Development-Theoretical Approach

Infrastructure development has long been recognized and understood by scholars and policymakers that infrastructure sector is the main inductive factor that support tourism arrivals and economic growth in general.(Suleiman N.N., Albiman M. M, 2014)

The tourism phenomenon relies heavily on public utilities and infrastructural support. Tourism planning and development would not be possible without roads, airports, harbors, electricity, sewage, and potable water. The infrastructural dimension is thus a necessary element for tourism development and the above factors are all basic elements for attracting visitors to a destination. (Seetanah B, Juwaheer T D, Lamport M J, Rojid S, Sannasee R V, Subadar Agathe U, 2011)

Inhabitants of developed countries, from where the majority of tourists originate, are used to modern transport infrastructure that enables high quality service. These tourists prefer to maintain essentially the same comforts as at home while traveling (Mo, Howard, Havitz, 1993). In fact, Mo, Howard and Havitz (1993), using survey methodology, find that tourists prefer to travel to countries that have the same infrastructures as in their home country. Prideaux (2000) argued that if the ability of tourists to travel to preferred destinations is inhibited by inefficiencies in the transport system such as uncompetitive prices or lengthy and uncomfortable journey, the likelihood that they will seek alternative destinations may increase.

In the hospitality industry, the Internet has revolutionized business operations. It is widely acknowledged that the Internet can serve as an effective marketing tool between suppliers and consumers for its capabilities of information dissemination, communication and online transaction (Li et al. 2015).

The decision to purchase a tourism product is taken as a result of either previous experience or a previous communication (Stăncioiu, 2004, p.148). Online hotel rating lists are perceived as more useful and more credible when they are published by well-known online travel communities, attitudes and booking intentions are higher for hotels that appear in best hotels lists, a well-known online travel community can increase the perceived credibility and usefulness of online hotel rating lists, and also the negative reviews have greater effects overall on travelers' behavior, since consumers work hard to avoid the risk of service failures. (Casalo et al., 2015)

TripAdvisor is the world's largest online travel community. TripAdvisor branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, reaching 350 million unique monthly visitors, and more than 320 million reviews and opinions covering more than 6.2 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions. The sites operate in 48 countries.

Booking.com B.V is one of the biggest online tourism agencies and is part of Priceline Group which holds and operates Booking.com™, the world leader of online hotel bookings. On this site, tourists can find more than 879759 accommodation units from 87851 destinations located in 224 regions around the world. Also, booking.com comprises 82.33 million hotel reviews which are permanently checked.

4. The Specific Tourism Infrastructure in Galati City

4.1. Accommodation Units

Accommodation units in 2015 in Galati City are the *hotels* (15 units-71.4%), *tourist villas* (3 units-14.2%), *guesthouses* (one unit-4.76%), *hostels* (one unit-4.76%), *motels* (one unit-4.76%), *tourist cottages* (one unit-4.76%).

Regarding *the capacity of the tourist accommodation*, in 2015, Galati City could offer 754 rooms and 1717 bed places, the largest share being held by hotels (594 rooms-78.7%; 1231 bed places-71.7%), followed by hostels (80 rooms-10.6%; 320 bed places-18.6%); *tourist villas* (60 rooms-7.9%; 126 bed places-7.3%); *guesthouses* (8 rooms-1%; 16 bed places-0.9%) , *motels* (8 rooms-1%; 16 bed places-0.9%) and *tourist cottages* (4 rooms-0.5%; 8 bed places-0.5%).

The hierarchy of the *capacity of the tourist accommodation* (number of rooms&bed places), by *comfort class*, in 2015, reflects the predominance of the 3 stars units (503 rooms-66.7%; 1007 bed places-58.6%), followed surprisingly by one star units (80 rooms-10.6%; 320 bed places-18.6%); 5 stars units (69 rooms-9.1%; 161 bed places-9.4%); 4 stars units (63 rooms-8.3%; 141 bed places-8.2%) and 2 stars units (39 rooms-5.1%; 88 bed places-5.1%).

