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Socio-Economic Analysis Of The South-West Oltenia Region

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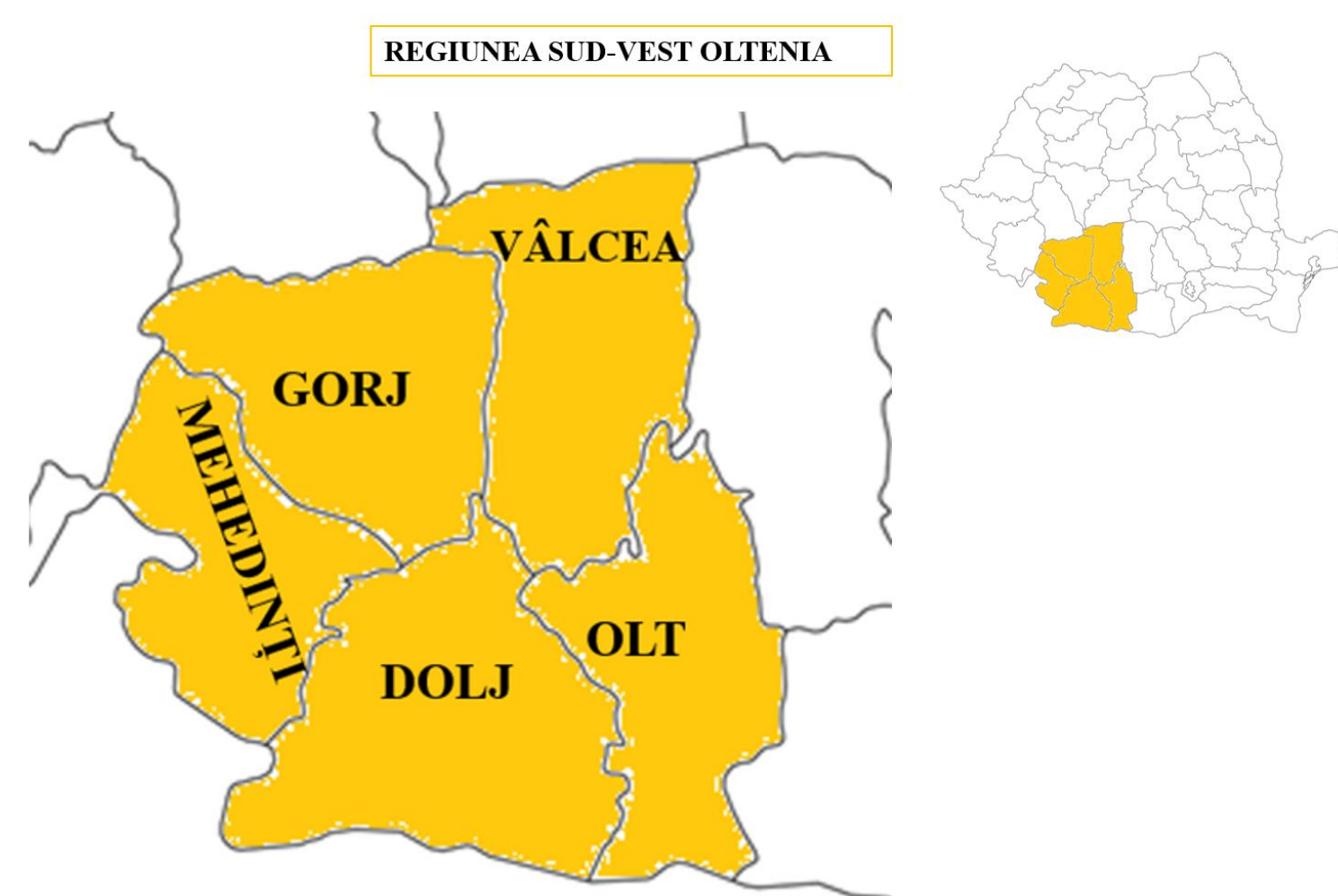
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Abstract: The paper analyzes the socio-economic development level of the South-West Oltenia Development Region, composed of Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt, and Vâlcea counties, aiming to identify territorial disparities and strategic priorities for sustainable regional growth. The study's relevance derives from the region's strategic location at Romania's south-western border and from the need to ensure a balanced use of its natural, human, and economic resources. The research methodology relied on official statistical data (National Institute of Statistics, Tempo-Online) for the 2014–2024 period, analyzed through descriptive and comparative methods. Demographic and economic indicators were assessed at both regional and county levels, and the results were presented using tables and graphical representations. Findings reveal a pronounced demographic decline, with a population loss exceeding 75,000 inhabitants and a negative natural growth rate (−10,741), the population density remaining below the national average. The regional GDP reached 108.4 billion RON in 2022, accounting for only 7.8% of Romania's economy, while GDP per capita (51,826 RON) confirms a low level of economic competitiveness. The regional economy shows a mixed structure – agricultural in the south, energy and industrial in the north – while infrastructure remains insufficiently developed. The conclusions emphasize the need for integrated policies of territorial cohesion, infrastructure modernization, a fair energy transition, investments in agriculture, and economic diversification, as key drivers to reduce internal disparities and enhance the region's competitiveness in the national and European context.