Thus, after analyzing the accommodation units, the tourist accommodation capacity and its comfort, Galati City obtained in 2015, according to the methodology of evaluation mentioned above, an aggregate score of 5.95 points out of a maximum of 7 points (table 1).This score was obtained by summing the partial scores for each type of accommodation unit (hotels-5 points, guesthouses-0.07 points, other accommodation units except hotels and guesthouses-0.88 points).

Table 1. The Evaluation of Accommodation Units in Galati City in 2015

No.	Accommodation Unit	Type	Number of Rooms	Number of Bed Places	Comfort (stars)	Number of Rooms/ Number of Bed Places	Rooms (%)	Bed Places (%)	Score	
1.	Viva Club	hotel	69	161	5	594/1231	78.7	71.69	5	
2.	Kreta	hotel	15	33	4					
3.	Galmondo	hotel	42	94	4					
4.	Vega	hotel	69	132	3					
5.	Galați Centrum	hotel	66	138	3					
6.	Danube Stars	hotel	84	156	3					
7.	Corneliuss	hotel	19	39	3					
8.	Faleza	hotel	73	146	3					
9.	Alex	hotel	12	24	3					
10.	Magnus	hotel	49	100	3					
11.	Royale	hotel	12	30	3					
12.	Mercur	hotel	41	82	3					
13.	Stejarul Complex (Gârboavele)	hotel	12	24	3					
14.	Sport	hotel	17	44	2					
15.	Das Hotel	hotel	14	28	2					
16.	Siret Guesthouse (Șendreni)	guesthouse	8	16	2	8/16	1.08	0.93	0.07	
17.	Clasic Villa	tourist villa	6	14	4	60/126	7.95	7.33	1	0.88
18.	Belvedere Villa	tourist villa	27	58	3					
19.	Tirighina Villa	tourist villa	27	54	3					
20.	Hostel Waterland	hostel	80	320	1	80/320	10.6	18.6	1	
21.	Motel Didona B (Șendreni)	motel	8	16	3	8/16	1.08	0.93	0.51	
22.	Stejarul Complex (Gârboavele)	tourist cottage	4	8	3	4/8	0.53	0.46	1	
Total			754	1717		754/1717	100	100	5.95	

Source: achieved using data collected from the accommodation units

If we compare the actual score, obtained in 2015, with the one mentioned in National Planning Document (only 0.6 points), Section VIth, Touristic Areas, Substantiation studies on the evaluation of tourism potential in the administrative units, by counties, published in 2012, we notice a positive evolution of the accommodation units, ready to support the requirements of the foreign tourists who travel for business to Galati City or are just in transit to the Danube Delta or the Black Sea.

In these circumstances, although the score for accommodation units was not maximum, we believe that Galati City has a tourist accommodation capacity that can meet successfully the upward tourist demand recorded in the last four years by the city on the left bank of the Danube, increasing the tourist accommodation capacity and its comfort, by building new accommodation units or upgrading the existing ones, being key strategies for the tourism of the region.

4.2. Treatment Facilities

The geographical position of Galati City determines, unfortunately, the absence of several natural therapeutic factors which could justify the presence of treatment centers, as they appear in the famous national and international spa resorts. However, daily stress from the urban areas, sedentary lifestyle, more and more demanding working conditions, generated the appearance and development in Galati City of medical centers, which also offer, besides relaxing activities, procedures for major treatment and associated procedures specific to each patient. Here we mention *Delfinul Center*, a new concept for the health of city residents and also for tourists transiting it, having an area of 1070 m² and three floors (table 2).

Table 2. Treatment Facilities in Galati City in 2015

No.	Treatment Unit	Treatment procedures	Address
1	Delfinul Center	Lasertherapy	Galati 3E Boulevard, near Selgros-Auchan
		Termotherapy	
		Ergotherapy	
		Physical Therapy	
		Magnetic Therapy	
		Electrotherapy and ultrasounds	
		Antistress and therapy massage	
		Psychotherapy	
		Hydro Physical Therapy	
2	Aves Medicom Clinic	Balneophysiotherapy	13 Ion Luca Caragiale Street
		Physical Therapy	
3	UGAL Physical Therapy center	Physical Therapy	63-65 Garii Street
4	Romi Kinetics	Physical Therapy	39 Oltului Street, Bl. G4C, Sc. 4
5	Viva Club Spa & Fitness	Antistress massage, physical therapy, electrotherapy	429 Traian Street
6	EliteWellness	Eximia	Siderurgistilor Boulevard, SD10
		Ultratone Futura Pro	
		Medical Wraps	
		Antistress massage	

Source: achieved using data collected from the treatment units

Medicom Aves Clinic is equipped with modern equipment therapy, rehabilitation, physiotherapy, physical therapy and laser therapy. Here, using electrical and mechanical clinical procedures (physical therapy, massage, rehabilitation), patients are treated for neurological, or rheumatologic disorders, without using medication. In addition to these centers, which offer varied treatment procedures, tourists can receive physical therapy services at the Spa & Fitness Viva Club, located inside the 5 star hotel Viva Club, at the Physical Therapy Center of the "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galati, opened in 2013 by the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, or at Romi Kinetics cabinet. Additionally, in Galati City, are also present the wellness services offered by Elite Wellness & Spa Center, where both town residents and tourists, transiting the region, can enjoy a range of body treatments, wraps or stress massage.

In conclusion, according to the criteria in the evaluation methodology (number of treatment facilities, the procedures they perform, the type of equipments used, the wellness facilities) **Galati City scores 5 points**, the presence of wellness facilities being the decisive criteria for granting this score.

4.3. Conference Halls and Exhibition Centers

One of the forms of tourism that experienced an upward trend in recent years in Europe, is business tourism. Business tourism is specific to large and very large industrial cities, business tourist flows increasing more and more in Galati City. Privatization and development of Arcelor Mittal Steel Plant and Damen Shipyard generated the specific of tourism accommodation units in Galati after 1990, business tourism causing a diversification of the room facilities and an enhanced comfort (Stanciu Ș., Lazarovici G., 2002, p.125). Therefore, were built 3 star or higher accommodation units which have varied services, associated to classical ones, specific to this form of tourism. Currently, according to table 3, Galati has 21 conference rooms with a total capacity of 2006 seats, suitable for numerous business events, mostly located within the accommodation units. Thus, according to the methodology of evaluation, Galati City scores 2.75 points out of a maximum of 6 points for conferences, meetings and exhibitions halls (number of rooms and capacity).

Although this evolution is an upward one, before 2012, the conference rooms capacity being only 1550 seats (Galati City scored only 1.5 points according to the evaluation made by the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism), we have to admit that in the near future the number of conference rooms and their capacity must increase to meet the demanding needs of business tourism.

Table 3. Conference Rooms (number and capacity) in Galati City in 2015

No.	Conference Room	Number of Rooms	Number of Seats	Score
1.	Vega	3	120	2.75
2.	Galati Centrum	2	240	
3.	Dunărea Business Center	3	135	
4.	Kreta	1	40	
5.	Viva Club	3	510	
6.	Alex	1	60	
7.	Magnus	1	100	
8.	Mercur	1	80	
9.	Galmondo	1	50	
10.	Belvedere Villa	1	55	
11.	Clasic Villa	1	50	
12.	Stejarul Complex	1	45	
13.	Dramatic Theatre	1	321	
14.	UDJ Aula Magna	1	200	
Total		21	2006	

Source: achieved using data collected from accommodation units and local institutions

4.4. Other Leisure Facilities

The geographic position of Galati City, not far from important and valuable Romanian tourist areas, and having its own resources, offers good opportunities for the development of transit tourism, business and weekend tourism. Thus, tourist flows from Danube countries of Central Europe to Danube Delta and communication axes to Northern and Eastern Romania, to Black Sea and Danube Delta pass through Galati. This position requires that Galati City should have a range of leisure facilities which can provide for tourists who come for business, or those in transit, but also for the residents, multiple possibilities to relax.

Currently, the leisure facilities in Galati City are:

- **Vega River**, a pleasure boat which can take tourists for cruises on the Danube to Prut and Siret Rivers, Channel Macin and Tulcea with a minimum duration of two hours. Also, the ship has a capacity of 60 people and can organize trips for 3 days in Danube Delta.