Introduction

- The South-West Oltenia region is composed of five counties: Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea (figure 1).

Figure 1
The South-West Oltenia region



General characteristics of the South-West Development Region. The South-West Oltenia Development Region is located in the south-western part of Romania and is one of the eight development regions of the country. It borders the Centre Region (Sibiu and Alba counties) and the West Region (Hunedoara County) to the north, the South-Muntenia Region (Argeș and Teleorman counties) to the east, Serbia to the west — with the border marked by the Danube River — and Bulgaria to the south, the natural border also being formed by the Danube River.

Dolj County is the largest county in the region, representing almost 28% of the total area of the region, benefits from significant agricultural potential, resources, and space for urban and industrial development; Vâlcea, Gorj and Olt counties have relatively close areas, ranging from 5,500–5,800 km². Although similar in size, these counties differ significantly in terms of relief: Vâlcea County is predominantly mountainous and hilly, Olt County is plain, and Gorj County combines mountains with hills and energy resources; Mehedinți County has the smallest area, under 5,000 km², but the county's population is also relatively small, 265,035 people, resulting in a low population density of 54.0 inhabitants/km².

Geographical and natural features. The South-West Oltenia Region benefits from a diversified relief structured on three levels: mountains in the northern part (Parâng, Vâlcan, and Mehedinți – exceeding 2,500 m), rich in resources and tourism potential; hills and Subcarpathians in the central area (the Getic Subcarpathians and the Getic Piedmont), favorable for agriculture and forestry; and the Romanian Plain in the south (the Oltenia Plain), a zone suitable for intensive agriculture.

The climate is temperate continental of a transitional type, with sub-Mediterranean influences, particularly in the Subcarpathian and plain areas. The region is exposed to drought in the southern part and to floods along the major rivers.