- **Tulucesti stud farm**, located near Gârboavele forest on DN24, 17 km north from Galati City, was established in 1999 and is populated with biological material of the Ghidran variety breed, originated from Radauti stud farm. Now it offers the possibility of riding, visiting and observing horses, carriage riding in Gârboavele forest or pony rides in the summer. In near future local authorities should modernize this stud farm, arranging a covered riding school for riding throughout the whole year.

- **Danube ice rink**, offers the possibility for practicing skating sports for city residents and tourists in transit when no national or international sport events take place.

The score for leisure facilities, according to the evaluation methodology is 0.5 points out of a maximum of one point, Galati City having a small number leisure facilities which can motivate tourists.

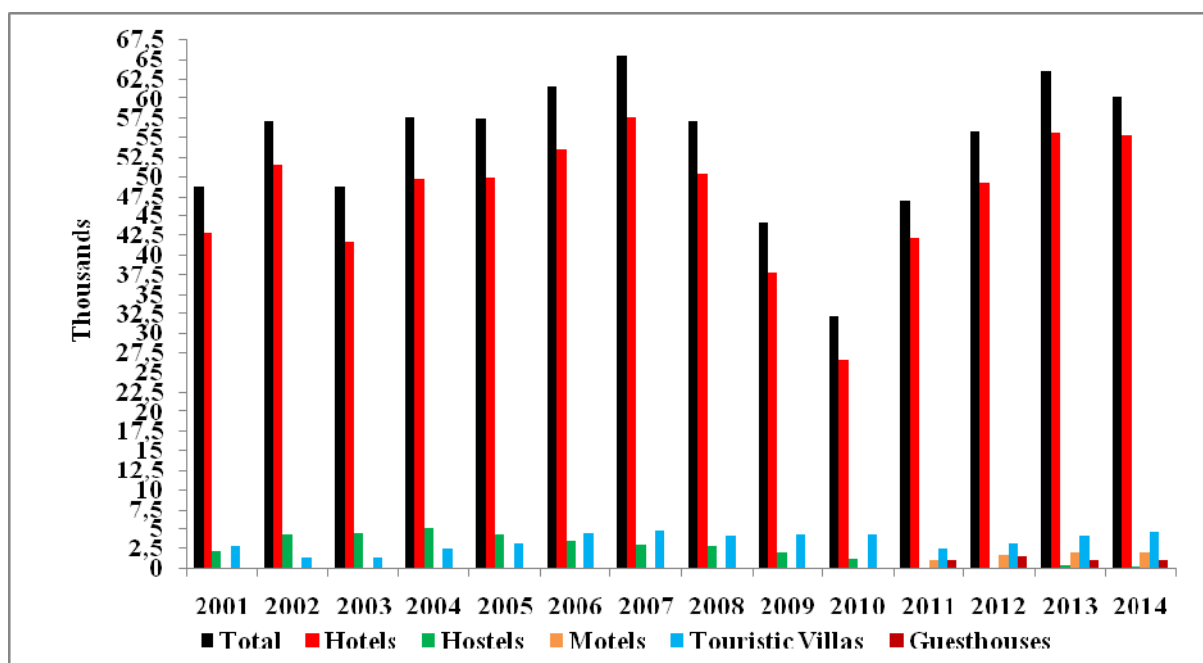
5. Tourist flows

The motivation of tourist flows and forms of tourism in Galati City were determined first of all, by building and developing the industrial plants of the city (steel plant and shipyard), and secondly by its geographical position near important and valuable tourist areas. The specific of tourism activities and tourist accommodation units, we analyze nowadays, began to emerge after 1990, business and transit tourism being the main forms of tourism in the city on the left bank of Danube. The tourist flows analysis shows that, in 2014, the number of arrivals in accommodation units of Galati City was 60333 people, 87.6% being accommodated in hotels, 6.7% in tourist villas, 3.2% in motels, 1.7% in guesthouses and only 0.8% preferring hostels. This classification of tourist flows, by type of accommodation units (figure 1), shows very clearly that **business tourism** dominates other forms of tourism in Galati City (transit tourism, weekend tourism, leisure, hunting), tourists preferring hotels with a level of comfort that often exceed three stars, where most of the facilities they need aren't missing.

The dynamics of the arrivals in tourist accommodation units during 2001-2014 reflects three distinct periods:

- **2001-2007** characterized by an upward trend, from 48793 tourists in 2001 to 65576 tourists in 2007, which was the maximum of tourists arrived in Galati City during the entire period we analyzed. This favorable evolution in the number of arrivals after 2000 was determined by the changes made to the leadership of the steel plant and shipyard, changes that have streamlined production processes, greatly increasing the volume of orders and the turnover. Also, we notice that in 2006, the second place in the preferences of tourists for the accommodation units were tourist villas which, although have an accommodation capacity much lower, offer comfort and amenities almost similar to many hotels in the city.

Figure 1. Tourist Arrivals In Galati City During 2001-2014, By Type Of Accommodation Units



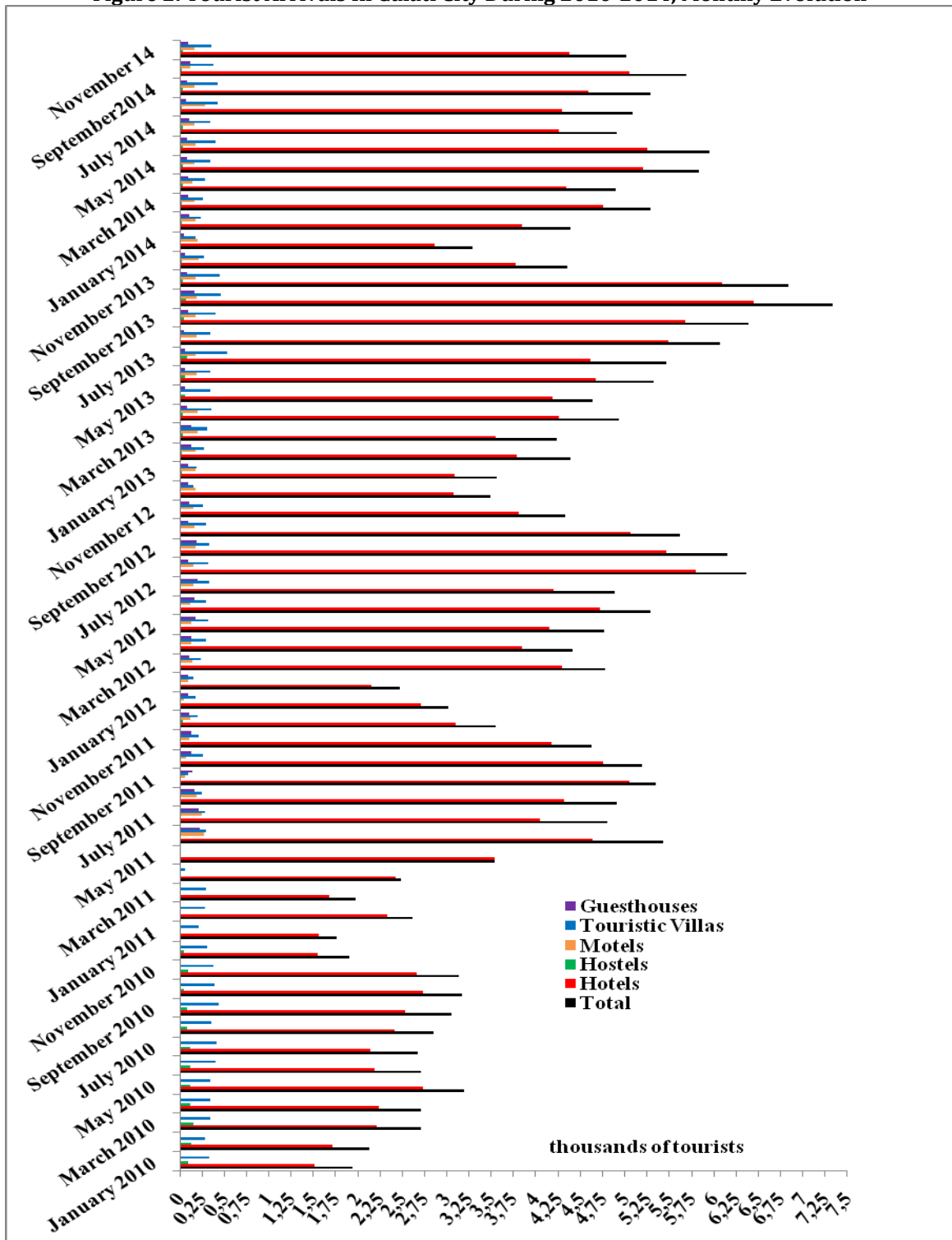
Source: INS, TEMPO-Online Database

- **2008-2010** is the period of global economic crisis, which affected the local economy in Galati City. A decrease in orders recorded by Arcelor Mittal and Damen shipyard, the massive layoffs at national and international level have also decreased the tourist flows to only 32236 people in 2010 (the minimum of the analyzed period).