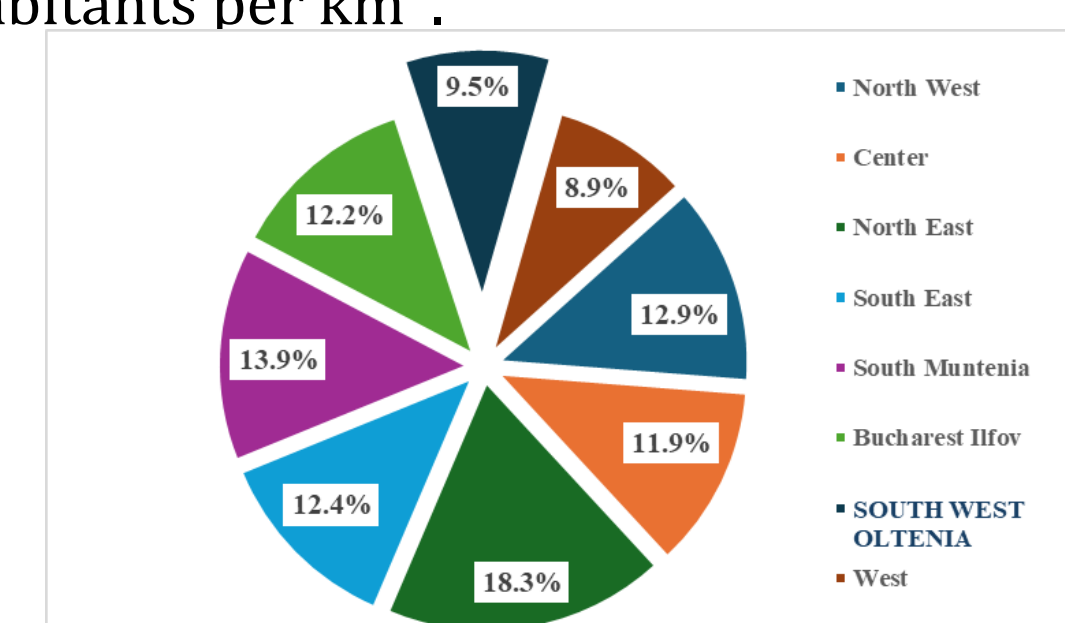
Material and method

The methodology used consisted of comparative analysis and statistical interpretation of data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, of time series (2014–2024) and of relevant programmatic documents, supplemented by own graphical and tabular processing.

Results and discussions

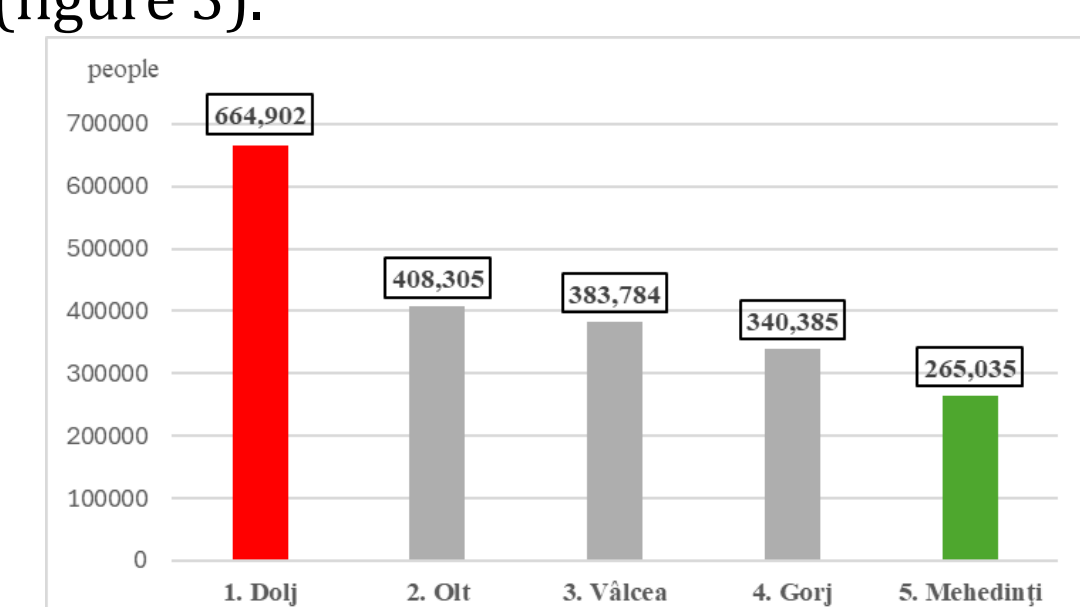
The population of the region on July 1, 2024, was 2,062,411 inhabitants, representing 9.5% of the total population, which makes the South-West Region in the second to last place among the regions of the country (figure 2), and the population density is 70.6 inhabitants/km², lower than the national average of 91.3 inhabitants per km².

Figure 2
Population distribution by regions in Romania



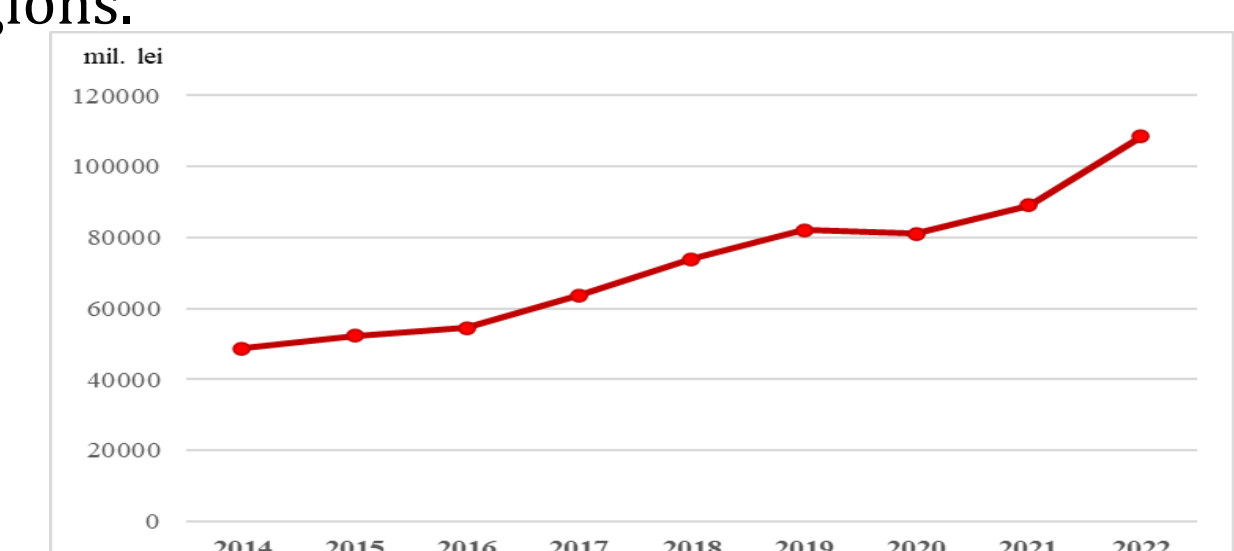
The population distribution in the South-West Oltenia Region is uneven, with the highest concentration pole in Dolj County (664,902 people), followed by three counties with medium populations, Olt (408,305 people), Vâlcea (383,784 people), Gorj (340,385 people), and a significantly smaller county in terms of population, is Mehedinți county with only 265,035 people. This structure reflects both the existing intra-regional differences and migration to more developed counties (figure 3).

Figure 3
Population distribution by county in the South-West Oltenia Region



Economic characteristics. In 2014, the GDP of the South-West Oltenia Region was 48,724.1 million lei. By 2022, it had increased to 108,430.5 million lei, almost double the amount at the beginning of the period (figure 4). The growth was constant every year, with a sharp pace between 2017 and 2019. In 2020, a slight decrease compared to 2019 is observed, probably caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. After 2020, the GDP returned to an upward trend, reaching a peak in 2022. The Gross Domestic Product of the South-West Oltenia Development Region accounted for 7.8% of Romania's economy in 2022, placing the region in the last position among the country's development regions.

Figure 4
GDP evolution, South-West Oltenia Region



Conclusions

The geographical position of the South-West Oltenia Region is **strategically important and diverse**, but it has a poorly developed economy, with agriculture and industry as its main sectors. The level of economic development is below the national average, and the GDP per capita is low, ranking sixth among the eight development regions.