- **2011-2014** marks a steady increase in arrivals, from 46843 persons in 2011 to 60333 people in 2014 as a result of exceeding the economic crisis, the number of orders for the shipyard and steel plant being crucial for the development of tourist flows. Thus, both Damen Shipyards and Arcelor Mittal have managed to streamline the production process at this time, the price and quality of their products have become more competitive on the international market. Also, the diversification of accommodation units, by building the motels, which currently rank third among tourists preferences, reflects the upward trend of tourism business in Galați City.

The monthly evolution of tourist flows during January 2010 - November 2014 shows that tourist activities in Galati City are seasonale. Most of the tourists come to Galati City in late spring (May), summer (June to August), and early autumn (September, October). Usually, during first quarter (January, February) and fourth quarter (November, December) the number of tourist arrivals decreases significantly, the minimum being in January 2011, when only 1770 tourists checked-in (figure 2).

Figure 2. Tourist Arrivals In Galati City During 2010-2014, Monthly Evolution

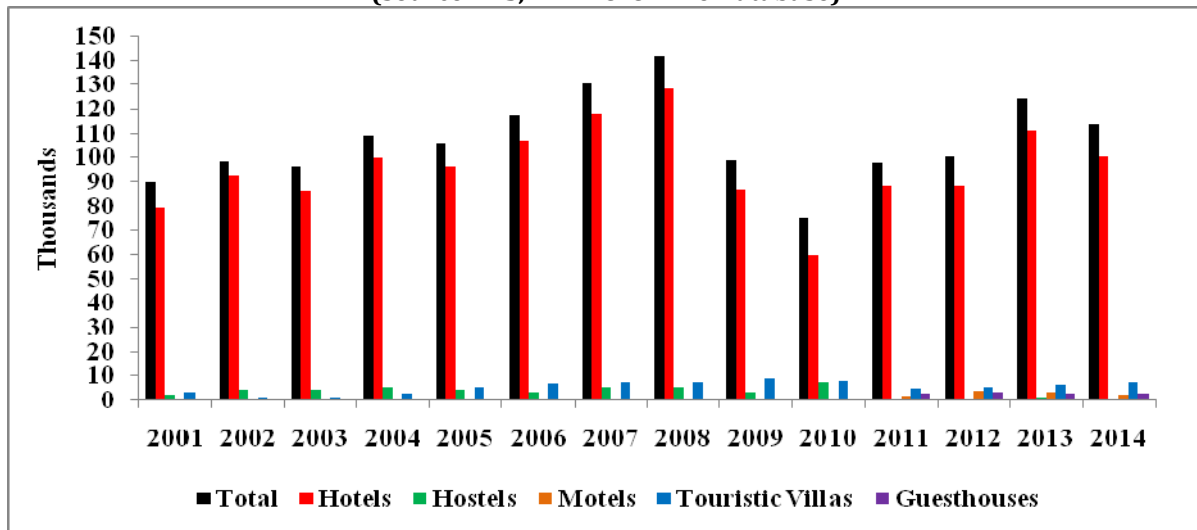


By Type Of Accommodation Units
Source: INS, TEMPO-Online Database

Overnight stays in accommodation units in Galati City were preferred by 113469 people in 2014, the highest share being recorded by hotels with 89.1% of the total, the hierarchy being pursued by tourist villas with 5.1%, motels with 2.8 %, guesthouses with 2.4% and hostels with only 0.6%.

The analysis of overnight stays, by type of accommodation units during 2001-2014 (figure 3) and the monthly evolution during January 2010 - November 2014, reflects the same trend mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the favorable/unfavorable periods being influenced by mutations recorded by the two "economic engines" of the city.

Figure 3. Overnight Stays In Galati City During 2001-2014, By Type Of Accommodation Units
(source: INS, TEMPO-Online Database)



6. Conclusions

Important harbour on the left bank of Danube, Galati City exploited its economic potential starting with the second half of the last century, when the two industrial units generated the business tourism before 1990. Business tourism was backed up by the transit one, the geographic position being also decisive for practicing this form of tourism. Let's not forget that Galati City is "the western gate" of The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, being located 30 km away from Macin National Park and about 200 km from the Black Sea. This position, near more known and appreciated tourist destinations, will provide a continuous transit from the north and east of the country or from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Thus, we believe that diversification and improvement of accommodation units, started after 2000, should continue, supporting private initiatives to increase the quality of tourism specific infrastructure (conference rooms, exhibition centers, treatment facilities, leisure, etc.) by local authorities being mandatory for the contribution of tourism to urban revitalization in Galati City. We consider that creating a touristic brand and a continuous development of tourism infrastructure are crucial for the tourist flows which are currently generated almost exclusively by the economic activity of the two industrial units in Galati City.

References

1. Casalo, L.V., Carlos F., Guinaliu M., Ekinci Y. (2015) "Do online hotel rating schemes influence booking behaviors?" *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, vol. 49, pp.28-36.
2. Li Xu, Wang Y., Yu Yixiu, (2015), "Present and future hotel website marketing activities: Change propensity analysis." *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, vol. 47, pp.131-139.
3. Mo C., Howard D.R., Havitz M.E., (1993), "Testing a tourist role Typology", *Annals of tourism research*, vol.20, Issue 2, pp.319-335,
4. Prideaux B. (2000), "The role of the transport system in destination development", *Tourism Management Journal*, vol.21, Issue 1, pp.53-63
5. Stanciu Ș., Lazarovici G., (2002), "Galații.Istorie și contemporaneitate", Editura Alma, Galați.
6. Stăncioiu, A. F. (2004), "Strategii de marketing în turism", Editura Economică, București.
7. Suleiman N.N., Albiman M. M. (2014), "Dynamic relationship between tourism, trade, infrastructure and economic growth: Empirical evidence From Malaysia", *Journal of African Studies and Development*, Vol. 6(3), pp. 49-55.
8. Seetannah B, Juwaheer T. D., Lamport M. J., Rojid S., Sannasee R. V., Subadar A. U., (2011), "Does Infrastructure Matter In Tourism Development?", *University Of Mauritius Research Journal*, volume 17, pp.89-108
9. *** HG 709/2009 privind clasificarea structurilor de primire turistice publicată în Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 440 din 26 iunie 2009
10. *** Ordinului nr. 913/30.10.2009
11. *** (2012), Planul de amenajare a teritoriului national, Sectiunea a VI-a -Zone turistice, Studii de fundamentare evaluarea potentialului turistic in unitatile administrativ-teritoriale pe judete, <http://www.mdrt.ro/studii-de-fundamentare-privind-patn-sectiunea-a-vi-a-zone-cu-resurse-turistice>, accessed on 20.09.2015.
12. *** INS, Baza de Date Tempo-Online
13. https://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c6-About_Us.html, accessed on 28.03.2016
14. http://www.booking.com/index.ro.html?label=gen173rf1BCAEoggJCAIhYSDNYA2jAAAYgBAZgBILgBCMgBD9gBAegBAaICEnByaWNlbgIuZWdyb3VwLmNvbGAgAw;sid=d4cfc0c645ad623dbc162cf66185d9ac;dcid=12;bb_ltb=0&sb_price_type=total&/, accessed on 28.03.2016
15. http://www.mie.ro/_documente/dezvoltare_teritoriala/amenajarea_teritoriului/patn_elaborate/secVI/metodologie.pdf, accessed on 28.09.2015